

# **The Case of the Inanimate Body**

A piece of intrigue and deceit  
by Sally Outen

With additional heresies  
by Oscar Wilde

## **Characters in the play:**

### **SLEUTHS AND ASSOCIATED:**

Sherlock Holmes, the great detective  
Doctor John Watson, his partner  
Oscar Wilde, a hired wit

### **PERSONS OF HIGH STATION:**

Queen Victoria, a monarch  
Lord Vernon Ratberger, lord of Hawteigh Manor  
Lady Violet, his sister  
Victor, their nephew  
Julianne, a mysterious young woman

### **SERVANTS AND OTHER NOBODIES**

Mrs Gristle, the housekeeper  
Fetish, the butler  
Cook, the cook  
Esther, the maid  
Martha, her sister, deceased  
Eric, an odd job boy  
Two Guards at Buckingham Palace  
Holmes's Subconscious  
Sally the Squirrel, a drug-induced rodent  
The Narrator

*On one side of the stage, there is the body of a serving girl, lying on her side with her back to the audience. The NARRATOR appears.*

NARRATOR: Hello boys and girls! Now I should begin by explaining that this play – “The Case of the Inanimate Body” – is not actually a coffin, despite a coffin being a perfectly suitable case for an inanimate body. So if any of you came here in the expectation that you were going to see a coffin, I do apologize and suggest that you complain to the advertising standards people – I’ll let you have their number after the performance. Who am I? Well, that’s not important – I’m just here to introduce the story; I’d rather not become part of events if I can help it. Anyway, the year is 1879, right in the middle of Queen Victoria’s reign, when the British Empire is at its peak. We are standing in the hallway of Hawteigh Manor, an ancient estate out on the moors... and as you can see, murder has just been committed.

*[NARRATOR exits just as Mrs GRISTLE enters. She is wearing an eye patch]*

GRISTLE: Martha? Martha! There you are, you idle girl! I’ve been looking all over the house for you. Well! What in heaven’s name do you think you’re doing, lying in the middle of the hallway just when there’s a fresh load of dirty dishes to be scrubbed? Oh, and would you look at that! Bleedin’ all over his Lordship’s nice Persian rug! If you’re not careful, I shall see to it that they dock your pay, young lady. Are you listening to me girl? Eh? Indolent child! *[kicks the body]* Come on, get up! *[grabs her wrist and then drops it again]* Oh lummie - you’re stone cold! Cold as a cauliflower, that’s what you are – we’d better get you into bed before you catch your death- .... *[the penny drops]* ...oh gawd!

*[Enter LADY VIOLET]*

VIOLET: Is something the matter, Mrs Gristle?

GRISTLE: It’s Martha the scullery maid, milady. I think she’s dead!

VIOLET: *[totally unconcerned]* Hmm? Oh yes, so she is.

GRISTLE: Well... what should we do, milady?

VIOLET: Honestly Mrs Gristle, why *do* we keep paying your wages? You must have *some*... servanty things to be getting on with, surely... you know, polishing the... sheets, washing the... whatever needs washing. I’m sure something will come to you if you use your imagination.

GRISTLE: No milady, I mean – should we call the police?

VIOLET: The *police*, Mrs Gristle? Why, whatever for?

GRISTLE: Well, one of my girls is lying dead in the middle of the hallway!

VIOLET: Oh... *that*. No, I shouldn’t bother.

GRISTLE: Whyever not, milady?

VIOLET: Policemen are hardly our sort of people, Mrs Gristle - I’m told that some of them have no breeding whatever. They’d only tramp around asking awkward questions in lower-middle class accents and you *know* I have a weak constitution at the best of times – I really think we ought to drop the subject.

GRISTLE: Very well, milady. But... shall I tell the girl’s parents?

VIOLET: Why should you do that? It would only antagonize them. Really, Mrs Gristle, you must show a little more sensitivity!

GRISTLE: Well I should at least move the body out of the hallway....

VIOLET: There's really no need, Mrs Gristle – it will make a nice conversation piece. Although... hmm, perhaps you do have a point – maybe we should place it a little further to the left so people aren't tripping over it all the time – although I don't want it clashing with the tapestry....

GRISTLE: But... it's a dead body, milady!

VIOLET: I'm aware of that, Mrs Gristle, you really don't need to keep on about it – frankly I'm becoming a little concerned by this morbid fascination of yours. Why can't you just leave it be and get on with your duties?

GRISTLE: But it'll get... all manky, milady.

VIOLET: Well... don't you have... some sort of spray or something?

[Enter LORD VERNON]

VERNON: Ah, Violet! What's the pother?

VIOLET: Oh, nothing Vernon – nothing to worry about.

VERNON: Mmm? Ah, that's what I like to hear! No pother whatever; a situation totally lacking in pother; one that might even be described as potherless – a state of potherlessness, in fact; why, I'll be unbepothered!

VIOLET: Vernon... what *are* you prattling on about?

VERNON: Nothing, nothing. Well, nothing you should pother yourself with, anyway.

VIOLET: Vernon, I really wish you would stop using words simply because you think they make you appear quaint. You always overdo it.

VERNON: My dear sister, it is *impossible* to overdo quaint. Odsbodikins, as lord of the manor, it's expected of me.

VIOLET: Vernon - *odsbodikins*?

VERNON: Well, quite. Now, where were we? Ah yes - nothing to worry about, you said?

VIOLET: That's right, Vernon.

VERNON: Jolly good – why's that then?

VIOLET: It's just that one of the serving girls has died, Vernon.

VERNON: Really? Ah, I see... so the time to worry is when the servant girls *aren't* dying, then? Sort of a... calm before the storm type thing, you mean? Right- o!

GRISTLE: Well, if I may be excused milord... milady... [curtseys and starts to leave]

VERNON: Hang on - hang on there... housekeeper! Where are you going?

GRISTLE: I'm just about to start the washing, milord....

VERNON: But shouldn't you... you know, move the body or something?

GRISTLE: Yes milord.

VERNON: Actually, you'd better contact the girl's parents first. They'll probably want to know she's snuffed it.

GRISTLE: Yes milord.

VERNON: Ooh, and – maybe we could tell the police about this? No, hang on, better still – we can call for that excellent chappie, whatsisname? That super sleuth from London. Sherlock Holmes, that's the one! Yes, call him – he can come along and apply his remarkable brain to the subject!

GRISTLE: I'm sorry, milord?

VERNON: I said – he can come along and apply his remarkable brain to the subject.

GRISTLE: [*not understanding*] I've got some... cold liver in the larder, milord... or I could mix up some milk and flour in a paper bag, but I doubt she's going to get much better....

VIOLET: [*who has been fuming for the last minute*] I don't think his lordship meant that Sherlock Holmes would be applying his remarkable brain as a *poultice*, Mrs Gristle.

VERNON: Quite right! Holmes's job will be to solve the murder. [*He calls*] Fetish!

VIOLET: I really think we ought to think about finding a butler with a less embarrassing name, Vernon. You know I resent having to cry 'Fetish' whenever my glass needs refilling.

[*FETISH enters but stays close to the wings*]

FETISH: [*very creakily*] Yes... milord. How may I... be of service?

VERNON: I would like a message sent out to Mr Sherlock Holmes of 221B Baker Street, Fetish. Tell him that I have a case for him.

FETISH: Certainly, milord.

[*FETISH exits from one side, GRISTLE from the other*]

VERNON: There! Now all we have to do is wait.

[*They freeze. The NARRATOR enters*]

NARRATOR: And so they waited. After a few days, the butler returned.

[*NARRATOR exits; FETISH appears*]

FETISH: Mr Sherlock Holmes has... arrived, milord. Shall I... induce him to come... into the great hall?

VERNON: Please do, Fetish.

FETISH: Certainly, milord. [*Clears his throat*] Mister Sherlock Holmes!

[*HOLMES enters, bows to VERNON and VIOLET. VERNON is about to speak when FETISH pipes up again*]

FETISH: His assistant... Doctor John Watson!

[*WATSON arrives, bows, and stands next to HOLMES*]

VERNON: Well, Mr Hol-

FETISH: Mister Oscar Wilde!

[*WILDE enters, carrying a lily. He bows extravagantly*]

VERNON: Well, Mr Holmes – this is indeed a pleasure! I've read all of your books!

HOLMES: [*aside, to WATSON*] What's he talking about? I haven't written any books. [*To VERNON*] You are Lord Vernon Ratberger, I presume?

VERNON: By gad! How did you know that?

HOLMES: [*showing off*] The line of your cravat matches the handwriting on the letter you sent me.

VERNON: But I didn't write you a letter....

HOLMES: [*cryptically*] Precisely. Allow me to introduce my assistant, Doctor Watson.

VERNON: Doctor what?

HOLMES: [*slowly*] Doctor Wat... son.

VERNON: Son? What son? *I have no son!* [*This is clearly a sore point*]

HOLMES: [*ignoring the outburst*] A-and this is my hired wit and interior decorator, Oscar Wilde.

VERNON: Ah, Wilde – your reputation precedes you!

WILDE: And what an age this is, when one can live down everything except a good reputation.

[*All laugh, woodenly*]

HOLMES: I've no doubt that you will find Mr Wilde a man of quite exquisite taste, Lord Vernon. He's done wonders with my apartment – aqua in the bedroom-

WATSON: Purple in the hall-

WILDE: And the study in scarlet.

VIOLET: Well then, perhaps Mr Wilde can educate us in all of the latest London fashions during his stay.

WILDE: I regret – my lady – that I am entirely out of fashion, for I have never learnt to appreciate the aesthetics of ugliness. I only appreciate beauty, which endures and is therefore deemed intolerably vulgar.

[*They all laugh again*]

VIOLET: Really, Mr Wilde! [*Then, sharply, under her breath*] Vernon!

VERNON: Oh yes, I suppose I should introduce Lady Violet...

HOLMES: Your wife?

VERNON: My sister.

VIOLET: Quite. No, my brother has never married, Mr Holmes. The closest he came was a little *affaire* almost twenty years ago now – [*mysteriously*] but as far as anyone can tell, nothing ever came of it....

VERNON: [*uncomfortably*] Yes, well I think perhaps... [*calls*] Fetish! [*speaks again*] perhaps you ought to meet the domestics.

FETISH: [*appearing*] You rang, milord?

VERNON: No Fetish, we don't have a bell-pull.

FETISH: Very good, milord. I'll just go and have my ears siphoned. [*Starts to leave*]

VERNON: Come back, Fetish. I did *call* for you.

FETISH: Yes milord.

VERNON: I would like you fetch the rest of the staff. Do you think you can do that?

FETISH: I'll make a spirited attempt, milord.

VERNON: Well done.

[*FETISH leaves*]

VIOLET: That man really is a waste of space, Vernon. We're bound to have been kept waiting for hours by the time he-

[*FETISH returns, followed by GRISTLE, COOK, ESTHER and ERIC*]

FETISH: [*a little smugly*] I have... I have aroused the staff, milord.

VERNON: Ah, capital! That's right, all form a line.... Now then Holmes - you've already met Mr Fetish, the butler.

HOLMES: Of course.

FETISH: [*very slowly and wheezily*] That's... that's right sir. I've... I've been... the resident butler... er... the resident butler... [*stops to catch his breath*] ...whew! I've been the... the resident butler of... this house for... for nearly fif... fifty ye... yee... yeeea... eeer... what was I saying?

WATSON: You were just saying: I've been the resident butler of this house for nearly fifty years.

FETISH: Oh... really?... Funny... so have I.

VERNON: [*Moving on*] This is Mrs Gristle, the... [*noticing that GRISTLE now has soot all over her face and hands, as though she has been badly burnt*] slightly singed... housekeeper. It was she who discovered the body.

GRISTLE: Ooh, a terrible thing it was, sir, a terrible thing. Lying there all stiff and green she was, like an enormous courgette with petticoats. I'm sure I don't know what's next - we shall all be slaughtered in our beds, sir, in our beds!

VIOLET: Mrs Gristle!

GRISTLE: [*suddenly indifferent*] Well somebody had to say it, milady.

VIOLET: Nonsense - you're only doing it for attention.

GRISTLE: [*sullenly*] Yes milady.

HOLMES: [*Moving on*] Ah, and this must be cook.

COOK: [*In an unidentifiable accent, chuckling*] Ooh, hecchei! Doi doi shigecch bleido Holmes! [*Grabs hold of Holmes's hand in both of hers and begins rubbing it as a bizarre greeting. Holmes looks uncomfortable*] Grigelgi vrast porjego bocch!

HOLMES: What does she say?

VERNON: I've no idea – I think she likes you. Anyway, this... [*waits as Holmes tries unsuccessfully to disentangle himself from Cook's grasp - eventually, Holmes gives up and lets her hang off him as he continues down the line*] this is one of our - well, our surviving maid, Esther. The deceased is her sister, I believe.

HOLMES: Excellent! Never fear, young lady - we'll have your sister back on her feet in no time at all.

WATSON: Holmes, we've discussed this, remember? We're just expected to find out what happened. We can't actually bring people back from the dead.

HOLMES: Really? Well, of course not. I was only trying to comfort the girl.

ESTHER: [*calmly, childishly*] Please don't trouble yourself, sir. I've already come to an acceptance... an acceptance that dear, sweet Martha has gone away - far away - to live with the vegetable people in the happy meadow. Everything is perfectly lovely. Perfectly lovely.

HOLMES: Splendid - it's good to see such a healthy attitude in one so recently bereaved. Well done. And who is this?

VERNON: Oh, that's just Eric, the odd-job boy.

ERIC: 'Ere mister – you wanna hear a joke?

HOLMES: Erm... oh very well then, why not?

ERIC: What do you call a cross between a homing pigeon and a chamber pot?

HOLMES: I don't know – what *do* you call a cross between a homing pigeon and a chamber pot?

ERIC: [*conspiratorially*] I can't remember. But it's still pretty funny, isn't it? Hur- hur.

[*pause*]

HOLMES: Wilde!

WILDE: [*Who has been wandering around elegantly, writing poetry in a little pocket book*] What? Oh, sorry – er... I say, isn't it perfectly monstrous the way people go about nowadays saying things against one behind one's back that are absolutely and entirely *true*?

[*All laugh gratefully – the situation has been defused*]

HOLMES: [*addressing the staff*] Well, I'm sure you'll all be seeing a lot of me for the duration of this case. In the meantime, I would ask you to come forward if you have any information that... ah, yes – Mrs Gristle isn't it? Do you have something to tell me?

GRISTLE: Begging your pardon, sir... I know who it was that done her in – it was the Great Brown Dog of the Ratbergers. They say it appears every full moon, and its teeth are bright green - and when it howls at you, the noise turns your legs into jelly - jelly's it's favourite food, see-

VIOLET: Mrs Gristle....

GRISTLE: ...and it can sort of move all its fur to different parts of its body so you can never tell what it's thinking, and it has three tails, one for each corner, and its eyes are like giant windmills, you know... and when it wants to, it can sort of blow up its own head-

VIOLET: *Mrs Gristle!*

GRISTLE: ...just like a balloon, and float away back to its lair... sorry milady, I hope I'm not being a nuisance.

VIOLET: I'm afraid you are, Mrs Gristle. Perhaps you should get back to your duties – [*addresses the servants*] and that stands for all of you, I think. Eric, maybe you could show Mr Wilde around the grounds – *please* don't try to impress him with your wit – oh, and I'd like you to meet me in the drawing room in... yes, half an hour. In the meantime, Mr Holmes and his lordship will be discussing important matters, and wish not to be disturbed. Is that understood? Good... well, Vernon?

VERNON: Oh... yes... er, staff dismissed.

VIOLET: Good day, Mr Wilde.

[*WILDE and the staff all exit*]

HOLMES: Well then – what important matters did you wish to discuss, my lady?

VIOLET: [*who hasn't decided yet*] Oh... well – Vernon, you had things you wanted to bring up with Mr Holmes....

VERNON: Did I? Ah yes, I know – we can show him the body!

WATSON: Now that sounds like a capital idea!

HOLMES: Indeed... [*walks over to the corpse*] Is this the one?

VIOLET: [*sarcastically*] No Mr Holmes, this is just one of the wide selection of corpses we have lying around the premises.

HOLMES: Well if you want me to gain any *constructive* forensic insights, I'm afraid you're going to have to provide me with the *relevant* body.

VIOLET: [*coldly*] This is the one, Mr Holmes.

HOLMES: Oh... right. [*Looks critically at it*] Well, we can instantly deduce that she was of relatively low station - the slight chink in her second molar is indicative of a gravel-rich diet - always a sure sign. She seems to have had a deep and enduring fondness for the country – note the slight tear in the hem of her dress, which could only have been caused by some kind of Morris dancer, as I'm sure you're well aware. The rash on her chin exactly complements the pattern of stubble on the face of the Captain of the Royal Artillery – an illicit affair, I suspect. Oh, and the tail protruding from her rear indicates that she is a honey badger.

WATSON: Holmes, that's a belt.

HOLMES: Indeed.

WATSON: What about cause of death?

HOLMES: Are you seriously telling me that the poisonous coral snake on the floor has entirely eluded your gaze?

WATSON: Holmes, I've just told you that's a belt.

HOLMES: Well I don't like the look of it.

WATSON: [*pensively*] It's strange - there aren't any obvious marks to show... hang on – perhaps if I just try.... [*He grabs the corpse and attempts to lift it up, but only succeeds in rolling it over onto its front, exposing....*]

VERNON: Gadzooks!

WATSON: Well this certainly puts the whole thing into an entirely new light.

HOLMES: Indeed! And I think we can safely say that the culprit is as good as caught.

WATSON: You don't mean... you've solved the riddle, Holmes?

HOLMES: But of course – it was perfectly elementary, my dear wosname. Even the most ingenious criminal masterminds harbour a tiny but hugely significant flaw by which they betray themselves. In this case, our villain's fatal flaw was to shoot herself in the back – six times.

WATSON: Holmes, you're not suggesting that this was *suicide*?

HOLMES: On the contrary, my dear Watson – I *am* suggesting that this was suicide!

WATSON: But Holmes, she couldn't possibly have done this by herself-

HOLMES: So, an accomplice, eh?

WATSON: [*sceptical*] You mean... *assisted* suicide, Holmes?

HOLMES: That's right, Watson, and I might make so bold as to go one further than that – it was *non-consensual* assisted suicide.

WATSON: Holmes... that would be *murder*.

HOLMES: Would it? Oh yes, I suppose it would. Yes, murder, the work of a criminal mastermind!

WATSON: You... you don't think it could be... Moriarty?

HOLMES: Don't be stupid, Watson. She looks nothing like Moriarty. Moriarty is taller than that.

WATSON: At least we know we're looking for somebody with a gun....

VERNON: But that just *can't* be right. Nobody in these parts owns a gun – apart from my nephew, of course. You must meet him, by the way, he's a smashing chap – been living here ever since his pater – my dear brother – died of something nasty he caught in Sumatra – a tiger, I think it was.

HOLMES: Yes yes, but I think we're getting away from ourselves here. The point is – if your nephew's the only person around here with access to a gun... is there any way that somebody else could have smuggled one onto the premises.

VERNON: [*thoughtfully*] ...No, no – not that I'm aware of.

HOLMES: Blast! So near and yet so far!

WATSON: [*who has crouched down beside the corpse, and is now tugging on a piece of fabric attached to its back*] Um, Holmes... I think you'd better take a look at this.

HOLMES: What is it?

[WATSON silently *pulls free the piece of cloth, and then opens it out – it is an ordinary white handkerchief, with some embroidered initials in one corner, and a black singe mark in the middle. A circle of blood has spread from this point, staining the fabric almost to the edge*]

HOLMES: Why, it's... a handkerchief!

WATSON: Indeed – I caught sight of the edge of it, sticking out of one of the bullet holes!

HOLMES: [*taking the handkerchief*] There can only be one possible explanation: the killer must have been blowing his nose just as he discharged the gun – somehow, the bullet became entangled in the fabric of this handkerchief *en route* to its target, and the whole ensemble ended up embedded in the victim's back.

WATSON: Holmes....

HOLMES: And I suppose *you* think it all sounds terribly implausible, don't you?

WATSON: [*sarcastically*] Not at all, Holmes – I was actually about to offer to rummage around in the wound to see if I might be able to locate the *nose* of the criminal. Better still, perhaps his entire person was propelled headlong into this poor girl's spine! [*cupping his hands around his mouth, he hollers in the direction of the corpse*] All right, the game's up! Come out with your hands in the air! [*Pause*] Nope – he's not in there.

VERNON: [*deaf to sarcasm*] Well... never mind, old chap – I thought it was a jolly good guess anyhow!

HOLMES: [*turning the handkerchief over in his hands*] Hmm... this thing must be able to tell us *something*, surely....

VIOLET: [*who has been looking at the hanky over HOLMES's shoulder*] Oh look – there's something embroidered in the corner!

HOLMES: So there is! It appears to be... a monogram! [*squints at it*] V. R. - Lord Ratberger, do you know anybody with the initials V. R.?

VERNON: Hmm... I can't think of anyone offhand – can you think of anyone with the initials V.R., Violet?

VIOLET: No, Vernon.

VERNON: Hmm... well, we'll give it some thought, and if... [*VICTOR enters, carrying a gun*] ...ah, but here's my nephew, Victor! Victor, these gentlemen [*indicating each in turn*] are Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson. They're here to investigate the murder.

VICTOR: There's been a murder? Well I never!

VIOLET: Victor, have you been paying attention to *anything* that has happened over the last few days?

VICTOR: [*flippantly*] Of course not, auntie – I've been shooting things! [*Points the gun at her and jolily pretends to shoot*] Bang bang! Haha! Three grouse and a wildebeest this afternoon, don'tchaknow! Well, I say wildebeest... it was more of a... large rabbit. But of course, it isn't *what* you shoot that matters, it's *how many* - it all adds to the tally, after all. Do you know, my total for last month was-

VIOLET: [*Bored*] Well if you gentlemen will excuse me, I think I shall check on Mr Wilde – with any luck, the battle of wits will not have proved too much for him.

VERNON: Actually, I might just join you.

[*They exit*]

VICTOR: Yes, shooting's my great passion, you know. [*Jollily*] As long as I've got my little beauty here, [*strokes gun*] nothing is safe in these parts!

WATSON: You spend a lot of time out on the moors then, Victor?

VICTOR: Oh yes - I know them like the back of my head.

WATSON: Mrs Gristle mentioned a rather strange dog that is believed to haunt the manor – have you ever seen anything like that around here?

VICTOR: Oh, but that's one of the three Mysteries of Hawteigh Manor: the Great Brown Dog of the Ratbergers.

HOLMES: Has it ever killed anyone?

VICTOR: No, but the pesky thing always runs off with the papers before we can get hold of them. I couldn't even tell you what year it is, it's that long since we last had any news....

WATSON: Just out of interest, what are the other two Mysteries of Hawteigh Manor?

VICTOR: Well, there's a *thing* living in the attic.

WATSON: A *thing*?

VICTOR: Yes – it only ever comes out at the dead of night, when its deafening music can be heard throughout the manor. And in the morning, the stairs are always inexplicably cluttered with empty liquor bottles.

WATSON: Fascinating. And the third mystery?

VICTOR: Oh... yes, well they say that, on a dark night, the sounds of ghostly battles drift over the moors in the mist. It's all just local superstition of course – no sensible person believes in ghosts... I mean, I saw *Hamlet* – it was just some chap covered in talcum powder, going 'woooo' and then sneezing-

HOLMES: [*inspired*] Of course – *Hamlet!*

WATSON: Have you thought of something, Holmes?

HOLMES: No, I was just saying. Come to think of it though... yes, of course! I've just worked out how we can catch our villain! Victor, how good's your acting?

VICTOR: Well I once played Bottom with the local thespians....

HOLMES: [*impatiently*] Yes but how good's your- oh I see – excellent! Watson, please inform his lordship that there is to be a reconstruction of the murder tonight at eight. Victor – come with me!

[*They exit, HOLMES and VICTOR to one side, WATSON to the other, looking slightly jealous. The NARRATOR enters and strolls casually across the stage*]

NARRATOR: Meanwhile, in the drawing room, shadowy schemes are beginning to unfold....

[*He exits. Enter VIOLET and ERIC*]

VIOLET: Now then, Eric – I expect you're wondering why I wanted to talk to you in private.

ERIC: Yes milady.

VIOLET: Actually, I expect you're wondering why I would want to talk to you at all.

ERIC: Yes milady.

VIOLET: Well, I have a little job for you... but it is something that you must not discuss with anyone – do you understand?

ERIC: Yes milady.

VIOLET: Good, now – Eric, are you grinning?

ERIC: No milady.

VIOLET: You have been listening to what I've been saying?

ERIC: Yes milady.

VIOLET: Very well then - listen closely. That idiot detective and his tedious assistant will presently be retiring to the drawing room, where they will have wine brought up for them. You must see to it that the content of this phial [*produces phial*] finds its way into the wine bottle they are drinking from. Do you follow me?

ERIC: Yes – erm, sorry milady... should I wait for them to finish the bottle first?

VIOLET: What? No, of course not, dolt – how do you expect to drug their drinks when they have already drunk them?

ERIC: Don't know, milady.

VIOLET: You must empty the phial into the bottle just after it has been opened... and it is absolutely critical that nobody sees you doing so, understand? Why are you giggling, boy?

ERIC: Not sure, milady.

VIOLET: Well don't. Now remember – the bottle must be shaken thoroughly to ensure that the drug has dispersed fully - *Eric!*

ERIC: [*still giggling*] Sorry milady. You know when you've got a really funny joke stuck in your head, and you just can't get rid of it?

VIOLET: No Eric – I cannot recall that ever happening to me.

ERIC: You would if you knew this joke, milady.

VIOLET: I sincerely doubt it. Just – you *must* not forget what I have tol-

ERIC: Are you sure you don't want to hear my joke, milady.

VIOLET: Quite sure. And please try to concentrate - if you mess this up, then-

ERIC: Oh go on milady – it's really short....

VIOLET: Eric!

ERIC: I'll just tell it quickly then, shall I? [*VIOLET is silently fuming*] Right! [*clears his throat*] - when is a jar a jar? [*Another pause*] I said-

VIOLET: Yes, alright – I don't know; when is a jar a jar?

ERIC: When it's... a jar! [*Grinning, he waits for her to laugh*]

VIOLET: [*wearily*] Eric, if your meaning is as poorly contrived as I suspect it is, I might point out that the object you are alluding to can scarcely be described as 'ajar' in the sense of being partially agape. Its lid may be loose – or even fully unscrewed and lying precariously over the rim - but it can never... *ever* exist in a state of unhinged half-openness.

ERIC: No... no, no – I don't mean it like that; I mean a jar as in... a glass container of, say, condiments... or preserved entrails... milady. I think you must be getting my joke confused with the very similar joke: when is a door not a door? [*She doesn't bother to answer,* *so* *he* *careers on...*] ...which also has the same answer: when it's a jar.

VIOLET: Oh yes, of course - that would be the reason, how very silly of me. Of course, that joke derives its humour from the use of the very double-meaning that you identified as the source of my confusion.

ERIC: That's right, yes.

VIOLET: So tell me, Eric – from what source does your joke derive its humour?

ERIC: Sorry, milady - I don't quite understand.

VIOLET: Well, have you perhaps cunningly concealed an incredibly witty double meaning within the folds of its seemingly plain and uninteresting exterior?

ERIC: Well, not that I'm aware of, no milady. I just meant that you always know where you are with a jar – because it's always a jar, you see?

VIOLET: I see. So what you have managed here is, in fact, an incredibly witty single meaning.

ERIC: Er... yes, milady. Although I'm not sure I'd say *incredibly* witty.

VIOLET: No, I can't for the life of me think why *I* did. Honestly Eric – these things that you come out with... where do you get them from?

ERIC: Well, me old man always taught me to call a spade a spade....

VIOLET: Eric, if I were you, I would call a spade 'Professor', and aspire to one-day reach the spade's level of intellectual sophistication.

ERIC: Yes milady.

VIOLET: Look – just take the phial and go. And Eric?

ERIC: Yes milady?

VIOLET: *I* have a little joke for *you*. When is a jar an appropriate container for the few pathetic pieces of squishy pink tissue that can be found and identified as probable human remains, soaked in formaldehyde and accompanied with a helpful label reading 'cretin'?

ERIC: Ooh, that's a tricky one milady - when *is* a jar an appropriate container for the few pathetic pieces of... um, squishy pink tissue that can be found and identified as probable human remains, soaked in forma... formaldehyde and accompanied with a helpful label reading 'cretin'?

VIOLET: *When you make a mess of this job!* – is that clear?

ERIC: Sorry milady... I don't think I get it....

VIOLET: Perhaps not, but I promise you *will* get it if you let me down. Now *get out!*

ERIC: Yes milady. [*He runs offstage*]

[*As VIOLET exits, the NARRATOR reappears*]

NARRATOR: The sun is now plunging towards the horizon like a dead turtle, staining the sky with its blood... [*seeing the audience's unappreciative expressions*] not that you're interested, of course – philistines, the lot of you! Anyway, Sherlock Holmes is about to present his reconstruction of the murder, and the guests and inhabitants of Hawteigh Manor are starting to congregate in the drawing room....

[*He exits. WILDE and WATSON enter, in the middle of a conversation*]

WATSON: ...you see, there are times when I think he doesn't appreciate me at all – he hardly seems to notice me, he's so wrapped up in his work. Oh, he needs a *partner* – somebody he can be brilliant and bossy to, but it doesn't have to be *me*. Anybody would do, anybody who could give him the right cues, say the right things... and

knowing that only makes me want to follow him *more* closely... as though I *need* him to define me, somehow.

WILDE: [*not unkindly*] Most people are defined by the ideals others hold of them, my dear doctor. People spend their whole lives chasing the perceptions of those who claim to know them.

WATSON: I know, I know – and I know it's selfish of me to feel this way....

WILDE: It is not selfish to live as one wishes to live – the only selfishness is to ask others to live according to the same precepts. [*WATSON searches WILDE's expression for hidden meaning; WILDE smiles winningly*] And I have found that the only way to remove temptation is to yield to it....

WATSON: [*with touching sincerity*] I truly envy you, Mr Wilde. There is so much that you have learnt to express, so much that I... that I... [*trails off and shrugs awkwardly*]

WILDE: [*teasingly*] You would aspire to be a poet, Dr Watson?

WATSON: [*embarrassed*] Well, that wasn't quite what I-

[*VIOLET and VERNON have entered. VIOLET stands near the back of the stage, facing the audience; VERNON approaches WATSON*]

VERNON: I do hope this reconstruction isn't going to be too morbid, Dr Watson. I can't stand sad endings, don'tchaknow.

WATSON: Oh, I'm sure Mr Holmes will make it as cheerful as possible, my lord. Who knows, you might even have fun....

VERNON: [*incensed*] What!? How dare you!? I've already told you – *I have no son!*

WATSON: No my lord, I said fun – fun, not son! You might have fun!

VERNON: [*calming down*] Oh... I see... yes, fun.

[*FETISH, COOK and ESTHER all enter and stand towards the back of the stage, facing the audience*]

WATSON: [*pushing his luck*] You *are* quite sure you *don't* have a son though, my lord?

VERNON: Yes, yes of course I am!

WATSON: Only I thought, maybe you had... or maybe you had one once, and lost him...? [*VERNON glares at him*] No? Just checking. It's really not a problem either way.

WILDE: Indeed – to lose one son would be regarded as misfortune; if you'd lost two sons, that *would* look like carelessness; three and I think we'd be talking about a full-blown police enquiry; whereas four... oh, I am sorry. I'm not sure what came over me there.

[*VERNON glares at WILDE. GRISTLE enters, minus one arm*]

VIOLET: There you are, Mrs Gristle – oh! Whatever happened to your arm?

GRISTLE: Oh nothing, milady. Well, I did strain it a little, doing the sweeping.

*[ERIC enters, with a wine bottle and two glasses. He crouches at the back of the stage; by now, the onstage actors should have formed a second audience, facing the first; various people are in muted conversation]*

VIOLET: No... I meant your other arm.

GRISTLE: I haven't got another arm, milady.

VIOLET: I can see that, Mrs Gristle – but didn't you have two earlier today?

GRISTLE: *[cagily]* I... can't recall offhand, milady. My memory really isn't what it - oh, but I think the performance is about to begin!

*[Everybody stops talking and looks attentive as HOLMES enters and bows]*

HOLMES: Good friends, attend to what I say:  
We hope you like our little play!

*[There is a smattering of applause as HOLMES exits. VICTOR comes on from the other side, carrying MARTHA's corpse, with his gun still slung over his shoulder. He stops in the centre of the stage and props the body up against himself, moving its arms in grotesque puppetry]*

VICTOR: Verily, the day is golden - see the bright orb of the sun bless our pleasant land; hear the little birdlets gibber merrily in the hedgerows! How raptured am I! I shall skip gaily and rejoice in my maiden innocence.

*[VICTOR has a valiant effort at making the corpse skip. HOLMES enters]*

HOLMES: Haha! So, my proud beauty – I have you alone at last!

VICTOR: Why – 'tis... *you!*

HOLMES: Yes, 'tis I, wench! And now you must elope with me.

VICTOR: But sirrah, I care not for you – why, you repulse me, you vile, ugly thing!

HOLMES: What – spurned? Shall I bear such ignominy? Nay! If I cannot have you, then no man shall!

VICTOR: Come not near me, swine! I fear the mad glint in your eye!

HOLMES: Silence, filly, and prepare to meet thy doom!

VICTOR: O lackaday! I am toast - *lost!*

*[HOLMES punches the corpse in the stomach – any residual good taste should be expelled from the scene at this point – from now on, this needs to be utterly sick]*

VICTOR: Wretched fate that I should perish so young and so fair!

*[HOLMES hits the corpse around the face]*

VICTOR: Oh but for one last kiss from my poor grieving mother!

ESTHER: *[rocking back and forth, grinning desperately]* Everything is lovely, perfectly lovely....

*[HOLMES's knee contacts with MARTHA's stomach. VICTOR lets the corpse slip a little]*

VICTOR: My spleen! My precious spleen! Ruptured like a frog in an oven!

*[HOLMES hits the corpse on the back of the neck and VICTOR drops it in a heap on the floor]*

VICTOR: Ah! Cruel misfortune that I should suffer such dreadful agonies, though my spinal cord be completely severed!

*[HOLMES continues to beat and kick the corpse as it lies on the ground]*

VICTOR: *[Crouching down beside the corpse]* Misery! I renounce the world, and go to join the host of angels in heaven! *[He straightens up, flapping his arms to represent MARTHA's spirit, and flaps offstage]*

HOLMES: The wicked deed is done – I go;  
And nobody shall ever know.

*[He gives the corpse one last kick, for good measure]*

HOLMES: And that's the end! *[He bows; VICTOR reappears and tries to make MARTHA bow, but drops her again. The audience claps slowly, still quite shocked]* If anybody would like to come forward to confess... *[But their audience is already leaving]* No? Well that's alright – we'll be running for another four nights, plus matinee, so you'll have lots of opportunities to turn yourselves in! *[He turns to VICTOR]* Well, I thought that went rather well, don't you?

VICTOR: Oh absolutely! Our audience loved us – it showed on their faces how moved they were. And I've been thinking – how about a musical version for the West End? Just imagine a Gilbert and Sullivan treatment of our script!

*[VICTOR exits happily, with the corpse. Their audience has now dispersed entirely, apart from WATSON and ERIC, the latter of whom is making a big deal out of pouring the contents of the phial into the wine bottle behind them]*

WATSON: *[storming over to HOLMES]* Holmes – what in blazes was that supposed to be!?

HOLMES: *That*, my dear Watson, was a reconstruction of the murder.

WATSON: Really? Well I thought it was insensitive and exploitative – honestly, trying to sell people choc-ices before the show! And it wasn't even an accurate reconstruction!

*[Behind them, ERIC is now shaking the bottle vigorously, his finger over the top]*

HOLMES: Oh, and how would you know so much about it all of a sudden?

WATSON: Holmes, we know she died from multiple gunshot wounds to the back. Her 'precious spleen' was mercifully unscathed until you got hold of it!

HOLMES: *[sulky]* Well I'm allowed a bit of artistic license....

ERIC: Wine anyone?

HOLMES: What? Oh... yes, thank you.

*[ERIC gives them each a glass and then pours wine into each one]*

ERIC: Oh, and mister - wanna hear an epigram?

WATSON: Listen boy, please would you – *what?*

ERIC: [*as though by rote*] Isn't it strange how the difference between a cynic and a romantic may lie in the space of just a few hours... or a few pints. Hur-hur.

WATSON: [*impressed*] Eric... did you... did you pick that up from Mr Wilde?

ERIC: [*proudly*] Nope, I made it up meself. But I've been learning a lot from him, you know. I'm going to be just like him one day, you know.

[*ERIC exits, imitating Wilde's walk with the bottle clasped passionately to his chest. HOLMES and WATSON watch with slightly glazed expressions*]

WATSON: [*snapping out of it*] Right – Holmes, it may interest you to know that while you were busy putting together your little *pantomime*, I was doing a bit of detection!

[*HOLMES and WATSON drink their wine as they talk*]

HOLMES: Oh... really, Watson?

WATSON: Yes, really Holmes. I've already solved one of the three great mysteries of Hawteigh Manor!

HOLMES: You don't mean... you've caught that dog that keeps stealing all the newspapers?

WATSON: No – I've found out about those battle noises that keep coming from the moor at night.

HOLMES: Really? What was causing them?

WATSON: Mrs Gristle and Mr Fetish.

HOLMES: No!

WATSON: Yes! It seems that they have a bit of a... thing... for [*raises eyebrows*] *historical recreation*.

HOLMES: How do you mean?

WATSON: Well... as I understand it, she dresses up as, say, Charles the Second, he's dressed as Oliver Cromwell, they run at each other with swords, wrestle each other to the ground and... [*whispers in HOLMES's ear*]

HOLMES: What, right there in the shrubbery!?

WATSON: Quite so. To be honest, I was surprised Mr Fetish had it in him!

HOLMES: Well I suppose it explains all of Mrs Gristle's little injuries...

WATSON: Yes – the poor woman does seem to end up with the most wretched roles. In the last few days alone she's been Harold Godwinson, Joan of Arc and Napoleon Bonaparte.

HOLMES: I see... Harold got an arrow in the eye – that explains the patch; Joan accounts for the burns... did Napoleon ever lose an arm?

WATSON: Not that I'm aware of. I expect Mr Fetish just got a bit overexcited... Holmes, are you all right?

HOLMES: I think so... I'm... I'm just feeling a little... light headed....

WATSON: Oh I expect it's just the air in here... gosh – actually, now that you mention it, I don't feel so well myself....

HOLMES: It's... as though I'm floating... floating over a field of... cheese....

WATSON: No... no, it's more purple than that – it's like... being inside the mouth of a duck.... Gosh – this stuff's rather good, isn't it...?

HOLMES: Well that's easy for you to say, mister teapot - you're the one with all the trumpets coming out of you.

WATSON: Have you noticed how, whenever you say something, bits of you sort of come off and turn into the words...? Look: the cat sat on the mat! Jack has a big ball! It was the best of times, it was the worst of times... hahahaha!

HOLMES: Hang on, stop it. Stop it, hey, listen!

WATSON: [*who has stopped giggling*] Hmmm?

HOLMES: Can you hear them?

WATSON: What?

HOLMES: The voices... I hear voices....

WATSON: What? No, that's... oh yes - I hear them! They're... chanting something.... We must have reached a state of heightened awareness!

HOLMES: Shhh! I'm trying to listen!

[*GRISTLE, FETISH, ESTHER and ERIC march solemnly onto stage in black cloaks, chanting the same four lines over and over as they take their position at the back. They quieten down to a whisper whenever there is dialogue, but never lose the rhythm of the words....*]

SERVANTS: See the cloak that gilds the skies;  
                  Craft that rows beneath the seas.  
                  Mind the smoke before your eyes;  
                  Mind your clues before your peas.

[*A figure appears beside HOLMES on the left hand side of the stage. It is his SUBCONSCIOUS*]

SUBCON: Hello there.

HOLMES: Hello... erm, Miss. And you are?

SUBCON: I'm your subconscious.

HOLMES: I'm sorry?

SUBCON: I said I'm your subconscious.

HOLMES: But... you're a person of the opposite... way of buttoning things....

SUBCON: A woman, that's right. Well of course I am – I do all the important jobs and never get any credit for it, what did you expect?

*[On the right hand side of the stage, WATSON has just been joined by an oversized rodent with a particularly silly voice....]*

SALLY: Hello!

WATSON: Oh... hello. Well you're a funny sort of creature, aren't you?

SALLY: I'm Sally the Squirrel, your furry forest friend!

WATSON: Oh... er... you're not my subconscious, are you?

SALLY: Of course not, silly....

WATSON: Ah, well... that's a relief!

SALLY: I'm just your sex-drive!

WATSON: *[weakly]* Oh, I see. Fine, fine.... *[he nods, just a little too vigorously]*

*[Now the figure of MARTHA appears and glides to the centre of the stage, between the two pairs – she is making pointing gestures with her hands, which are covered with blood]*

HOLMES: What the... but that's the girl who was murdered... or her ghost ....

SUBCON: Or a hallucination, maybe? You *are* drugged up to the eyeballs, you know.

HOLMES: What's she doing with her hands? It looks like she's trying to tell me something!

SUBCON: Hey, no shit, Sherlock.

HOLMES: But... but – what does it mean? All that pointing...?

SUBCON: Do you really need it explaining? Oh, all right – look, she's trying to tell you to... follow the blood.

HOLMES: Follow the blood?

SUBCON: Yes! Honestly - I'd have thought that ought to be as clear as custard!

HOLMES: Well it might be to you, but... hang on, custard's usually fairly opaque, isn't it?

SUBCON: No, it might *look* opaque, but that's just an optical illusion – it's actually quite clear.

HOLMES: Are you sure?

SUBCON: *[rolling eyes]* Oh please....

SALLY: You know, I can't squeak for you unless you squeeze me.

WATSON: I'm sorry?

SALLY: Oooh – I knew you'd say that. You don't *want* to squeeze me, do you?

WATSON: Well... no, I....

SALLY: I bet you'd squeeze me if I were a human; you humans are always squeezing each other. But no, I'm a squirrel, and I suppose you think squirrels are only good for one thing – squibbling. If I had an acorn for every time I've been picked up, squibbled on, and then cast aside by some heartless human... I'd have some acorns.

WATSON: But why would anybody scribble on a squirrel?

SALLY: I don't know - I suppose it saves on paper. I hate being a squirrel, I'd much rather be a human – then I could have all the squeezing I wanted, and think what fun I'd have!

WATSON: If you could just....

SALLY: [*singing, in a world of her own*] I wanna be... where the people are... I wanna see, wanna see 'em dancin'! Walkin' around in those - what's that word again? Shoes! Down where they walk, down where they run, down where they- ...

WATSON: Listen! Please listen - if there's anything I can do....

SALLY: *Squeeze me!!!*

[*Watson panics and squeezes her*]

SALLY: \*Squeak\*! Ooooh, that's so much better!

HOLMES: [*watching MARTHA pensively*] It just doesn't make sense... there's no obvious motive – I mean, why would anybody kill a scullery maid?

SUBCON: Maybe they didn't *mean* to kill the scullery maid....

HOLMES: You mean somebody shot her in the back six times *accidentally*?

SUBCON: Maybe they meant to kill somebody else.

HOLMES: Well in that case, who *did* they mean to kill?

SUBCON: Look, I told you – follow the blood!

HOLMES: But I don't understand! There was a puddle of it under the body, but I can't recall it leading anywhere....

SUBCON: Oh, do I really have to spell it out? Not that kind of blood, dummy! The kind that's just like you – thicker than water!

HOLMES: Oh – you mean *family* blood – inheritance! Of course, Lord Vernon's fortune – somebody's trying to get their hands on the manor house, somebody who mistook the maid for his lordship! But... what kind of person could have such *abysmal* powers of observation?

SUBCON: [*staring fixedly at HOLMES*] Oh, I can think of at least one such person, offhand....

SALLY: Right: let's talk squirrel. Did you know that squirrels can run in excess of forty miles an hour on level ground?

WATSON: Goodness me, is that true? I never knew that!

SALLY: Oh yes. And the common squirrel has an extremely finely tuned olfactory system - it can smell a decaying carcass from over two miles away!

WATSON: Well I never!

SALLY: The biggest types of squirrels are able to reach the tops of even the tallest trees with their long necks. They have specially reinforced hip bones to help support their massive weight.

WATSON: Erm....

SALLY: In fact, squirrels remained the dominant land animals on Earth until sixty-five million years ago, when a giant meteorite- ...

WATSON: Hang on, hang on - that's dinosaurs, surely?

SALLY: What did you say?

WATSON: You mean dinosaurs, not squirrels.

-

SALLY: Oh my god - you said it!

WATSON: What?

SALLY: The d- word - you said it! Oh, you've done it now - I can feel it, it's happening - I'm changing!

WATSON: What!?

SALLY: I'm changing, I'm changing - nnnuargh! Help me- aaargh! Rrrurgh! [*She starts having contortions, shrieking like something from "Jurassic Park", and eventually adopts a dinosaur stance*] I'll get you for this, Doctor Watson - just you wait and see!

[*Stalks off, shrieking. MARTHA's ghost is now doing something approximating to the Macarena.*]

HOLMES: All right, so we just need to work out who stands to inherit, yes? [*musings*] If Vernon never had a son, his lands must pass to his next of kin, who would be... would be *Violet*. But it can't be her – she's a... you know....

SUBCON: A *person of the opposite way of buttoning things*? Does that make her incapable of murder?

HOLMES: Well... no, technically... but it does make her incapable of inheriting anything. By law, only a man can own a manor.

SUBCON: Is that really still the case? Oh, for heaven's sake!

HOLMES: It's for your own good, you know – the female brain is hardly equipped to cope with... [*sees her expression and begins to trail off*] ...with such weighty matters as... well, property and so on – look, I'm only repeating what I've heard, all right?

SUBCON: [*calmly, sweetly*] You remember that dream you had – the one with the scorpions and the suction pump...?

HOLMES: Good grief, yes! I was afraid to sit down on the privy for a week afterwards!

SUBCON: How would you like it *recurring*? [*MARTHA leaves*] Oh dear, now we're out of spirits. Listen, I'm going to have to leave you here – well, technically I'll just be returning to the back of your mind, but it'll probably *look* like I'm walking off in that direction. Just remember what I said – follow the blood!

[*She exits. The chanters raise their voices again, and then begin to circle HOLMES, getting louder, faster, wilder. HOLMES, terrified, falls to the ground, and lies curled up in a foetal position, clutching his hat to his chest. The chanters exit, repeating the last word – 'peas' over and over again, like an echo. This turns into WATSON's voice offstage at the same side. WATSON and WILDE now enter*]

WATSON: [*entering*] Please, please, please Holmes - wake up!

HOLMES: [*stirring*] Uuuurgh?

WATSON: Holmes, you've been asleep for the best part of the morning!

HOLMES: Wha? Wuzzuh... oh! [*suddenly sitting bolt upright*] Who's been murdered!?

WATSON: Calm down Holmes – there hasn't been another murder, but I'm afraid Lady Violet is rather furious with you. She's trying to persuade his lordship to take you off the case – claims you're no closer to solving it, that you're nothing more than a shameful opium fiend!

HOLMES: [*still quite muzzily*] Now... now just a minute – you can tell them that I'm past all of that now... completely clean... you know, taking things one day at a time... not sure what happened last night... *and* that I just happen to have deduced the identity of the killer!

WATSON: What!?

HOLMES: That's right – kindly inform them that, if they would be so good as to meet with me at their earliest convenience, I will explain everything. [*WATSON and WILDE make to leave*] Not you, Wilde! I could do with some witty remarks to help clear this headache, if you don't mind. [*WATSON leaves*] Well... go on then.

WILDE: [*hesitantly*] Erm... well... ah – is it not true that... that *experience* – the name we give to our mistakes – is only ever gained when it is no longer of any use to us...?

HOLMES: What? What's that supposed to mean? Try another – an easy one, perhaps.

WILDE: Very well... when one is in love, one always begins by deceiving oneself, and ends by deceiving others.

HOLMES: Oh for goodness sake, man – can't you do any better than that? Come on – say something *witty* this time! *Witty*, if you actually understand the concept!

[*WILDE turns away sullenly and makes a very soft raspberry*]

HOLMES: I'm sorry? I'm sorry, Wilde – what was that?

[*WILDE calmly fixes HOLMES with his gaze, walks casually up to him until he is standing a little too close, raises his thumb to his nose, and lets out a thunderous raspberry while wiggling the fingers of his raised hand. When he has lowered his hand, there is a pause – HOLMES looks stunned; WILDE seems perfectly placid, still staring into HOLMES's eyes*]

HOLMES: [*wearily*] Wilde-

[WILDE interrupts with a short raspberry]

HOLMES: I hardly think-

[Another raspberry]

HOLMES: [*rushing to get his words out*] It's not funny and it's not clev-

[And again]

HOLMES: [*shouting, while WILDE gives a long drawn out raspberry*] Right! If that's your attitude, then I've had just about enough of it! You're fired, do you hear? You can... you can get out – go on – out!

[WILDE has run out of breath. He smiles at HOLMES, bows elegantly, turns and begins to stalk out]

HOLMES: [*disgusted*] Is that really all you have to say for yourself?

WILDE: [*turning, then, sweetly*] I have nothing to declare except my [*raspberry*]!

[WILDE exits.]

HOLMES: [*To himself*] Well, fine. I don't need a hired wit anyway – I'm about to wrap up the most important case of my career. Hah - no son indeed! You fool, Lord Ratberger, did you really think you could staunch the flow of blood? Did you even realize how much danger you'd put yourself in?

[VIOLET marches in, followed by VERNON and VICTOR]

VIOLET: Well, Mr Holmes – I sincerely hope that you are able to explain yourself!

HOLMES: I rather think I can do better than that, my lady – I can explain the murder!

VERNON: Really, Holmes?

[FETISH, COOK, ESTHER and ERIC enter]

HOLMES: Oh yes! [*To ESTHER*] Take heart, young lady - the man who killed your sister will soon be brought to justice!

ESTHER: Oh, how lovely! Martha will be so pleased to hear that!

VERNON: I expect *everybody* will be pleased to hear it – well, except the killer, obviously. Are we all assembled? [*He does a quick count*] Oh, has anybody seen Mrs Gristle? [*FETISH looks guilty*] Fetish – have you seen Mrs Gristle?

FETISH: [*shifty*] She... couldn't make it, Milord. She seemed... a bit drained... when I saw her. I think she's just having a bit of a lie down... in the shrubbery....

VERNON: But... deuce take you, Fetish, this is important – can you not just fetch her for ten minutes or so?

FETISH: Oh no milord... I couldn't possibly wake her... dead to the world, she is....

VERNON: [*sulkily*] But it's *traditional* for everybody to be present....

VIOLET: Vernon, please let's not delay this any longer – I'm just *aching* to hear what Mr Holmes has to tell us – I *do* hope it's something scandalous....

HOLMES: Oh yes – it is a tale that goes back almost twenty years, a tale of forbidden love and deceit, and it concerns the *thing* that is locked up in the attic of this manor house. [VERNON looks horrified] Yes Lord Ratberger, I think you know what I'm talking about.

VERNON: [*faintly*] I knew this day would come, I knew that somebody would find out eventually. But why... why must you do this to me now?

HOLMES: Because your life and inheritance are in danger, my lord, and will be for as long as you try to hide the truth.

VERNON: Well then... cook – here are the keys... you know what to do – it's time the world learnt about our little secret.

COOK: [*resignedly*] Prolz gifenyach....

[COOK exits]

HOLMES: And in the meantime, perhaps you could tell us your story, Lord Ratberger?

VERNON: Yes. Yes... I will. I suppose... I suppose it all began seventeen years ago, really. There I was, fresh out of Oxford, not a care in the world-

VIOLET: But Vernon, you weren't *at* Oxford.

VERNON: Yes I was – I had to go to the farmers' market, you remember, after our last cook ran away with that sailor....

HOLMES: You didn't actually study there then?

VERNON: Not that I recall. I suppose I found it a bit difficult to concentrate with all those people shouting about lovely pears. Anyway, where was I? Oh yes, there I was, fresh out of cabbages, not a care in the world, a mere tadpole-

WATSON: Sorry Lord Ratberger - a tadpole?

VERNON: Erm, yes, a tadpole. I'd decided to stock up on fruit-

WATSON: In what way would you consider yourself to have been a tadpole?

VERNON: I'm sorry?

WATSON: Well, did you resemble a tadpole in some way? Did you have a small, bulbous body and a flattened tail?

VERNON: Not... not as such, no. No, when I say that I was a tadpole, I mean that I was young and reckless – although [*jokingly*] I must admit, I *did* have a small, bulbous body.

WATSON: Was it... soft and largely featureless?

VERNON: Erm... yes?

HOLMES: And the tail?

VERNON: I didn't have a tail, no. Anyway, it was such a nice day I'd decided not to take a cab, and I was strolling along a country lane, whistling merrily. I can picture myself

now: my small, bulbous, largely featureless body; my shopping list hanging rakishly out of my back pocket, bright-eyed and bushy tailed....

HOLMES: Excuse me Lord Ratberger, but you just claimed that you didn't have a tail.

VERNON: Well I didn't. I was referring to my shopping list.

WATSON: Your shopping list had bright eyes and a bushy tail?

VERNON: That's right, yes. I'd written it on a passing squirrel. It saved on paper. I was just strolling along, minding my own business when I saw the most gorgeous woman I'd ever laid eyes on.

HOLMES: I knew it!

VERNON: We got talking and... well, what can I say? Within a week, I'd taken her on as a cook; within a month she was pregnant; and within a year, I'd set aside a little space in the attic where we could raise the child without anybody finding out about it. I was so concerned about secrecy that I even made Cook take an oath that she would never speak anything but Karelian for the rest of her life.

WATSON: But... weren't you worried about the possibility of her running into somebody who *knew* some Karelian?

VERNON: Not really, no. *She* doesn't know any Karelian, you see – she just makes it up as she goes along, as far as I'm aware. [COOK enters] Ah, but here she is – you made the summons, my dear?

COOK: [solemnly] Szehkhi dosse.

VERNON: Very well then – Mr Holmes, Dr Watson, allow me to introduce... my daughter, Julianne!

HOLMES: Your... *daughter*!?

[JULIANNE enters]

JULIANNE: [rudely] Yeah, what?

VERNON: Young lady, I really do wish you would learn a few manners. I'm sick and tired of having to tell you to stop playing with fire, and to keep your music down at those parties you hold, but now it seems that you've killed one of my maids.

JULIANNE: What!? Oh my god, I can't believe you just said that; I so int done nuffin!

VERNON: Well then, you won't mind answering these gentlemen's questions, will you?

JULIANNE: Yeah but no but, yeah but there's this whole thing what you don't even know nuffin about, right, cuz I weren't there but what happened was Mary Coleridge and James Barrie got caught, like, kissing and stuff in public, anyway that's what Beatrix Potter says but you shouldn't listen to her cuz she's a right loner what gets off on mushrooms and anyway, everyone knows she's got the hots for David Lloyd George after he got like totally hammered at Robert Cecil's, he's *such* a lightweight but anyway *sha-up*, I dint done nuffin so *sha-up*!

VERNON: Julianne!

HOLMES: Actually Lord Ratberger, I believe her.

JULIANNE: What?

VERNON: But Holmes... I thought you said....

VIOLET: [*triumphantly*] Can it be that this *girl* doesn't fit with your little theory in some way, Mr Holmes?

HOLMES: [*trying to cover for himself*] Ye- no... no, of course not. This is all entirely significant... even though it would seem that... Julianne is almost certainly not the culprit.

JULIANNE: Yeah, whatever – am I bovvered?

VERNON: Julianne, you will not speak like that to our guests! Go to your attic, and you can stay there until you start to act your age!

JULIANNE: Oh my god, that is so unfair! I hate you – just leave me alone!

[*JULIANNE storms off*]

VERNON: And now, Mr Holmes, perhaps you won't mind giving me an explanation for why you decided to humiliate me by exposing my... little indiscretion... in front of my entire household.

HOLMES: I assure you, Lord Ratberger – all will shortly become clear. You see, my point was... my point *was*... sorry but you don't happen to have any *other* children kicking around the place, do you... any... sons, perhaps?

VERNON: By the brazen bottom of Beelzebub, Holmes, I keep trying to tell you – *I have no sons!*

VICTOR: Well if I'm not needed any more, I might just toddle outside and find something to shoot.

HOLMES: [*turning to him so that WATSON and VERNON are now behind him*] What did you say?

VICTOR: I said I think I'll go and shoot something!

[*Realization dawns on HOLMES's face – WATSON speaks from over his right shoulder, VERNON from over his left – the effect should be that of memories surfacing and coming together in HOLMES's mind...*]

WATSON: We're looking for somebody with a gun...

VERNON: My nephew's the only one with a gun around here...

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WATSON: We're looking for somebody with a gun...

VERNON: My nephew's the only one with a gun around here...

HOLMES: Good grief – of course!

WATSON: We're looki-

HOLMES: Yes yes, all right – I get the point! Victor, I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you to accompany me to the nearest police station, to be detained on suspicion of the murder of Martha the Maid!

VICTOR: [*shocked*] What!?

HOLMES: Stop acting innocent, Victor – you were trying to get hold of your uncle's inheritance, but regrettably managed to kill the wrong person. You had both the motive and the perfect murder weapon – that gun you always carry around with you!

VERNON: Ingenious!

VICTOR: What? But [*he laughs nervously*] – that's absurd, you surely can't believe... [*suddenly desperate – he points the gun at HOLMES*] Just get away from me, all right? I'm going to leave now... to start a new life far away from here. And none of you are to come after me, understand – or I'll blow your brains out!

ESTHER: No! You killed my little sister – and that is really... not... very... lovely!

[*Before VICTOR can react, ESTHER runs forward and grabs hold of the gun. They grapple, and it goes off, hitting VICTOR in the face... with a jet of water*]

VICTOR: Gaaaargh!

VIOLET: But... it's just water.

VICTOR: Oh yes, so it is!

WATSON: Then... you *couldn't* have killed the scullery maid!

VICTOR: No, I suppose not.

VERNON: Then... who did?

HOLMES: Well a good detective always trusts his subconscious – except on the subject of custard, perhaps – and my subconscious is still telling me to follow the blood. Now that young Victor is out of the frame, I'm afraid there can be only one possible culprit. Yes Lord Ratberger, it was you – you tried to implicate your own nephew in a murder to stop him from getting his hands on your money! Isn't that right?

[*There is the sound of a gun being fired*]

VERNON: Oh... pother! [*He falls to the ground*]

VICTOR: Uncle!

VIOLET: He's... dead!

HOLMES: Damn it! In that case... but of course! How could I be so blind!?

WATSON: What do you mean?

HOLMES: I see it all now – I've finally worked out who the culprit is, and they're after a lot more than a piffling inheritance – indeed, the very future of Britain may be at stake! But we must act fast – the killer already has a considerable head start over us. We must proceed hotfoot – to *Buckingham Palace*!

ALL: [*gasping*] *The Taj Mahal*!?

HOLMES: No, I said *Buckingham Palace*.

ALL: Oh....

VIOLET: Good.

VICTOR: That's much closer.

*[All exit, except FETISH, who takes out a hunting knife and starts polishing it distractedly, as though waiting for something. GRISTLE appears, bent over slightly]*

FETISH: Well Mrs Gristle, did you have a nice lie down?

GRISTLE: Yes thank you, Mr Fetish – I really don't know what came over me.

FETISH: How are your ribs?

GRISTLE: Still a bit fractured, I'm afraid Mr Fetish. You really should be more careful with that mace, you naughty man!

FETISH: Sorry. *[Pause]* Does this mean you won't be up to... Agincourt, this afternoon?

GRISTLE: *[taking his hand and smiling gently]* Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more....

*[FETISH grins, happily. They walk off, arm in arm. The NARRATOR appears. Two GUARDS enter and stand on the right hand side of the stage]*

NARRATOR: These two upstanding and bebusbied individuals are guards at the gates of Buckingham Palace. Holmes and company are a bit later arriving than expected, so we're stuck here for – well, hopefully no more than a few minutes. On the bright side, the delay gives us a great chance to observe two fine specimens of the Queen's Guard in action....

*[He exits. There is a long pause while the guards do nothing]*

GUARD 1: So... did you, er... did you see the cricket this afternoon?

GUARD 2: Yeah. It was great, wasn't it?

GUARD 1: Yeah.

GUARD 2: I reckon it must have been sitting right there for... oh, at least thirteen minutes and twenty- one seconds.

GUARD 1: There was a moth here once, you know.

GUARD 2: Was there really?

GUARD 1: Last June. June the third. From two forty- seven until two fifty- three.

GUARD 2: My word – a whole eight minutes of moth.

GUARD 1: Well actually, it was only seven minutes and thirty- eight seconds. It went away again after that.

GUARD 2: Still... something to tell the grandchildren, I expect. What kind of moth was it?

GUARD 1: I don't know. It was sort of brown.

GUARD 2: How interesting.

GUARD 1: I thought so.

GUARD 2: Well... they're right, you know.

GUARD 1: Right about what?

GUARD 2: You see a lot in this job.

*[Enter HOLMES, closely followed by WATSON, VIOLET and VICTOR, who each have guns hidden under their clothes]*

HOLMES: *[To WATSON, VIOLET and VICTOR]* Right, we're here – now I just need to persuade the guards to let us through. You all remember the plan? *[They nod]* Excellent – just let me handle this. *[To GUARDS]* Hey, you there! We seek admission to Buckingham Palace.

GUARD 1: Right- o. *[Stands aside for them]*

HOLMES: Hang on, hang on; you're letting us through – just like that?

GUARD 1: Yessir. Pleased to oblige, sir.

HOLMES: But... excuse me – you can't just go letting *anybody* through these gates!

GUARD 2: Can't we?

HOLMES: Of course not! You need to be surly and confrontational – otherwise... well, what's the point?

GUARD 1: Not sure what you mean, sir.

HOLMES: Oh for goodness sake - be rude to people! Tell them to shove off – go on, say it: shove off!

GUARD 1: *[uncertainly]* Shove off?

HOLMES: Right! *[to GUARD 2]* Now your turn....

GUARD 2: Shove off.

HOLMES: Something different, man! Use your imagination.

GUARD 2: *[desperately]* Er... away... with you?

HOLMES: Angrier next time! *[to GUARD 1]* Now, you!

GUARD 1: *[more confident]* Get lost!

HOLMES: Good! *[points at GUARD 2]* You!

GUARD 2: *[still a little nervous]* Go hang....

HOLMES: Come on, more passion!

GUARD 2: *[shouting]* GO HANG!

HOLMES: Much better! [*To GUARD 1*] You!

GUARD 1: [*who has been working on this*] Get bent!

HOLMES: [*to GUARD 2*] Excellent! Now you!

GUARD 2: Piss off!

HOLMES: Ye-

GUARD 1: Go to hell!

GUARD 2: Screw you!

GUARD 1: Get the fu-

HOLMES: *All right!* You can stop now! I'll just pop back over there and then we'll take it from the top, all right? [*Walks back to WATSON, VIOLET and VICTOR, giving them the thumbs up; he turns and starts back towards the GUARDS*] Now then- [*but GUARD 2 is already striding towards him menacingly*]

GUARD 2: Alright *scum*, if that *is* your real name – you'd better give me a damn good reason not to whip your sorry little ass!

HOLMES: [*striking a pose*] Open these gates, in the name of good Queen Victoria!

GUARD 1: Oh blimey – please forgive us, your majesty

GUARD 2: We didn't recognize you in that deerstalker.

HOLMES: No no no *no* - you were so close! Oh, to hell with it – we'll just have to begin anyway! Get 'em, gang!

[*WATSON, VIOLET and VICTOR draw their guns. There is a totally over-the-top slow motion gunfight, with much "nooooo!"ing and diving around. It's rather one-sided – the GUARDS don't actually have guns, and end up totally soaked, lying on the floor as though dead*]

HOLMES: And let that be a lesson to you! [*pause, then sheepishly*] Erm, actually... could you open the gates for us now?

GUARD 1: Right- o. [*Gets up and shows them through the gate. The GUARDS resume their previous positions. There is another pause....*]

GUARD 1: Aww... now I've gone and lost my train of thought.

GUARD 2: Yeah, me too.

GUARD 1: Honestly – some people!

GUARD 2: Tsk!

[*Long pause*]

GUARD 2: Oh look – a bee!

[*They stare at it... then exit as the NARRATOR and QUEEN VICTORIA appear from opposite sides of the stage*]

NARRATOR: Queen Victoria, reigning monarch of Great Britain and emp of India, is in her reception room, waiting to be entertained by a touring chamber orchestra, when suddenly....

[*HOLMES, WATSON, VIOLET and VICTOR enter; NARRATOR exits*]

HOLMES: Aha! Just in time!

VICTORIA: Oh... my goodness! What means this most ungracious intrusion?

HOLMES: [*bowing elaborately for far too long, suddenly grossly sycophantic*] Your Majesty! What an honour it is to be here in your presence... and may I say how very radiant you're looking - why, is that a new hat? It really suits you.

VICTORIA: Who *are* you? You're not Joe Brahms and his Raving Germans, we're certain of *that*.

HOLMES: Alas no, your majesty – my name is Sherlock Holmes and these are my... associates. We're not here to play for you; we've come in great urgency... although if you'd like, I could always get out my instrument and have a bit of a fiddle – I'll even let *you* have a go on it, if you want....

VICTORIA: [*dryly*] We are not a musician, Mr Holmes. Perhaps you had better come to the point.

HOLMES: Of course, of course - pardon me... [*suddenly stern*] Alexandrina Victoria, I would like to question you in connection with the deaths of Lord Vernon Ratberger and Martha the Scullery Maid. You do not need to say anything, but anything you don't say may be interpreted as evidence that anything you did say would further incriminate you. Of course, if you *do* decide to say anything- ...

VICTORIA: Mr Holmes, we don't know who you are, but we are quite taken aback by your impertinence! Do you think that anybody is going to believe that we, Queen Victoria, are responsible for murdering two of our own subjects? Why would we do such a thing anyway?

HOLMES: Why? Well, allow me to explain. My hypothesis is that it was all an elaborate plot to distract *me* from the real issue – your felonious attempts to further the expansion of the British Empire!

ALL: What!?

HOLMES: Yes, the British Empire! Who knows how many inoffensive countries are even now caught in the grip of imperial oppression? Who knows how many innocent lives are being blighted by the deathly dirge of our national anthem? And you knew that you would be safe as long as I, the great Sherlock Holmes, never found out about it. So you constructed a cunning scheme to send me out onto the moors, where I'd be safely out of the way of your machinations – you even arranged that the newspapers never arrived at Hawteigh Manor, just in case they mentioned anything of your plans.

VICTORIA: Conjecture – mere conjecture! You have no evidence....

HOLMES: My suspicions were first aroused when Victor mentioned that a large dog was in the habit of running off with the paper every day. That dog was none other than a royal corgi – don't try to deny it! And if more proof were needed, I have it here on this handkerchief, which was entangled around one of the bullets. The initials – V.R. – Victoria Regina, no less!

[All gasp]

VICTORIA: Yes, all right, we admit it. It was we who crept into the manor house and shot the kitchen girl; we who did in that stupid old lord before you could name him as the murderer and wrap up the case. Oh yes, we were so close – we could have been the undisputed Empress of the World! And you had to go and ruin everything!

HOLMES: You must have known you'd never get away with it.

VICTORIA: [*suddenly grinning eerily*] You know, we think we might *just* get away with it yet! Look to the skies, Mr Holmes – do you see the moon's bright orb? We can feel its power coursing through us now, the ancient power of lycanthropy! [*Drawing herself up to her full height*] Oh yes, yes, you're too late Mr Holmes – nothing can stop us now! Mwahahahaha!

HOLMES: [*boldly*] I promise you, Queen Victoria – I won't rest until you're safely behind bars!

VICTORIA: In that case, prepare to meet your doom! [*Takes off her glove to reveal a claw*]

WATSON: No! [*Flings himself in front of Holmes*] I won't let you near him!

VICTORIA: Out of my way, fool! Holmes is mine!

WATSON: No – he's mine... I love him!

HOLMES: What? But, John....

WATSON: It's true, Sherlock. I always meant to tell you....

VICTORIA: Very touching, Doctor Watson – we are almost moved. And now... you will die!

[*She scratches him across the chest with her fingernails; he falls backwards, into Holmes's arms*]

WATSON: Uuergh... slashed to death!

VICTORIA: And so perish all who dare to challenge the imperial might!

VICTOR: [*wildly*] Guards! Guards!

[*The GUARDS enter*]

VICTOR: [*pointing at VICTORIA*] Seize 'er!

GUARD 1: [*with a wry smile*] Nah, you can't fool us....

GUARD 2: That's Queen Victoria, that is!

VICTOR: [*pointing his gun at VICTORIA*] Yes, well done – just... grab hold of her arms, would you, stop her from getting away!

GUARD 1: Right-o!

[*The GUARDS comply*]

HOLMES: John... speak to me, John....

WATSON: I'm... still here... old friend....

HOLMES: John – I'm... so sorry.... I never knew....

WATSON: It... doesn't matter... Shirl.... Just... remember... me....

HOLMES: [*In tears*] Please John... don't go....

[*The NARRATOR enters*]

NARRATOR: [*Breezily, taking control of the situation*] Hi, sorry I'm late – I'm the Doctor, by the way. Long time no see, your majesty. [*Sees WATSON*] Ooh, nasty chest wound... [*Runs sonic screwdriver over WATSON's chest*] ...there we go – all better!

WATSON: [*Touching his chest*] But - that's... incredible!

NARRATOR: Incredible? Nah! – this baby's just a simple sonic screwdriver. No, I've been to the furthest reaches of the galaxy, I've seen the beginning and end of time, I've even travelled through alternative dimensions – and you know what I think is incredible? One species – one *brilliant* species from a tiny blue-green planet in the outer spiral arm of the milky way – a species that never stops, that never gives up, no matter what happens. You know what I'm talking about – *cats*. Because however many times they get hit over the head with frying pans, burnt in ovens and catapulted off high buildings by cute little mice, cats always bounce back, and still have the energy to star in hit West End musicals at the end of it all. What? *What?* Why are you all staring at me?

WATSON: You... you saved me!

NARRATOR: Yes... yes, I suppose I did. Come on... [*offers WATSON his hand and pulls him upright – they gaze into each other's eyes*] Actually, just a minute... Doctor Watson, isn't it?

WATSON: Yes... yes, that's me....

NARRATOR: Well then, Doctor – this may sound a bit forward, but... how about a quick ride in my time machine?

WATSON: What? Oh... yes, please! You... you don't mind, do you, Holmes?

HOLMES: [*stunned*] Hmm... no, of course not, John... I... don't mind....

VICTORIA: [*Still held by the GUARDS*] Um... excuse us....

NARRATOR: Well then... come along now, Doctor.

WATSON: Yes... you show me the way, Doctor.

[*They exit, WATSON staying close to the NARRATOR, not even looking back at HOLMES*]

HOLMES: Well then... that's it then – he's gone.

VICTOR: Yes, but only for a few minutes....

HOLMES: No... no, I can tell... he's not coming back. He only just revealed his feelings for me, and now... he's not coming back....

VICTORIA: *Excuse us....*

VIOLET: I suppose you'll be looking for another partner now, Mr Holmes....

HOLMES: I... yes, I suppose... [*pause*] but... no... nobody could ever replace my Watson.

VIOLET: [*slyly*] Oh, I don't know, Mr Holmes. You'd find me *very* adaptable....

HOLMES: You?

VIOLET: [*seductively*] Why not? I've had my eye on you for a while, you know.

HOLMES: No, Violet, I'm not interested in you... and I don't think you're interested in me. So tell me... what *do* you want from me?

VIOLET: Oh, I think you know.

[*Pause. Then HOLMES slowly reaches up and removes his hat; he holds it out towards her*]

VIOLET: [*reverentially*] You're... giving it to me?

HOLMES: Yes. Now that Watson's gone... somehow, I don't need it any more.

VIOLET: Do you have any idea how hard I've tried to get hold of this hat? I waited... oh, so long, for you to remove it when you first arrived at the manor – I just needed you to take it off and hand it to the butler, but no.... I tried drugging your wine so that I could snatch it while you slept, but you held it so closely, next to your heart.... I even tried to have you taken off the case, hoping that you might throw it to the ground in a fit of rage – and all the time, I just had to ask. [*shaking, she takes the hat and places it on her own head*] Yes! Yes, it's mine, all mine!

VICTORIA: *Hello?* Somebody...

[*NARRATOR enters*]

HOLMES: You're back! So you didn't take Watson away from me after all!

WATSON: [*entering*] I'm sorry, Holmes, it's been a lot longer than you think – it may only seem like we've been gone for a few minutes, but we've been backwards and forwards more times than an enquiry with the NHS call centre.

HOLMES: But... Doctor Watson....

WATSON: Sorry – that reference may be a little anachronistic for you, Holmes... but that's the great thing about time travel – I've seen the building of the pyramids, the sack of Rome, the signing of the Magna Carta...

HOLMES: Doctor Watson....

WATSON: And then we travelled to the twenty-first century and had a civil union! Isn't it wonderful, Holmes – the Doctor and I are married! I do hope you'll be happy for us....

HOLMES: Doctor Watson, I....

WATSON: Actually, it's not Watson any more, Holmes – I've taken the Doctor's name, you see.

HOLMES: Well then... Doctor Doctor – I feel like a real turkey!

WATSON: Well try the kitchens – they may have one there.

HOLMES: *[close to tears]* No, I mean I... I never... I never... oh, it doesn't matter. I wish you every happiness for the future... both of you... *[smiles bravely]*

VICTORIA: Don't judge him too harshly, Mr Holmes - he had no more control over his actions than we did over ours. That's right, haven't you worked it out yet? - we are none of us any more than slaves, toiling under the yoke of narrative imperative!

HOLMES: What on earth are you on about, woman?

NARRATOR: I shouldn't listen to her, Mr Holmes – she's delirious.

VICTORIA: No! No, you shouldn't listen to *him* – he's in league with them. We've seen him, talking to them... uugh!

*[She bends double, as though about to be sick. Behind his back, the NARRATOR is directing the sonic screwdriver at VICTORIA's abdomen]*

HOLMES: Talking to who? What do you mean - *them*?

VICTORIA: *[choking]* ...think they can silence us! They are... beyond this world. We... we only know them as... the W-....

HOLMES: The what?

VICTORIA: The W-... the W-... oh god! The... Watchers... ugh! *[gags]*

HOLMES: I don't think I quite....

VICTORIA: No... of course you... don't. But it doesn't matter... now. We've already... said too much. Listen... listen - you must look for them... beyond... the Fourth... W-...

HOLMES: The fourth what?

VICTORIA: *[choking]*

HOLMES: Come on, tell me! The fourth what?

VICTORIA: The... Fourth... W-... *[lets out a long, rasping breath and falls limp]*

NARRATOR: *[pocketing the sonic screwdriver]* I'm sorry... I'm so sorry....

*[There is a tableau for a few moments, and then HOLMES looks up and brightly addresses the audience]*

HOLMES: So, the Watchers beyond the Fourth Wubbleyou, eh? I wonder what she meant by that, boys and girls. You know, maybe we'll never find out who the real villains are. Never mind – that's quite enough of this silliness – I think it's just about time for a final song!

### **Final Song**

**ONSTAGE CAST: Goodbye so soon**

**Let's have no more delays  
We know by now that time knows how to fly  
So here's goodbye so soon  
We'll go our separate ways.  
With time so short we'll say so long  
And go**

So soon  
Goodbye

*[ONSTAGE HOLMES CAST hum while slow dancing; OFFSTAGE HOLMES CAST enter and join in; when the FULL HOLMES CAST reach the end of the hummed verse, the PARLOUR CAST enter...]*

PARLOUR CAST: You followed me –

HOLMES CAST: I followed you –

ALL: We were like each other's shadows for a while

Now as you see, this game is through

So although it hurts, let's smile

And say....

Goodbye so soon

And isn't this a crime?

We're off to plead our case before the bar.

So here's goodbye so soon

We've run right out of time

And now we're late, we think we'll weight

Our bo-

- dies down

With wine!

Gin!

Beer!

Vodka!

Cheese!

GOODBYE!