

A MYSTERY IN THE PARLOUR

By William Minter

The Cast

Jerome Brown	Detective Twitt
Uncle Edulous	Prof. S. Hour
Aunt A. Mused	Miss Takenne
Bezukhov	Flossie
Rostov	Florence
Pasternak	Flo
Marie Claire	Forbes
'Juliette'	Jennings
Sea captain	Reverend Jones
1 st Policeman	Col. Brown
2 nd Policeman	

Description of Scenes

Act I - A Summer's Day

Scene 1	Morning Confusion
Scene 2	Jerome arrives home
Scene 3	Plot to clear the house
Scene 4	Parlour games and the murder

Act II - Later that day, and sometime after that

Scene 1	The Interrogation Begins
Scene 2	In the professor's room
Scene 3	Back on the case
Scene 4	At the Laundry
Scene 5	Father returns
Scene 6	Final Game

Act I

A summer's day

[The action takes place sometime in the late 1800s, in a plush London house belonging to Col. Brown.]

Scene 1 Morning confusion

[Breakfast, there is a table, enter F1, F2, and F3. They are laying the table. The room is a bomb-site]

Flossie: I really don't know! It beats me

Florence: Gets me it sure does.

(both look at F3 expectantly)

Flo: Well don't look at me! I don't know either! ... wait ... what are we talking about?

Florence: The guests!

Flossie: Pests you mean?! I've just laboured over a hot stove preparing eggs and bacon times eight, and every day he has to bring home another mouth to feed. Well I give up!

Florence: I quit too.

Flo: Me three.

Florence: Just what is he thinking going on like this, not earning a bean and wasting his poor old father's money on a bunch of good-for-nothing...

Flossie: Now, Florence, don't get yourself into a state, after all it is only 8 o'clock in the morning...

Florence: Yes, you're right, Flossie. But how can they expect us to clean up all of *this*?

Flossie: Not to worry, we'll make Jerome clean up his own mess this time, give him a taste of his own medicine. There's only so much we can be asked to do!

Flo: Eight o'clock? Won't they be coming down?

Florence: You're right... well, Flo darling, I think it's your turn to serve breakfast this morning

Flo: Is not!

Flossie: Is too!

Flo: (points at F1) It's her turn, we agreed.

Flossie: Gosh! I've just remembered I... haven't done the erm the shopping, I mean, the bathroom this morning, so sorry must dash! (leaves)

Florence: Well! The little...

Flo: She'll want a hand (starts to leave)

Florence: Oh no you don't, you're serving breakfast.

Bezukhov: (offstage) Good moooooorning ladies! Ouch! My head!

(F2, F3 have a frenetic silent argument and staring contest, and then both leave hurriedly, R1 enters...)

Bezukhov: (sees breakfast) Aha! Eggs! Zavtrak! (sits down) Floryenski?! Ouch! Floryenski?! Ouch!

(F2 gets pushed into the room, looks angry)

Bezukhov: Aha, my little Floryenski, this is very good eggs. Ha ha! But today I have a headache.

Florence: Yes... Well, if that's all... (starts to leave)

Bezukhov: Not all! Sit down, Ve must talk.

Florence: Later, Mr Bezukhov, later!

Bezukhov: Now!! Ouch! (F2 sits down) Dear Floryenski. Dear Floryenski. You are good girl. Let me tell you about my life story. It all began when I was but a young khlobchik...

Rostov: (enters) Aha! Bacon! Zavtrak! (sits down) Hello Bezukhov.

Bezukhov: (grunts)

Rostov: Hello, Floryachka! I must report that I have a headache.

Florence: Good morning Mr. Rostov. I'm sorry to hear about your headache. Shall I get you some pills?

Rostov: No. Good breakfast. Ha ha ha!

Bezukhov: (gets the joke) Ha ha ha! Good breakfast.

Florence: Ummmm... Can I go now?

Rostov: No. You are good girl. Have a cup of Chai.

Florence: But, but, but...

Bezukhov: I am beginning my life story, yes? (dramatically) It was 1853. A cold, cold wind was blowing down the Yenisey...

Rostov: Then you should have been wearing more furs, ha ha ha.

Bezukhov: Mr. Rostov, I beg of you.

Rostov: Pardon me, Bezukhov

Bezukhov: It was 1853...

Pasternak: (enters) Aha! Zavtrak! Chai! I think perhaps I am still drunk? (sees F2) Florriya! You are good girl! Ha ha ha! (sees strained expression on others' faces) sorry was I interrupting something??

Bezukhov: (solemnly) It was 1853... I had just got married to my first wife, Yelena. She was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. Her hair flowed like the graceful birch, her skin was as white as a Siberian winter... her eyes, oh her eyes... Oh, Yelena! I'm sorry. I did not mean to leave you so. (sobs)

Florence: (sees a chance) I'll get you a cup of coffee, shall I? (runs out)

Bezukhov: Now whatever can be the matter with her? I was just getting started! Oh, da. I think my story was too mournful.

Pasternak: It is so... Oh? But who is this?

Marie-Claire: (enters) Only me,

Russians: Marie-Claire!! Ouch.

Marie-Claire: Good morning. I see you three also are feeling the worse for wear after last night's excesses, non? Ah, but I see our faithful Florences have laid on some little dejeuner. That is good. (sits down)

Pasternak: Tell me, Marie-Claire, where did you get those beautiful eyes?

Marie-Claire: Isn't it a bit early for that, Mr Pasternak?

Pasternak: (sulkily) I don't think so.

Marie-Claire: But wasn't it a fantastic game last night? I'm quite won over by these English parlour games. I think I-spy was a real success.

Bezukhov: (excited) Indeed! And I will never forget that round of 'hunt the thimble'.

Rostov: Wasn't it upsetting that the priest would think to cheat at blindman's buff? It's simply shocking, after all it is only a game.

Jones: (enters) Whenever those words are uttered, isn't it quite clear that it isn't just a game?

Rostov: Oh, Reverend, you must excuse me, I had no idea you were listening.

Jones: Heh heh, that's quite alright old bean. Oh, what a splendid breakfast of eggs and bacon. Mind if I join you?

Bezukhov: Be our guest.

Jones: Thank you. I say, shouldn't there be one more of us at this table? Has anyone seen that other Parisian this morning, I have been looking for her over the house.

(all look blank)

Jones: No?

Marie-Claire: Well she was already up when I woke up this morning. I suppose she must have gone out for a walk.

Jones: Oh, that explains it, well never mind, as you were.

Flossie: (enters) Oh, Reverend, you're down for breakfast? What would you be wanting to eat, is eggs and bacon ok?

Jones: Oh I shouldn't like to trouble you, Flossie.

Flossie: Oh, my, you're no trouble at all, I can promise you.

Jones: Well in that case I should like a cup of tea, if it be convenient to make one for me.

Flossie: I'll see what I can do. (to others, brashly) And wha' about' you lo'?

Marie-Claire: I'll have some croissants mademoiselle.

Pasternak: I don't suppose there is Caviar and Borsht?

Flossie: I don't suppose there is! You lot just eat your bacon and eggs, it took me long enough!

Rostov: Tsk! The service in this country...

Flossie: (angry) Well excuuuse me, but where do you think you are? That's taking the liberty that is! I have a mind to remind you, that you are here because of the good will of the young master, and if he'd listened to me, which he never does, he never would have taken you in anyway. Fine gratitude that is... (leaves, grumbling)

Bezukhov: Some people just don't understand what it means to have fun! I couldn't see the likes of her understanding intellectual games like 'what am I thinking of' or 'charades'.

Pasternak: Or mud-wrestling.

Rostov: I'll drink to that. Oh wait, I vowed never to drink again.

(ding dong!)

Marie-Claire: Now, who can that be, and so early in the morning?

Flo: I'll get it!

Pasternak: Perhaps Jerome is home.

Rostov: I hope so. I can't wait for another round of 20 questions!

Flo: (Opens door) Why! It's Uncle Edulous, oh and Aunt Aggie... What a surprise!

(guests all stare wide-eyed at Ul and At during the next sequence)

Uncle: Well, may I come in?

Aunt: Don't just stand there, woman, take my husband's coat!

Flo: Of course, of course, come in, I was just making some tea!

Uncle: Yees. Earl Grey, I suppose?

Flo: Earl Grey, yes, of course...

Uncle: A frightful drink. I say tea is a vice.

Aunt: Quite so.

Flo: Yes, 'tis so, 'tis so.

Uncle: Truth be told, there's nothing better than scotch. Oh my goodness, this place is a mess. Does no one ever clean up in here? Why, words can hardly describe this room I'll wager!

Aunt: Eddie, dear, they have guests.

Uncle: (patiently) Yes, darling, I know they have guests.

Aunt: They have guests here, in the house, right now.

Uncle: I can see that.

Aunt: Well!?! Do something!

Uncle: (to F3) Excuse me, is Jerome at home presently? I had been meaning to come over to check up on, ahem, I mean see how the dear boy is getting on. But, uh...

Flo: He's out now, Mr. Mused. But he should be back soon.

Aunt: The guests?! What about the guests?

Uncle: I'll handle this, no need to be impatient... (to F3) I understand, of course he's out. May I enquire where he is currently?

Flo: I'm not sure, Mr. Mused. But I can say for certain that he hasn't gone to the park today to look at the fashionable ladies.

Aunt: I knew it. Inviting guests here willy-nilly, off in search of romance. And it's a Thursday! What ever happened to his job at that bank, that's what I'd like to know!

Uncle: (laughing embarrassedly) A ha ha, well, you see, you know how father's ill, and all that, and how Jerome promised to keep the house ship-shape...

Florence: (offstage) Flo!? Flo??

Uncle: ...yes, and, (looks at guests) well it seems we are interrupting something, are we not? Perhaps you'd better introduce me?

Florence: (offstage) Flo? I've lost the keys! Flo, where are you?

Uncle: I suppose you'd better go, don't mind us

Flo: Sorry, I shan't be long... (leaves)

Marie-Claire: Permit me to introduce myself, my name is Marie-Claire. I am from la belle France, or Paris to be precise. Are you here for the games too?

Uncle: Charmed, I'm sure. I'm sorry?

Marie-Claire: The games. Are you here for the games?

Uncle: I think we are talking at cross-purposes my dear. Games are for children, savages, and lunatics, as everyone knows. (To Russians) And who might you three gentlemen be?

Bezukhov: Bezukhov. Ouch!

Rostov: Rostov. Oooh!

Pasternak: Pasternak. Yow!

Marie-Claire: They have headaches, of course these Russians are not used to your British climate.

Aunt: Russians? Russians? Darling, they have Russians here in the house!

Pasternak: Mrs Aggiya, tell me, what is your game.

Aunt: My game? Perhaps you mean my name?

Pasternak: No, I mean your game.

Aunt: I'm quite sure I don't know what you're talking about.

Pasternak: Ha ha ha! You like 'what are you talking about'! It is also one of my favourites! Did I mention that you are the most beautiful woman I have ever laid eyes on?

Aunt: I beg your pardon!?

Uncle: (To At) Don't mind them, they're obviously quite loopy. (To Mu) And how about you, sir?

Jones: (charmingly) Oh, my name is Reverend Jones. I was just on a tour looking round the local churches of this region when yesterday I chanced upon that lovely fellow Jerome, who, when hearing I had nowhere to stay, kindly invited me back here for the night. And, I might add, I couldn't have fallen in with a more interesting group of sinners.

Aunt: You can say that again.

Uncle: Excuse me, Reverend, but haven't we met somewhere before? You seem awfully familiar.

Jones: Oh, now that couldn't be. I have been serving the Lord our God as a priest in Africa for the past

few years, and I shouldn't have thought you've been to such wild places as Honolulu.

Uncle: No, I suppose not. Still, it's strange.

Flo: (returns, out of breath) Excuse me, sir. Just having a bit of trouble finding a set of keys! Oh, I'm glad you've become acquainted with the foreigners, and the priest... Will you be staying for luncheon?

Uncle: Well now, that might be nice...

Aunt: No, we shouldn't like to trouble you. Tell me, were all these... people invited here by Jerome, or did they get in by some other way?

Flo: They were invited, ma'am.

Aunt: Just how long have they been here.

Flo: About a month, ma'am.

Aunt: And who is paying for their upkeep?

Flo: I don't know, ma'am.

Aunt: You don't know!? This surely means it's the family funds!

Flo: I think so, ma'am.

Aunt: Well! When my nephew returns home today, you can tell him that he has exactly 24 hours to invite these... people... back out again. AND clean up this mess! Or he'll have me to answer to.

Uncle: I say, isn't that a bit rash...?

Aunt: Silence! I have spoken.

(silence reigns for a second)

Aunt: Good. These people are silly. There is no room in the world for silly people, and certainly no room in this house. Let us leave them.

Uncle: But...

Aunt: Lead the way.

(They leave)

Jones: I say, someone got out of the wrong side of bed this morning.

(The other guests laugh)

Bezukhov: Very funny, ha ha ha.

Rostov: Ha ha ha, very amusing.

Marie-Claire: Very droll, Revd.

Scene 2 Jerome arrives home

(The Russians, Marie-Claire, and the priest are playing a game of 'blind man's buff' improv. After a bit, Jerome enters with the Sea captain)

Jerome: (enters) Yah great, great, just put your cap there, sir.

Captain: Arr, that be, that be. What be this? Blind man's buff no less! I loves a good game I does.

(Marie Claire is the 'blind man' and catches hold of the Captain)

Marie-Claire: Got you! Oh, gosh, I'm not too sure who this is! Is it Bezukhov?

Bezukhov: No, I'm over here!

Marie-Claire: Well, it must be Pasternak.

Pasternak: Nyet.

Marie-Claire: The professor!??

Captain: Arr, ye silly wench, 'tis me.

Marie-Claire: (peeks, and squeaks) Oooh! Gosh!

(all laugh)

Jerome: Ha ha! Charming, charming. What a charming time we have in this house! Permit me to introduce a jolly good old friend of mine, Captain... Captain... Er?

Captain: Cap'n Pott, at yer service. But you can call me Ismail.

Rostov: Did you say 'old' friend, Jerome?

Jerome: Well, by that I meant advanced in years, of course. In fact I just met him on the street corner there and thought he was a jolly good chap, and all that! So I told myself he'd be an excellent addition to our little evening soiree I am planning. What do you say?

Marie-Claire: The more the merrier

Jones: Seems a nice chap to me!

Pasternak: (introduces himself) Pasternak. That is my name. What is your favourite game?

Captain: Arr, my game be 'crossing the line', so it be.

Marie-Claire: Ooh, that sounds fun, do tell us how to play?

Captain: Well now, we take a bunch of old Pollywogs such as yourself and slap em with a fish, before making ye walk the plank. If ye don't make it to Davy Jones's locker, ye get to be a part of Neptune's court. Ya har har har!

Marie-Claire: (puzzled) That sounds... fun.

Jones: I believe he is referring to some queer custom they have on their ships. I did once read of such perversions in a book.

Captain: Who rattled your cage? Ay, I bet you're a land-lubber and all, aint ye?

Jerome: Well, I think it sounds jolly splendid! I'm glad we're all getting along so well. By the way has anyone seen Juliette? Is she up yet?

Jones: No, I don't think so. She hasn't been around all day. She has gone for a walk.

Jerome: Oh I see, perhaps she also went to the park to find her beaux... well, in any case, perhaps captain, you should tell us something more about yourself too?

Captain: Certainly. My story goes thus: It was a dark and stormy night, and a steamboat was sailing across the Atlantic Ocean. The ship's crew had just finished their evening's meal of ship's biscuits and gruel, when they said to the captain, 'captain! Captain! Tell us a story!' And this is the story he told them: It was a dark and stormy night, and a steamboat was sailing across the Atlantic Ocean. The ship's crew had just finished their evening's meal of ship's biscuits and gruel, when they said to the captain,

'captain! Captain! Tell us a story!' And this is the story he told them: It was a dark and stormy night...

Jerome: Yes, yes, we get the picture. That's a fascinating story, captain. Oh me. (no one notices) I said, Oh me!

Jones: Jerome! Whatever can the matter be?

Jerome: Might well you ask, might well you ask!

Marie-Claire: Any luck in the park today, Jerome?

Jerome: Ahh, I thought you'd never ask, Marie-Claire my little Frenchie. Well as a matter of fact I did. Today I decided to wear the most striking blazer I possess, and I went straight to the band-stand, for it is the place where many society women with the loftiest virtues go. As luck would have it they were playing my favourite songs there: 'come into the garden, Maud', 'I dream of Jeanie with the light brown hair', and so on. And this naturally put me in the most melancholy of moods.

Captain: Melancholy? You?

Jerome: You'd never have thought it, but beneath my hearty and wholesome exterior, I have the most melancholy of souls. And there is nothing that brings my gloomier side out more poignantly than to hear the strains of 'Love's old sweet song', which I must add they played with exceeding good taste. (dramatically) and so! There I was, leaning *thus* against a railing, thinking about the trials of life, and the irony of existence without love, when who should approach me, who, but the very girl I have been dreaming, nay yearning for all these years.

Rostov: So who was it? What was her name?

Jerome: Who? She was the fairest girl I have ever seen, that's who! Her eyes were shapely and of deep green, while her lips were as red as roses and constantly quivering in the most coquettish of smiles...

Rostov: So you didn't get her name. Ha ha ha.

Jerome: Well, what's in a name anyway. She was listening to the band next to me, and she was certainly startled and distraught when she saw my soulful expression, and enquired as to what the matter was. I said that I was just lost in a daydream, and that should she have time later today perhaps she would care to come around here for a game or two of hide-and-seek.

Marie-Claire: Goodness, that was a bit forward of you!

Jerome: I know, but it couldn't have been helped, my feelings were so strong I just couldn't hide them from the world any more! In any case she said that indeed she was very fond of parlour games and might just pop along later this evening! The very thought of her makes me want to write an ode to her beauty...

Jones: Jerome, you cunning old fox, you! An innocent game of hide-and-seek? Any self respecting society lady would know better than to respond to such an invitation!

Jerome: What can I say? She must have been literally swept off her feet... Well, not literally.

Bezukhov: Ah, it reminds me of the old days. Back when I was with Yelena. Oh it is almost too much for my poor soul to bear.

Rostov: Bezukhov, you're always too busy worrying about your own soul, and never give enough thought to our souls.

Jerome: Rostov, there is absolutely no call for such crude language! When my sweetheart comes here this evening I want you all to be on your best behaviour! And that means, apart from anything else, no cheating.

Jones: What's everyone looking at me like that for? I didn't understand the rules! Don't let's be silly about it?

Jerome: On the contrary, my dear Reverend, there has never been a better time to be silly. I uphold in

this day and age it is the only alternative to insanity.

Rostov: Cheers to that! Oh yes, I don't drink, do I...

Jerome: In any case it will be a splendid night tonight, Reverend, and I hope you will stay around to take part... Why, we have great games such as pass the parcel, ping pong, forfeits, camouflage, and trivial pursuit awaiting our delectation.

Jones: I shouldn't miss it for the world.

Jerome: It will be wild enough, I'm sure

Professor: (enters, furious) Wild? Wild? What's this?

Jerome: Oh, professor! How nice of you to come down.

Professor: Nice? Nice? Nice is not a word in my vocabulary, young man. All this hullabaloo, if you please, all of this brou-ha-ha, why! It's enough to drive someone to their grave! I tell you, you have to get them out!

Jerome: (confused) Get what out?

Professor: All your little friends, you half-wit, I can hardly hear myself think up there! (sees Cpn) And another! Has my fury driven me to insanity or is that yet another strange creature I see you have invited at your father's expense? You seem to be a collector!

Captain: Ay, and who be you?

Professor: I am going to have to have words with your father about this young man, and see that he puts an end to it. Do you hear me?

Jerome: (wittily) I should say so, I am not deaf.

Professor: Insolence! Insolence! Upstairs I am trying to... I am trying to... Um, (finds glasses, consults notebook) Oh yes! I am trying to conduct experiments on the very essence of life itself, and yet how am I going to concoct the elixir of life with all of this hub-bub, sir? With great difficulty, if at all.

Marie-Claire: Fish-fiddle-dee-dee!

(all laugh)

Jerome: Oh, splendid timing, splendid!

Flossie: (enters) Now then, you just lay off the professor, and hear what I have to say.

Bezukhov: Floryacthka! You are looking radiant this evening.

Flossie: Bezukhov, please!

Bezukhov: I am sorry, I meant this afternoon, (looks at time-piece) It seems that I am still on Omsk time.

Flossie: Do you know who was here this morning, Sir?

Jerome: I should say not.

Flossie: Very well, your uncle E. and aunt A. Mused were here.

Jerome: Edulous and Aggie...? Here...?

Flossie: Indeed. They were here and met all of your friends.

Rostov: Funny chap, but he has an excellent taste in strong wives.

(all laugh)

Jerome: Stop! This, for once, is not a joke. Go on.

Flossie: He met your friends and gave you until tomorrow morning to get them out of here, AND clean up this mess, lest he tell your father.

Jerome: Say it isn't true! That my hopes of living happily here in this house are to be dashed once and for all, that my true love as she appeared to me today is to turn up to a house with no laughter, a house with no fun...?

Flossie: That is, if he lets you stay here when he finds out... Sir, I suggest you save your melodrama for your uncle when he returns tomorrow.

(Jm breaks down)

Professor: If you had listened to me in the first place, you never would have let them in.

Jerome: Never! Never! I shall not be made to return to the bank! Do any of you understand what a boring and worthless place that is, with its procedures, interest rates, and loans? I never wanted to be a bank manager, I wanted to be... a poet. I have written a poem on the subject, would you like to hear it?

All: NO!

Jerome: Of course you would! It goes like this:

Banks are boring places so,
To work there never did I want to go,
Morning, evening, adding digits,
It's enough to give me the fidgets,
Counting cash and cashing cheques,
My heart is sad, my mind rejects,
This boring world, and on cupids wings,
Flies away to nobler things...

Professor: That was shocking.

Jerome: Why can't other people work and give me the money anyway? It's not like I'm undeserving.

Professor: Hmph, you ungrateful puppy, you should learn the hard way that a man's duty is first and foremost to work. Play is better left to infants.

Jerome: None of you understand the pressures of being a social animal... I cannot and will not lock myself up in a steel cage with not even a deck of cards for company! There must be another way!

Flossie: There may well be another way, sir, but while you're thinking about it I might introduce you to this common household utensil. It's called a mop, so use it.

Jerome: (starts cleaning up) Oh, woe is me, today I rose to great heights, only to be crushed, and now what have I become, nothing, nothing but a cleaning machine!

Marie-Claire: You missed a bit.

Jerome: Hmph!

Scene 3 Plot to clear the house

(The professor's lab. As many funny machines and tubes and things as possible. Prof and Florences are all conspiring)

Professor: It is a matter of urgency that has made me call you here today. I am on the brink of a great discovery that if I have made my calculations correct will benefit the whole of mankind.

(applause from others)

Professor: Quite so. And although I cannot allow you to witness my greatness yet, I need your help to make this happen for me. I am certain you're aware of the disruption those people cause me?

Flossie: I'm more than aware!

Florence: It seems very clear.

(all look at F3)

Flo: Oh, let's see now, it's about half-past four.

Professor: Pay attention if you please! Now, I have been observing their little rituals that they play out down there, and I have found that there is nothing they hate more than a cheater – someone who knowingly disobeys the rules that Jerome so clearly sets out.

Flossie: That's right, why last night they were practically spitting at the poor priest when he cheated at blind man's buff.

Florence: A depraved game, God knows why they play it... I say, Flo, do stay awake!

Flo: Uh-huh?

Florence: Oh Flo, you are a hopeless case, and I bet you haven't found those keys yet either.

Flo: No, I have no idea where they could be. It's a mystery.

Professor: Indeed it is, but let's return to the subject of these depraved people... tonight, since Jerome has so confidently dismissed the idea of bidding farewell to his playmates, we will use their games to help him accept the idea.

Flossie: What do you mean?

Professor: I happen to know they enjoy a certain betting game called whist. Now (handing over counters), I have procured myself a number of exact copies of the counters that they use to keep the score, and during the evening it is up to you three to plant these counters wherever necessary, to be discovered at opportune moments - thus convincing each of the guests that the others are cheating. Finally I shall come down from my work, and demand that they leave, and not knowing who to turn to, I feel they will all have to leave in dismay.

Flossie: An ingenious and very worthwhile plan, professor! And while we go to work, what will you be doing?

Professor: Me? I will of course be... hang on a second (consults paper) Oh yes, of course, I will be working on finding and cultivating the ESSENCE of life itself!! To let you into a secret, I am already working on a machine that can capture your voice and transport it to another location. I call it, the teledistant sonic-manipulation device!

Flo: Ha ha ha! It will never catch on.

Professor: You may laugh, girl. Well, no time to dally, I have work to do. Off you go, the three of you. (as they start to leave) Oh, Flossie, could you stay behind? There is something I need to tell you.

Flossie: Certainly, professor. (The others leave)

Professor: Lock the door, darling.

Flossie: (hesitantly) Oh, professor, what if we're found out?

Professor: We won't, we won't be... Oh... Flossie!

Flossie: Oh, Septimus!

Professor: Oh, Flossie!

Flossie: Oh, Septimus!

(run into one another's arms)

Professor: Flossie?

Flossie: Yes, Septimus?

Professor: I was thinking...

Flossie: Yes??

Professor: Well, how should I put it?

Flossie: Yes??

(Prof walks back, in hesitation)

Professor: Do you love me, Flossie?

Flossie: Oh yes! Yes, Septimus, I love you with all my heart! It seems absurd that someone like you, and someone like me, could find love, doesn't it?

Professor: It is not absurd, my dear, it is natural...

Flossie: Professor! When I first met you, I thought you were a rotten old wrinkled hairy turnip, but slowly I began to see... that those wrinkles were the most charming flourish of your benevolent smile... and that those whiskers of yours were whiskers of love, stretching out to me... and where the hair on your head grows thin, I cannot help but admire the shape of your ample and ingenious skull. You are the kindest and most interesting man I have ever met.

Professor: Oh, Flossie, this is the happiest moment of my life... Words cannot describe my feelings for you. But no one can know! No one must know!

Flossie: No one shall know, my darling, no one shall.

Scene 4 Parlour games and the murder

(Jerome is still cleaning, while the captain, Russians, priest, and marie-claire are sitting around waiting)

Jerome: What time is it?

Bezukhov: It is one in the morning.

Marie-Claire: That late already?

Bezukhov: Ah yes, I still not have changed my watch.

Rostov: I make it 7pm.

Jerome: She said she'd be here about now!

Jones: Calm down, dear boy. Fashionable women say a lot of things these days, but rarely keep their promises.

Jerome: But, I feel that she will come. There was some intangible bond that formed between us when our eyes met. I know she will be here.

Pasternak: Yes, of course she will be here, Mr J.

Jerome: When she arrives, I want you all to be yourself. There is no need to be extraordinary on my behalf. I want her to see the world I have created here and I know she will love it.

Marie-Claire: Don't worry, mon petit chou-fleur.

(ding dong)

Jerome: That's her! I'll get it! Stand aside! (rushes to door) Oh, hello, Forbes, it's you.

Forbes: Hello, old fruit. I say, that's a queer expression on your face, why, you almost seem surprised to see me!

Jerome: Not at all, come on in.

Forbes: I have brought Jennings again, he is *such* a riot, isn't he?

Jennings: Evening, all! I say, what a mess in here! Did we really make such a mess last night? Haw haw haw! I can hardly remember, I was so drunk on ginger ale!

Forbes: Oho, Jennings you old rascal! Jennings! Tell everyone where you woke up this morning!

Jennings: Oh Forbes, you didn't have to bring that up again!

Forbes: Tell them, Jennings!

Jerome: Yes, by thunder, tell us!

Jennings: Well... I woke up this morning in a horse chestnut tree in Regent's Park, of all places, goodness only knows how I got there. I say, what games shall we play this evening?

Forbes: Heh heh heh! Isn't he a riot? Didn't I tell you he was a riot? Jennings, tell them with whom you awoke!

All: Who!?! Who?!

Forbes: Watch your grammar, ladies and gentlemen!

All: With whom!?! With whom?!

Jennings: I'll get you for this, Forbes!

Forbes: Of course you will!

Jennings: Well, erm... When I woke up, lying next to me was...

(ding dong)

Jerome: It is her! It is her!

Forbes: Watch your grammar!

Jerome: Oh yes. It is she! It is she! (grabs flower from Jennings' button hole, rushes to door) Good evening! For you!

Takeenne: (enters) Oh how sweet. Gosh what a quaint little house you have. Oh but it's a revolting

mess! How Bohemian!

Jerome: It's not much, but it's home, please come through...

Takenne: Oh my, what a lot of people! I had no idea

Jerome: They are all great friends of mine. Allow me to introduce you, Miss, er, Miss...

Takenne: Miss Takenne, with 2 Ns

Jerome: Miss Takenne, this is Captain Pott, Mr Bezukhov, Mr Rostov, Mr Pasternak, Miss Marie-Claire, Reverend Jones, Mr Forbes, and Mr Jennings.

Takenne: Well, I say, hello everyone.

All: Hello Miss Takenne with 2 Ns

Jerome: Ho ho, they're a jolly bunch! I'm sure you will get to know them better as the evening progresses. I suppose you like parlour games.

Takenne: Why, I love parlour games! I just rarely get the chance to play them.

Forbes: Splendid, what's your favourite?

Takenne: I like 'whist'. It's a card game of sorts.

(general delight)

Jerome: Well, Miss Takenne, it seems you have chanced upon our favourite game as well! We shall play it presently, after a cup of tea. Florence! Flossie! Flo!

Flo: (enters, drily) At your service.

Jerome: Aha, Flo, could you serve a cup of tea to the guests?

Flo: Certainly, sir (calls) Florence! We're going to need a larger vat!

Jerome: Please excuse her, you can't get the staff these days. And Flo, we will need the cards out of the cupboard.

Flo: Oh, sir. The thing is, sir, that we can't find the keys.

Jerome: Well you'd better search harder, hadn't you!

Flo: (sighs) Yes, sir. (exits)

Jerome: (calls after her) Run to, run to! (to all) please excuse the inconvenience, miss Takenne, if we could just get into this cupboard the evening's entertainment would have already started.

Rostov: (goes to cupboard) Let me see, I can perhaps get into this lock.

Jerome: Well, don't break anything, Rostov, that's my father's cabinet you know, and he'd hate for his fossils to get broken. Oh, that reminds me, I have some very sad news for you all.

Marie-Claire: What is it? Do flower fairies not really exist?

Jerome: No, don't be ridiculous, of course they do. No... Unfortunately I have to inform you that tonight will be the last opportunity you all have to play games here for a while.

All: Noooo!

Jerome: Although I understand how upset you are, with the way things are...

Jones: What are you worried about? Your father is terminally ill in hospital!

Jerome: On the contrary, he is recovering. Not one hour ago I received a telegram that reads thus:
WHAT THE DEVIL STOP STOP THIS NONSENSE STOP STOP BEING SILLY STOP STOP THE
MAYHEM OR I WILL STOP YOU MYSELF STOP.

Bezukhov: These are not the words of a dying man.

Jerome: So, here's the deal, first we have fun, and then you all leave here by 9am tomorrow, how does that sound?

(general disapproval)

Jerome: Oh drat and fish fingers. I knew you wouldn't like it!

(ding dong)

Jerome: Hello? I wasn't expecting anyone else... (opens the door) Hello, my dear sir, is there anything I can do for you?

Detective: Jerome Brown?

Jerome: Yes, that is me...

Forbes: Grammar!

Jerome: Yes, that is I...

Detective: My name is detective Twitt. I understand there's been a disturbance at this property and I have come to investigate. But I see it was not you who requested that I come.

Jerome: I'm not sure, I don't think so. Do come in, anyhow, we were just about to play a round of whist.

Detective: Thank you, I do not care for games. I will come in though.

Jerome: As you please, sir.

Captain: Who be you?

Detective: My name is detective Twitt, Lieutenant.

Captain: Captain, if you please.

Detective: Tell me, if you are a Captain then what are you doing wearing a Lieutenant's uniform?

Captain: Arrr, good point.

Marie-Claire: You seem like a knowledgeable person, detective, tell me, where did you learn your trade.

Detective: One keeps one's personal qualities private, miss. Tell me, how is your father doing in the Saint-Louis hospital?

Marie-Claire: Ooh la la! But how is it that you know where my father is working?

Detective: Not only do I know that, but I know that he is a fine surgeon, overworked, and enjoys good wine.

Marie-Claire: Oh, mon dieu! It is correct! But... But... How...?

Detective: An educated guess, in fact. I saw that you were of the age at which young fashionable people travel, and as your mother is not with you presently I conjectured that she may be dead. Seeing the locket around your neck, combined with the doctor's stitch that repairs the lining of your dress, I had only to put these simple facts together to deduce that he was a doctor. Given that he is a widower, and still having to repair his daughter's dresses, he could hardly be underworked, and yet seeing the quality of his stitching I assumed he would be a surgeon rather than a doctor of medicine.

Marie-Claire: But how did you know he enjoys good wine?

Detective: Well, he's French, isn't he?

Forbes: A marvellous performance, sir. Now for your next trick, pray tell me the age of my grandmother?

Detective: My dear sir, if only you knew how unimaginative you were. Both your grandmothers are in fact dead. (turns to Jennings) I agree with you entirely, sir, rabbit is a fine dish.

Jennings: What trickery is this!? How could you ever guess what I was thinking? It's impossible!

Detective: My dear sir, you practically told me yourself.

Jennings: What do you mean? I demand an explanation of this tomfoolery!

Detective: Keep your calm sir, I merely observed that you were looking at distaste at the muddy patches around our friend's trousers where he had been taking his dog for a walk, am I right?

Forbes: Right!

Detective: And you wrinkled your nose with disgust at the thought, but then your eyes caught hold of that picture on the wall of the huntsmen and hounds, and you must have been thinking that dogs can be useful for catching game, for you then put one hand on your stomach and closed your eyes, thinking of the delightful taste of something or other. I assumed it must be rabbit you enjoy so much, as you are evidently not a Scotsman and interested in eating deer.

Jennings: Remarkable! Utterly Remarkable!

(a polite round of applause)

Detective: Please, please. Ladies and gentlemen, there is one thing I am unsure of, however, and that is who asked me here this evening.

(no one speaks)

Detective: Well, if no one requires my services, I deduce...

Pasternak: You deduce what?

Detective: I deduce that I have the wrong house number. Good evening everyone.

(starts to leave)

Marie-Claire: Wait a minute, detective, please stay, you're such a breath of fresh air around here, and you'd be immense fun to play with!

All: Yes! Stay, please do, etc.

Detective: I am sorry, my dear friends, but a talent such as mine would be wasted on the simple problems of charades and the like. Perhaps some other time.

All: Awwwww.

Detective: No seriously, I actually have some work to do. Nothing in the world could convince me to stay a moment longer.

Jerome: (shows him to the door) Well, ta-ta, if you change your mind and all that...?

Forbes: What a bore.

Bezukhov: A terribly dull man.

Jennings: I've seen better party tricks than that.

Takenne: Yes, he really lowered the tone of the evening, though he is devilishly handsome!

Jerome: Well, let's not worry any more about him. How are we coming along with the cupboard there?

Rostov: Actually, I think this should do it – Nnng... nngg... A-ha!

(R.H. cupboard door comes open and Juliette falls out onto R2. She is dead! For a moment shock keeps everyone silent.)

Forbes: There's a surprise.

(after a pause, a complete improvised pandemonium of screaming and shouting, fainting, smelling salts, etc...)

Jerome: Quiet, everyone! Quiet!! (pause) It seems that Juliette is dead.

(everyone starts shouting again)

Jerome: No, no, quiet! There's no need to panic. There's been a terrible accident, and we need to, um, do whatever is required.

Jones: God have mercy!

Forbes: Well, shouldn't someone get the police?

Jerome: The police!? What if my father finds out? He didn't even know she was here in the first place, let alone dead! Oh dear, it will take months for this to be cleared up!

Jennings: I know, why don't we have a game of whist to calm our nerves, now the cupboard's open.

Bezukhov: I think that's a good idea

Jerome: I think that's a TERRIBLE idea!

Captain: Arr, I'd have just thrown her overboard and have done with it!

Flossie: (enters) What's all this shouting?! (sees corpse) Oh my god! (faints)

(return to shouting)

(ding dong)

Jones: The police? They've come already?

Jerome: How could they, idiot? No one knows about this except us in this room. It's probably just... oh, someone, I don't know! (opens door) Oh, hello again.

Detective: Yes, indeed. I forgot my umbrella. Be a good chap and let me in, I'll just be a moment.

Jerome: That won't be necessary, detective, I'll have someone bring it out to you. FLORENCE?? FLO??

Detective: But it's just there, I can see it! I'll just grab it and go.

Jerome: Please, sir, don't trouble yourself! FLO!!? ANYONE!?! GET THIS MAN'S UMBRELLA!!

Detective: What are you doing, shouting like an imbecile? I just came for my umbrella...

Jerome: (Slams the door) Quick! Hide! Hide the body! (grabs umbrella)

(ding dong)

(R2 puts Juliette back in the cupboard, and leans against the R.H. door)

(ding dong)

Jerome: (opens the door) sorry about that, here is your umbrella, sir.

Detective: Not that one, the green one. You are too impertinent, sir! Oh, let me! (brushes past him) Aha. Here it is. I trust you are all enjoying your game?

All: Yes, thank you.

Detective: Well, I won't keep you.

(Juliette falls out of L.H side of cupboard)

Detective: What's going on here?

Jerome: (gets between him and the corpse) Nothing, detective, we're just having a game of hide-and-seek. It's a lot of fun. Now, if there's nothing else?

Detective: Someone just fell out of your cupboard!

Jerome: That's part of the game.

Detective: It looked like she was dead.

Jerome: Um, no...

Detective: Are you sure?

Jerome: Yes, yes, now, if you don't mind could you please leave?

Detective: (walking towards the door) I don't like it.

Jerome: Goodnight, detective

Flossie: (awake) DEAD! DEAD! SHE'S DEAD!

Detective: (runs past Jm, to corpse) SO! You do have a corpse in your living room!

Jerome: Oh, I say. Is she *actually* dead?

Detective: Sir, this woman has no more life in her than a cannibal has table manners! She is stone dead sir, stone dead!

(all gasp!)

Jerome: Oh that's a shame.

Detective: A shame it most certainly is, but it was as a detective that I came here tonight and so it is up to me to detect the nature of this unfortunate creature's death. Does anyone have an objection to this?

(silence)

Detective: Fine! Let the inquest commence!

(End of Act I)

Act II

Later that day, and sometime after that

Scene 1 The interrogation begins

(5 minutes later. The corpse is laid on the table, with the detective examining closely. The others are watching on eagerly)

Detective: (thinking aloud) ...hmm, what else? She seems to be in a night-gown of some sort, and what's this? She's wearing a silver bracelet, made probably in London, carved with the initials F. B. Intriguing... intriguing... It is quite clear that it is murder!

(all gasp)

Detective: Indeed... murder!!

(all gasp again)

Bezukhov: How do you know, detective?

Detective: How would anyone manage to lock themselves in a cupboard without the key?

Bezukhov: Oh da, I see.

Detective: Our corpse seems not to have endured any violence that led to her demise, however upon her lips I did sense some vile stench. And I take it you didn't have garlic for dinner last night.

Rostov: Poison!

Detective: Precisely. Now would anyone like to own up? Whodunnit?

Forbes: Grammar sir, please watch your grammar!

Detective: Oh yes, I mean, who did this terrible crime? Or at least could anyone tell me how our beautiful corpse got into the cupboard?

(everyone points at someone else)

All: He/She did it!

Detective: Tut tut tut. I guess I'll have to do this the hard way. From now on no one is to leave the house, under any circumstances. If anyone attempts to leave I will see it as a clear sign of guilt! Now, I shall want to cross examine the suspects, and that means all of you. Meanwhile, the rest of you can wait upstairs to be called down. Does anyone not understand?

(silence)

Detective: Good!

Jennings: Ooh, ooh, please sir!

Detective: Yes?

Jennings: It's just that, I've always wanted to be a detective like you, and, well I don't suppose you'll need any help in solving the crime?

Detective: A volunteer! But, Jennings, how do we know it wasn't YOU who killed her.

Jennings: (scratches head) Oh yes. I forgot about that.

Detective: Well, you quite clearly haven't got the wits to have set up such an elaborate murder. Very well, I will take you on as a helper.

Jennings: Oooh, yay!

Flo: (offstage) Jerome! Sir! Master! I've found the keys to the cupboard! (enters) Ah, there you are, sir. I... I... found the... keys. They were in the... professor's... lab. Now, why are you all looking at me like that? (sees corpse) Oh my gowd miss Juliette is dead. (drops keys) I think I'm going to be sick (runs out)

Detective: So. Whose keys are these?

Flossie: They are mine sir.

Detective: Everyone except this maid and Jerome is to leave the room and go upstairs. Keep an eye on each other for any suspicious activities.

(All leave, solemnly)

Detective: What is your name, girl?

Flossie: Flossie, sir.

Detective: Flossie, except these keys, are there any other sets that could open this cupboard?

Flossie: No sir. I... but we didn't know where these keys were!

Detective: Yes, I know that. When was the last time you saw them?

Flossie: It must have been when I was locking up everything last night after the party.

Detective: I see, and where did you put them?

Flossie: In my room, I always keep them in my room.

Detective: And so how did they leave your room?

Flossie: I don't know. I think someone took them during the night.

Detective: (jingles keys) are you a heavy sleeper, Flossie? Could someone have taken these keys without you hearing them?

Flossie: Maybe. I don't know, it hasn't happened before.

Detective: What do you know about miss Juliette?

Flossie: Well, she was French, she came here about a month ago, and... she liked to play parlour games.

Detective: Is that all? Did you notice anything peculiar about her behaviour before she died?

Flossie: Not really, let's see, the only thing is last night she went to bed early.

Detective: Early? What time?

Flossie: About 9 o'clock, I should say.

Detective: What was she like, this Juliette?

Flossie: Well, I have to say, she was a nosy so-and-so, seemed to like looking around the house, poking through other people's stuff, that sort of thing.

Detective: I see. Jennings! I have a task for you.

Jennings: Yes?

Detective: Go to miss Juliette's room and search for pieces of paper. Bring back anything you find.

Jennings: OK. Which is her room?

Flossie: It's upstairs, next to the bathroom. The same as Marie-Claire's.

Jennings: Oooh, am I allowed in the girl's room?

Detective: Of course you are, Jennings, this is an important matter.

Jennings: Right-Oh. (leaves)

Detective: I suppose you didn't like her poking her nose around, Flossie?

Flossie: Well, I didn't mind.

Detective: I say you loathed it. She might uncover family secrets that way, mightn't she?

Flossie: I... I wouldn't know!

Detective: (conspiratorally) such people are best got rid of sooner than later, right?

Jerome: Now, steady on, old chap

Flossie: No! No! I wouldn't want to see anyone dead!

Detective: Then tell us where you were last night.

Flossie: I was in my room! Asleep!

Detective: And somehow the keys just *flew* out of your room without you noticing?

Flossie: Yes! No! I don't know! (sobs)

Detective: I put it to you that you were not in your room last night, Flossie.

Professor: (entering) Indeed! That's because she was in my room.

Jerome: Professor!

Flossie: Septimus!

Professor: You! Heartless beast! Carrying on in that fashion! Abusing a poor innocent girl like that! Flossie was not in her room last night, she was in my room. I am an eyewitness to that fact, because I was also in my room.

Jerome: Flossie! Just what were you doing in the professor's room?

Professor: You let her alone. You, Jerome, of all people should understand the value of love in this world. Flossie and I, we are in love! The secret won't be hidden from the world any longer! Don't you understand how hard it is to be an inventor without moral support? Without anyone loving you or looking after you? There you all were, downstairs playing your fancy games, without a thought for the advancement of science, all but one of you, that is. Flossie here understands me, and she loves me, and I love her.

(F1 runs sobbing to the professor)

Detective: So, that explains how the keys went missing, but how were they found in your room, professor?

Professor: I have an explanation. When I woke up this morning, I found them hanging on the hat stand outside my room. I thought someone must have lost them, so I put them in my room for safety. Then I must have forgotten all about them until just now.

Detective: Yesss. A likely story.

Professor: But it's true!

Jennings: (enters) Ahh, detective I couldn't find anything. Nothing at all, sir. She seems to have had hardly any belongings to speak of, in any case.

Detective: That's no problem, Jennings. I'd hardly have expected a great find from you. (turns to Jerome) Well, what about you, sir, what is your relation with the deceased?

Jerome: Are you suggesting sir, that I indulge in such sordid crimes as necrophilia!?

Detective: No, not your relation with the deceased in general, your relation with this particular deceased person!

Jerome: Oh, well that's different. She was a friend that I met just over a month ago, along with Marie-Claire. I felt they would both be a great inspiration to my poetry, so I invited them back here for a few parlour games, and indeed I found they were a valuable addition to my circle of playmates.

Detective: I see. And when was the last time you saw her?

Jerome: It was last night – about 9 o'clock. She had just lost 3 rounds of whist in a row, and decided to make it an early night.

Detective: And how long did the rest of you keep going?

Jerome: Oh, until about 1 in the morning. By that time we were all pretty much sozzled, so I can't really remember what happened then.

Detective: Hmm.

Jerome: I say, detective, would you mind awfully if you didn't call the police, I wouldn't want my father to find out about this!

Detective: And, pray, why not?

Jerome: Well, let's just say he doesn't actually know that anyone is in this house except me, the professor, and the maids. And he's not the forgiving kind. If he found out that there had been games going on here, he'd send me away to military school for sure!

Detective: That does not concern me, sir!

Jerome: Oh, have a heart! You just simply must not call the police!

Detective: Rest assured, sir, I will do no such thing. In situations like these, the police always make the wrong decisions, follow the wrong leads, and arrest the wrong people. The only times that the police successfully solve a murder are by complete accident. No! I alone shall orchestrate the capture of the criminal.

Jerome: Thank you! Thank you!

Detective: Jennings! Get me Marie-Claire. I have heard enough from Jerome for now.

Jennings: Right away! (exit)

Professor: A poet, did he say? He's a bank clerk in denial.

Jerome: No! It is not true, I am an artist! An artist! My calling is to create beauty, and to refine lofty ideals!

Professor: Pah.

Jennings: (enters with P1) Here she is, sir.

Detective: Miss Marie-Claire? How long did you know Juliette?

Marie-Claire: Well, about a month.

Detective: Was she a friend of yours?

Marie-Claire: No, I didn't hardly know her.

Detective: But you must have shared a common background, both being French?

Marie-Claire: You say that, but non, we had nothing we could talk about together. She was very cold to me, just like the English people!

Detective: I see. When did you see her last?

Marie-Claire: Well, I don't remember, I just went straight to bed last night and I didn't see if she was in the room or not. But she certainly wasn't in my room in the morning when I woke up.

Detective: I see, thank you for your help, Marie Claire. Just one more question, did Juliette always sleep with her make-up on?

Marie-Claire: No, now that you mention it, she always removed it when she was in the bathroom. She always spent AGES in the bathroom!

Jennings: But, the corpse still has make-up on! Maybe she never went to bed! Oh, but then why is she in her night-gown?

Detective: Ha ha, we'll make a detective out of you yet, Jennings!

Jennings: Oh, I hope so! I've been making a note of the clues! We have the bracelet, the night-gown, the make up, the time she left, and the place of the keys...

Detective: Now, don't let's jump to conclusions. Wait, let me see those keys! (examines closely) Aha! What is this key used for?

Flossie: That's the key to the storeroom, sir. I hardly use it.

Detective: Well, it has apparently been used recently, as the metal has been scratched and the edge of the key is shiny. We must go to the store room, and immediately! I have a feeling that an answer lies there!

(all leave)

Scene 2 In the professor's room

(The Russians, Mt, Cpn, Forbes, Mu, F2, and F3 are sitting bored in the professor's lab.)

Forbes: I wonder how long this is going to last?

Rostov: I say it is dull, waiting up here.

Captain: Cheer up, lads, I know, why don't we play a game to lighten up the mood?

Forbes: That's the spirit, captain, but what game shall we play?

Captain: I-spy!

Bezukhov: Too boring. How about 'what's my name'?

Rostov: Too simplistic. I say we play 'musical chairs'

Pasternak: But there's no music up here, fool, how about '20 questions'?

Captain: Arr, 20 questions is a fine idea!

Florence: Oh, you heartless people, how can you think of playing games at a time like this?? Can't you understand? Someone has been murdered! Murdered! In cold blood!

Forbes: In a cupboard, more like.

Jones: (mutter) Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine: et lux perpetua luceat eis...

Florence: Boo hoo hoo! (sobs)

Flo: There, there, Florence, don't get yourself upset again, you'll start me off too! There there! (starts sobbing too)

Takeenne: Oh gosh, I wish I had never come here at all!

Captain: I'm a-thinkin of somethin!

Bezukhov: Halibut!

Captain: What!?! How did you know?

Bezukhov: Just an inkling.

Captain: That's not fair! I demand another go!

Rostov: As you wish.

Captain: Now then. Let's see... Ah yes, I'm a-thinkin of somethin!

Pasternak: Halibut!

Captain: Well I never did! Out-witted me again! I never thought you'd go for the same thing twice! Give me another go!

Pasternak: Alright, but this is your last chance, Captain.

Captain: Arr now, let's see... I'm a-thinkin of somethin! And it don't be halibut this time!

Forbes: Is it big or is it small?

Captain: It be neither big nor small.

Forbes: I say, how strange!

Pasternak: Is it found in the ocean?

Captain: Ay, that be so.

Forbes: Is it useful?

Captain: It is useful to some and harmful to some.

Jones: Can you eat it?

Captain: Ay, sir, you can, but not too much.

Bezukhov: This is a puzzling puzzle! What colour is it?

Captain: It has no colour to speak of.

(All ponder for a moment perplexedly)

Takeenne: It is quite clearly seasalt.

Captain: Arr! Quite right, my little bream. Now it is your turn to think of something.

Takenne: I tell you what I'm thinking of, I'm thinking of going home right now! (shouts) Mr Brown! Mr Brown!

Jerome: (enters) Why, Miss Takenne, how are you all doing up here? Having a good time? Shall I bring up some tea?

Takenne: Mr Brown! What is the meaning of this, you invited me here for a few parlour games, and I came in spite of my better judgement. Now I come here and what do I find? You have inconsiderately allowed a murder to occur in your house, and now I found myself held prisoner in your house with a group of hopeless idiots. If you ever wish to win the heart of a woman in the future, Mr. Brown, this is not a way to do it!

Jerome: Well, I'm sorry for the inconvenience...

Takenne: I'll say. Please show me to the door, my husband will be wondering where I am by now.

All: Your husband!?

Takenne: Oops, did I say that out loud?

Jerome: You have a husband, Miss Takenne, or should I say, Mrs. Takenne?

Takenne: Now, don't take it the wrong way, Mr Brown...

Jerome: Considering your marital status, I see that it is most inappropriate that you came here in the first place, and furthermore it is asking too much for me to accompany you to the door! (turns to leave)

Takenne: Wait, I can explain!

Jerome: Please don't.

Takenne: Oh, what does it matter, you wouldn't understand, you've never been married to a barbarian like my husband!

Jerome: At this rate, I probably never will get married at all! You tricked me! How extremely beastly of you!

Takenne: But I needed to be with you! This morning you said to me: "Have you ever had a dream come true? Have you ever realised the true meaning of beauty in this world?" Then you bowled me over with your magnificent poetry: I was so curious about you that I had to take some risk... any risk, just to find out more...

Jerome: Oh, woe! Your hypocrisy is too much for my fragile countenance to bear... (leaves)
(F2, F3 start crying and comforting one another again)

Rostov: (to Mt) Well, never mind. (clears throat) Did I mention that you have beautiful hair? It flows in such a graceful way. Your skin reminds me of the Ob river, covered in ice during wintertime.
(Mt also drops to her knees and sobs)

Takenne: I can't take it! Stop!

Jones: Now, Mr. Who-ever-you-are-ski, lay off the excessive complements, can't you see she is upset about something?

Rostov: I was trying to cheer her up.

Jones: Well you were doing a jolly bad job.

Rostov: (to Mt) Here, have a handkerchief to wipe your eyes.

Takenne: Thank you, (wipes eyes, and then, looking at handkerchief, screams) Eeeeeek! Oh my goodness, oh my goodness! Those letters! (beside herself)

Forbes: (coming over) Now what is it? (takes handkerchief) Oh-ho! Where did you get this handkerchief, Mr Rostov?

Rostov: That is not your business, sir.

Forbes: This handkerchief is embroidered with the initials F. B.! The same initials as our dead friend had on her bracelet!

Rostov: Don't be ridiculous, those are my mother's initials!

Forbes: Oh really? Bezukhov? Pasternak? Where are your handkerchiefs?

(They bring out their handkerchiefs)

Forbes: So, do all your mothers have the initials F.B., or is this some ghostly coincidence?! I think our detective will surely be interested!

All Russians: But... but...

Forbes: Oh no you don't! We're on the trail of the murderers now, wouldn't you say? I think it's time we went downstairs.

Takenne: Good idea. I'm leaving anyway.

Scene 3 Back on the case

(Back in the parlour, Dv has his lens out and is examining closely a small empty vial F1, Prof, and P1 gather around.)

Detective: Hmm! Yes! This evidently contained the very foul liquid that led to our corpse's demise. Jennings, what do you make of it?

Jennings: (takes the bottle) It looks like an ordinary medicine bottle to me.

Detective: A good start, Jennings, but not sufficient for our purposes. Why don't you read the embossed writing?

Jennings: "Handyside's patented cough syrup". What of it?

Detective: You have much to learn, Jennings. This could be the key to finding the right person! Little things are so commonly overlooked by common people. If only people walked around with their eyes open for once in a while!

Forbes: (entering with the others) Detective! Detective! I have found a clue!

Detective: Indeed? And what of it?

Forbes: The Russians! They all have handkerchiefs embroidered with the letters F.B.! The same letters as the bracelet on Juliette's wrist!

Detective: Oh, is that so?

Pasternak: But, mr. detective, she gave them to us as tokens of her esteem. We were all rather captivated by her good looks, and... so, she gave us each a handkerchief. That's all there is to it.

Detective: Oh, is that all? Well, just forget about it, then.

Rostov: Thank you for your understanding, sir!

Detective: That's alright.

Forbes: What!? Are you just going to let them off like that?

Detective: My good sir, I see that the Russians' acquiring our dead friend's handkerchiefs bears little importance to the case in hand.

Jennings: But! You just said that little things...

Detective: Yes yes! Look, you have to pick the right things to go on, Mr. Jennings, it is not simply a case of theorizing about every scratch, every paperclip that one sees.

(Cpn coughs in an old-sea-dog type way)

Jennings: (suddenly turns to Sea captain) Hey you! What's your story? Why are you here?

Captain: Me? What? I just got here today!

Jennings: Is that so? And how long have you had that cough?

Captain: 10 years, now. Why? What's it got to do with you?

Jennings: The murderer used a cough syrup bottle to hold the poison. I believe that the murderer *has a cough!.* You also have a cough, so you must be the murderer.

Captain: Har har har! Keep up the good work. I was never here, now how could I murder someone if I was somewhere else?

Jennings: Oh, just where were you last night, mr captain?

Captain: I was staying with an old sea-dog friend of mine in Bermondsey.

Jennings: I say that you came here last night, climbed in through the window, administered the poison, locked her in the cupboard, hidden the bottle, deposited the keys, and made your getaway.

Captain: Arr, now why would I do such a risky thing as that? If I wanted to kill someone I'd just run 'em through with a rusty cutlass! Har har!

Detective: Ahem, Jennings?

Jennings: Yes?

Detective: I hate to mention it, but I think you may be barking up the wrong tree, old chum. Leave the detection to the professionals, alright?

Jennings: He has guilt in his eyes!!

Captain: I say it was you, ye land-lubber!

(Jngs and Cpn argue loudly improv)

Detective: Quiet, everyone! Right now, I am spinning a trap for the murderer in my mind. I have almost come to a conclusion, but I need a moment to think of the missing piece... (lights up pipe and sits in easy chair)

Takenne: Well, I might take this quiet moment to leave, if you don't mind.

Detective: Please do, Miss Takenne. If I want you I will know where to find you.

Forbes: Well, actually, I think I might just toddle off too...

Detective: Stay where you are, sir! I see your early departure as a clear sign that you want to avoid detection! No one else is to leave the room!

Forbes: Not fair!

Jerome: Miss Takenne! Please forgive me for being so harsh to you earlier!

Takenne: That's alright. Please, call me Sophie.

Jerome: Sophie! A beautiful name!

Takenne: Ooh, you flatter me!

Jerome: Well, Sophie, if you ever want a game of... well, you know where I am, at least. Good bye, Sophie.

Takenne: Good bye, Jerome (leaves)

Jerome: (melodramatically) My only love. Gone, gone, gone! Gone forever! Aaaaargh!
(ding dong)

Jerome: (opens door) Oh? It's you!

Takenne: Sorry, I forgot my hat.

Jerome: (gets hat) Here you are... Mind how you go, good bye! (after a second) Drat and fish fingers! I was in the middle of such a good dramatic moment, too.

Detective: By jove! I think I've got it!

Marie-Claire: Yes? What is it?

Detective: Where is the laundry kept in this house?

Florence: In the laundry room, naturally.

Detective: In that case... To the laundry room! We don't have a moment to lose!
(omnes exeunt, in large rabble)

Scene 4 At the laundry

(All [except the priest...] enter the laundry room and are confronted with a big basket of clothes.)

Detective: Alright, everyone, stand back while I search for the missing clue!

(Dv dives into laundry basket and pulls out a dress)

Detective: Does this look familiar?

Jerome: Why, it's the dress that Juliette was wearing last night! How did it get here?

Detective: Do you see these grass stains? It is just as I'd imagined. It was during your game last night that Juliette was murdered. She was forced to drink poison and then her body was hidden in the garden. When everyone had gone to bed the murderer came out again, changed her clothes to make it seem she had been killed at night. He then found the keys, and decided to hide her in the cupboard, planning to frame the professor for the crime.

Marie-Claire: A wicked deed!

(Dv pulls out scissors and cuts into the lining of the dress, before pulling out some papers)

Detective: This! This is the missing part of the puzzle!

Jennings: Let me see that! (snatches papers, reads) Last Will And Testament of Colonel Edward Brown... I, Edward Brown, a resident and citizen of Chelsea, London, being of sound mind and disposing memory, do hereby make, publish and declare this instrument to be my last will and testament, hereby revoking any and all wills and codicils by me at any time heretofore made." Blah blah blah... Aha... this is interesting: "If I am the owner of any real estate, monies, or property of any sort at the time of my death, I instruct and empower my Executor and my Trustee (as the case may be) to keep it in trust until the day when my daughter Florence Brown turns eighteen, when it shall all be handed over to her..."

Jerome: Florence Brown?? Who is Florence Brown?

Detective: Florence Brown, sir! Florence Brown is your Aunt! Or should I say your late Aunt, known to you under the name "Juliette".

(All gasp)

Detective: Indeed. This Juliette was using a different name to disguise herself. She had come here to look for these papers, which would prove this imposing property, and all of the cash that goes with it, to be hers. But she was stopped by a family member and murdered, thus making sure her claim to the family fortune would never be realised.

Jerome: I don't understand, I'm the only family member here and I didn't even know she was my Aunt!

Detective: Poor, innocent fool! Your family has been here with you all the time, right under your nose, as it were, and you never even realised!

Jerome: What! The professor?

Detective: No, not the professor, you imbecile, the priest!

All: The priest!?

Jerome: But the priest isn't part of my family!

Detective: Appearances can be misleading. Isn't that so, reverend? Hang on a minute, where is he? Oh no, I can't believe it! He's run away!

Florence: Well, I don't think he's out of the house, or I would have heard the front door open.

Flo: You're right. He must be hiding somewhere in the house!

Detective: Now, everyone, listen closely: we are going to have a game of hide-and-seek, only this time it's for real! We don't have a moment to lose.

Forbes: Quick, he can't have got far!
(All run off in search)

Scene 5 Father returns

(The parlour. All is quiet for a second)

(Jm runs in from left, starts searching around, turning the room upside down)

Bezukhov: (runs in from right) He's not in the kitchen!

Jerome: He's not in the dining room either. I hope he hasn't got away.

Florence: (enters from somewhere else) I can't find the priest anywhere! Oh dear! There has been too much excitement today!

Jerome: Courage, Florence, we just have to find him!

(ding dong)

Bezukhov: That's him!

Florence: Now, how could it be, he's meant to be running away, isn't he?

Bezukhov: Perhaps he has forgotten his umbrella?

(all go to door, Jm opens the door)

Father: Good evening.

Jerome: !#@??*#*!!! Father! You're here already?

Father: Of course I'm here! Well, don't just stand there like a dummy, let me through. Who are these people? Friends of yours?

Jerome: Well, yes.

Father: (to others) Good day to you, sir, madam. (to Jm) What have I told you about inviting your friends around without asking me? Well never mind, we'll discuss that later. (sees mess, flies into a rage) What the devil!? What's going on here? Why is this place such a mess?

Jerome: Well, we're just searching for something.

Father: Just searching for something? And what a reckless way to do it!

Rostov: (enters left) No luck yet, Jerome! (exits right)

Father: Who was that! What's going on here?

Captain: (enters right) Where are ye, scum! Come out come out wherever you are! I'll find ye or my name isn't Cap'n Pott! (exits left)

Father: Whaaaaat?

Jerome: I can explain...

Father: Have you been playing HIDE AND SEEK in my house!? What have I told you about games? And what about that job at the bank, it's a Thursday!?

Flo: (enters) Oh my goodness, Mr Brown is here!

Father: FLO! I hope you have an explanation for all of this!

Flo: It was out of my control, sir!

Father: Listen, Flo, be a good girl, and go out and get the police. I wish to report a disturbance! On your toes!

(F3 leaves in a rush)

Jerome: Wait, I can explain!

Father: Don't bother! You little wretch! I'm going to show you a thing or two about playing around and breaking things! You break my house, I break you! (advances threateningly)

Jerome: Now, Father... papa, don't let's get overheated... (backs off)

Father: Stay where you are you good for nothing little... Hey! Come back here! (chases him round the room and out stage right)

Detective: (enters stage left) This is terrible! How could I have let him slip through my fingers like this?

I don't suppose anyone's found him yet?

Marie-Claire: I'm afraid not.

Detective: (sits down on chair, puts feet up) It is hopeless. He was too smart for me.

Bezukhov: No, don't worry, we will track him down!

Professor: (enters right) There's no sign of him in my lab, or in the Russians' room.

Detective: He could be in Calais by now, for all we know. We've lost him. No! I've lost him! (broods and mutters)

Jerome: (enters, left) Help! Help! Save me!

Father: (still chasing him) You little rat-bag, I'll teach you some manners!

(FB corners Jm and raises his walking stick)

Detective: Stay your hand, you ignorant toad!

Father: What! Who dares to talk to me like that?

Detective: I dare!

Father: What is the meaning of this? After fighting a life-threatening illness, I come back to find a house filled with lunatics! I demand an explanation!

Detective: (drags corpse on stage) Here is your explanation! Florence Brown has been murdered!

Father: What do you mean? Now I find there's a dead person in my parlour, too. You are all wild lunatics and you will go to jail for this!

(Jngs, Fbes enter)

Forbes: No luck, sir.

Detective: Jennings, Forbes, do me a favour, and tie up that violent man.

Jennings: Certainly.

(A humorous struggle, FB ends up tied to a chair)

Detective: Good. We have at least caught one of the conspirators, so it seems.

Father: Let me loose! Jerome, you will pay dearly for this!

(the cupboard sneezes)

Detective: Of course! How silly of us, where else? (opens the cupboard door) So here you are!

Jones: Mea culpa, mea culpa, Lord, have mercy! Have mercy! Don't send me to jail!

Father: Ernest?? What the devil are you doing here?

Jones: It's all your fault! You sent me here!

Detective: I see you two have met before?

Father: Met! He's my brother, of course we've met. Ernest! Don't you dare!

Detective: Hold your tongue you monster! At least one of you is showing remorse. Ernest, *if* that is your real name, kindly spill the beans!

Father: Ernest! Don't be a fool!

Jones: Well, God forgive me for my sins, maybe now we can put the record straight. Jerome, At the time of your grandfather's death, your Aunt, my sister, was not old enough to take care of her inheritance, and so it was given to your father and me to keep in trust for her. But we became so attached to what would never be ours, and so we never let your Aunt see the papers that would entitle her to her property. Instead, we sent her to boarding school in France. Well, the years passed and no one thought anything of it, until we heard from the maids here that a French lady had arrived and was poking her nose through the family affairs. That could only mean one thing...

Father: Shut up! Shut up! Don't tell them!

Jones: It meant that Florence had returned. She had to be stopped, and I drew the short straw as the one

to intercept her. (cries out) I never meant to kill her! I thought it was sleeping potion in that bottle!

Father: When something needs doing, it needs doing right!

Jones: But our own sister! How could we?

Father: She was always father's favourite! This never would have happened if he had distributed his wealth evenly among us! Hah! She was always so sweet to him, yet so above us! Well now she's paid for her double standards.

Jerome: Father! I always knew you were a cold-blooded animal, but now...

Father: Don't think this exonerates you, my boy! I will have ways of paying you back for this!

(ding dong)

Detective: I'll get it. Ah, officer, you are evidently a mind-reader.

First Policeman: Ello ello ello, what seems to be the trouble?

Second Policeman: Are you the owner of the property, sir?

Detective: Don't you recognize me?

Second Policeman: Oh my goodness, it's Detective Twitt of Twitt & Co. It's an honour to be working with you, sir.

Detective: Quite so. Now, there has been a murder of a lady, but with a little effort I have found both the murderer and the accomplice within 24 hours. Now, Would you two mind arresting that fellow there, and that fellow over there. I will accompany you to the station and give a full report there.

First Policeman: It would be our pleasure, Detective.

(The police grab the two suspects and lead them out, kicking and screaming)

Detective: Well, everyone, ta-ta for now. I have a report to write on this case.

Marie-Claire: Oh, detective, thank you! However can we repay you?

Detective: I will be sending my bill presently.

Marie-Claire: Oh, I see. Well, fair enough, you did do a good job.

Rostov: Yes it was Ochin Horrorshow. Very good, sir, very good.

Detective: Yes thank you there is no need to inflate my ego any more than its currently already voluminous state.

Jerome: Well, do at least come back for a game of snakes and ladders some day.

Detective: Not likely, my work here is done! (leaves)

Flossie: Cup of tea, anyone?

Scene 6 Final game

(Some unspecified number of days later. Jm, P1, R1, R2, R3, Prof, F1 (who is of course close by the professor), Jennings, and Cpn are solemnly playing Cluedo (what else!?!))

Rostov: Captain, do you have Col. Mustard?

Captain: No.

Professor: Aha! My turn! (rolls dice) ooh, a double 4. Hmm! I can use the secret passage, and that takes me to the kitchen! Now then! Bezukhov, do you have the revolver?

Bezukhov: Yes, I do, professor Plum.

Professor: Hmm, then my hypothesis is wrong...

Jennings: I've got it! I've got it! It was Miss Scarlet, in the ball-room, with the candlestick!

Jerome: Let's take a look... Jennings, you are completely correct. Miss Scarlet, in the ball-room, with the candlestick!

Jennings: Ooh, whoopee! It seems I have some future as a detective after all.
(laughter)

Professor: Gosh, these parlour games really aren't so bad after all, I don't recall having this much fun since I was at college.

Pasternak: Professor, we are honoured to have you join our ranks. Playing games may seem childish to some, but when it comes down to it, is life worth living without a bit of fun, now and then?

Marie-Claire: Hear, hear! What's more, after all that trouble, I think we've all earned a rest.

Professor: Well, I'd say that the problems would never have been solved without the wit and resourcefulness of our dear friend, Jerome.

Jerome: Now, now, professor, you flatter me.

Professor: I say, three cheers for Jerome! Hip hip...

(All do 3 cheers plus the inevitable 'oh for he's a jolly good fellow')

All: Speech! Speech! Speech!

Jerome: Everyone, really! I feel so embarrassed!

All: Speech!

Jerome: Well, since you pressed me, I have written a poem in memoriam of recent events. Would you like to hear it?

All: No!

Jerome: Of course you would. It goes thus:

Dearest friends, from far and near
I have a tale that's rather queer
It all began one Thursday morn
My friends and I were feeling bored
But opening the games cupboard
To our horror we discovered
Murder's fruit: A corpse of death
Poison took from her, her breath
The murderer had much to face,
Detective Twitt was on the case
And in the end he solved the mystery
My uncle and papa are history
Meanwhile games go as before

And while I hate to be a bore,
I have another thing to add
A thought of which I'm rather glad
Recently my mind was stirred
And turned to pensive reverie
And suddenly my heart concurred
The real way I could be free:
Though it be fun to be here playing
What greater good does it bring?
A sudden urge to be productive
And use my days to be constructive
My mind's convinced though it give me strife
Of the real purpose I have in life
I have realised, to be frank,
My future lies within the bank.

(General reaction)

(End of Act II)

Reference for who's in which scene

Jerome Brown	Jm		2		4	1	2	3	4	5	6
Uncle Edulous	U1	1									
Aunt A. Mused	At	1									
Bezukhov	R1	1	2		4	1	2	3	4	5	6
Rostov	R2	1	2		4	1	2	3	4	5	6
Pasternak	R3	1	2		4	1	2	3	4	5	6
Marie Claire	P1	1	2		4	1			4	5	6
Corpse	P2				4	1				5	
Sea captain	Cpn		2		4	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 st Policeman	Pol1								5		
2 nd Policeman	Pol2								5		
Detective Twitt	Dv				4	1		3	4	5	
Prof. S. Hour	Prof	2	3			1			4	5	6
Miss Takenne	Mt				4	1	2	3			
Flossie	F1	1	2	3		1			4	5	6
Florence	F2	1	2	3			2		4	5	6
Flo	F3	1	2	3	4		2		4	5	6
Forbes	Fbes				4	1	2		4	5	6
Jennings	Jngs				4	1		3	4	5	6
Reverend Jones	Mu	1	2		4	1	2	2		5	
Col. Brown	FB									5	

Cast in Order of Appearance

Florence	Typical maid, London accent
Flossie	As Florence, but has a thing about older men
Flo	As Florence, but 'the slow one'
Bezukhov	Effusive Russian, keen on gallantry, not a subtle character
Rostov	As Bezukhov
Pasternak	As Bezukhov
Marie Claire	Elegant but mysterious Parisienne
Reverend Jones	Charming Welsh vicar
Uncle Edulous	Soft-touch, ruled over by wife
Aunt A. Mused	Typical dominatrix aunt from hell
Jerome Brown	Foppish, charming, melodramatic, the sort who gets into fixes easily
Sea captain	= captain in The Simpsons, a one-dimensional character, n.b. <i>not</i> a pirate
Prof. S. Hour	The typical absent-minded professor, ingenious inventor, sentimental at heart
Forbes	The life and soul of the party, i.e. a pain in the neck
Jennings	Tagger-alonger, not special in any regard
Miss Takenne	Society lady, every bit as whimsical as Jerome
Detective Twitt	Fiery, arrogant, yet brilliant
'Juliette'	A corpse. Does not move, or speak.
Col. Brown	By-the-book old-fashioned father. The sort of person Roald Dahl hated.
1 st Policeman	Your average panto policeman
2 nd Policeman	As policeman #1