characters, Stoppard celebrates the gaiety and perverse vitality that can be generated from despair.

Stoppard frequently uses plays by other playwrights as launching pads for his own: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern step out of the shadows of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and the plot of Stoppard's *Travesties* (1974) is entwined with that of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Past and present are again entwined, though not intertextually, in his masterpiece, *Arcadia* (1993), which explores the nature of Nature, Classical and Romantic theories of landscape gardening, literary history and historians, truth and time, and the disruptive influence of sex on human orbits—"the attraction which Newton left out." Stoppard's most recent plays have been *Indian Ink* (1993) and *The Invention of Love* (1997), which brings together in one galaxy A. E. Housman, Moses Jackson, Oscar Wilde, and a sparkling constellation of High Victorian worthies.

In a different but no less witty mode, *The Real Inspector Hound* (1968) parodies the classic country-house murder-mystery play. Stoppard's hilarious spoof parallels Agatha Christie's play *The Mousetrap*. An extratheatrical dimension is added by the subplot satirizing the pomposities of theater critics. When the lives of Birdboot and Moon become entangled with those of the characters in the play they are supposedly reviewing, we are treated to a brilliant demonstration of one of Stoppard's recurrent themes, the indistinct frontier between Life and Art. He has said:

"I write plays because writing dialogue is the only respectable way of contradicting yourself. I'm the kind of person who embarks on an endless leapfrog down the great moral issues. I put a position, rebut it, refute the rebuttal, and rebut the refutation."

Stoppard shared an Oscar for the screenplay of *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) and has also written for radio and television, alternating—sometimes in the same work—between a serious handling of political themes and arabesques of exuberant fantasy. As he says: "I never quite know whether I want to be a serious artist or a siren."

The Real Inspector Hound

The first thing is that the audience appear to be confronted by their own reflection in a huge mirror. Impossible. However, back there in the gloom—not at the footlights—a bank of plush seats and pale smudges of faces. (The total effect having been established, it can be progressively faded out as the play goes on, until the front row remains to remind us of the rest and then, finally, merely two seats in that row—one of which is now occupied by MOON. Between MOON and the auditorium is an acting area which represents, in as realistic an idiom as possible, the drawing-room of Muldoon Manor. French windows at one side. A telephone fairly well upstage (i.e., towards MOON). The BODY of a man lies sprawled face down on the floor in front of a large settee. This settee must be of a size and design to allow it to be wheeled over the body, hiding it completely. Silence. The room. The BODY. MOON.

MOON stares blankly ahead. He turns his head to one side then the other, then up, then down—waiting. He picks up his programme and reads the front cover. He turns over the page and reads.

1. Stoppard told Kenneth Tynan: "Moon is a person to whom things happen. Boot is rather more aggressive."

2. A pair of windows, reaching to the ground, that open like doors between room and garden.
He turns over the page and reads.
He turns over the page and reads.
He turns over the page and reads.
He looks at the back cover and reads.
He puts it down and crosses his legs and looks about. He stares front. Behind him and to one side, barely visible, a man enters and sits down: Birdboot.

Pause. Moon picks up his programme, glances at the front cover and puts it down impatiently. Pause. . . . Behind him there is the crackle of a chocolate-box, absurdly loud. Moon looks round. He and Birdboot see each other. They are clearly known to each other. They acknowledge each other with constrained waves. Moon looks straight ahead. Birdboot comes down to join him.

Note: Almost always, Moon and Birdboot converse in tones suitable for an auditorium, sometimes a whisper. However good the acoustics might be, they will have to have microphones where they are sitting. The effect must be not of sound picked up, amplified and flung out at the audience, but of sound picked up, carried, and gently dispersed around the auditorium.

Anyway, Birdboot, with a box of Black Magic, makes his way down to join Moon and plumps himself down next to him, plumpish middle-aged Birdboot and younger taller, less-relaxed Moon.

Birdboot [Sitting down; conspiratorially.] Me and the lads have had a meeting in the bar and decided it's first-class family entertainment but if it goes on beyond half-past ten it's self-indulgent—pass it on . . . [And laughs jovially.] I'm on my own tonight, don't mind if I join you?

Moon Hello, Birdboot.

Birdboot Where's Higgs?

Moon I'm standing in.

Moon and Birdboot Where's Higgs?

Moon Every time.

Birdboot What?

Moon It is as if we only existed one at a time, combining to achieve continuity. I keep space warm for Higgs. My presence defines his absence, his absence confirms my presence, his presence precludes mine . . . When Higgs and I walk down this aisle together to claim our common seat, the oceans will fall into the sky and the trees will hang with fishes.

Birdboot [He has not been paying attention, looking around vaguely, now catches up.] Where's Higgs?

Moon The very sight of me with a complimentary ticket is enough. The streets are impassable tonight, the country is rising and the cry goes up from hill to hill—Where—is—Higgs? [Small pause.] Perhaps he's dead at last, or trapped in a lift somewhere, or succumbed to amnesia, wandering the land with his turn-ups stuffed with ticket-stubs. [Birdboot regards him doubtfully for a moment.]

Birdboot Yes . . . Yes, well I didn't bring Myrtle tonight—not exactly her cup of tea, I thought, tonight.

Moon Over her head, you mean?

Birdboot Well, no—I mean it's a sort of a thriller, isn't it?

4. I.e., the other theater critics.
5. As issued to a theater critic.
6. Trouser leg cuffs.
MOON Is it?
BIRDBOOT That's what I heard. Who killed thing?—no one will leave the
house.
MOON I suppose so. Underneath.
BIRDBOOT Underneath?!? It's a whodunnit, man!—Look at it!
[They look at it. The room. The body. Silence.]
Has it started yet?
MOON Yes.
[Pause. They look at it.]
BIRDBOOT Are you sure?
MOON It's a pause.
BIRDBOOT You can't start with a pause! If you want my opinion there's
total panic back there. [Laughs and subsides.] Where's Higgs tonight,
then?
MOON It will follow me to the grave and become my epitaph—Here lies
Moon the second string; where's Higgs? . . . Sometimes I dream of rev-
olution, a bloody coup d'état' by the second rank—troupes of actors
slaughtered by their understudies, magicians sawn in half by indefati-
gably smiling glamour girls, cricket teams wiped out by marauding bands
twelfth men—-I dream of champions chopped down by rabbit-
punching sparring partners while eternal bridesmaids turn and rape the
bridegrooms over the sausage rolls and parliamentary private secretaries
plant bombs in the Minister's Humber—comedians die on provincial
stages, robbed of their feeds' by mutely triumphant stooges—
—and—march—
an army of assistants and deputies, the seconds-in-command, the run-
ers-up, the right-hand men—storming the palace gates wherein the
second son has already mounted the throne having committed regicide
with a croquet-mallet—stand-ins of the world stand up!—
[Beat.]
Sometimes I dream of Higgs.
[Pause. BIRDBOOT regards him doubtfully. He is at a loss, and grasps
reality in the form of his box of chocolates.]
BIRDBOOT [Chewing into mike.] Have a chocolate!
MOON What kind?
BIRDBOOT [Chewing into mike.] Black Magic.
MOON No thanks.
[Chewing stops dead.]
[Of such tiny victories and defeats . . .]
BIRDBOOT I'll give you a tip, then. Watch the girl.
MOON You think she did it?
BIRDBOOT No, no—the girl, watch her.
MOON What girl?
BIRDBOOT You won't know her, I'll give you a nudge.
MOON You know her, do you?
BIRDBOOT [Suspiciously, bridling.] What's that supposed to mean?
MOON I beg your pardon?

7. Revolution (French).
8. Reserve players on cricket teams with eleven
members.
9. (Make of) car assigned to a government minis-
ter. 1. Cue lines.
2. Foils or subordinate partners.
3. Short pause.
BIRDBOOT  I'm trying to tip you a wink—give you a nudge as good as a tip—for God's sake, Moon, what's the matter with you?—you could do yourself some good, spotting her first time out—she's new, from the provinces, going straight to the top. I don't want to put words into your mouth but a word from us and we could make her.

MOON  I suppose you've made dozens of them, like that.

BIRDBOOT  [Instantly outraged.] I'll have you know I'm a family man devoted to my homely but good-natured wife, and if you're suggesting—

MOON  No, no—

BIRDBOOT  —A man of my scrupulous morality—

MOON  I'm sorry—

BIRDBOOT  —falsely besmirched.

MOON  Is that her?

BIRDBOOT  —don't be absurd, wouldn't be seen dead with the old—ah.

MOON  [Reading his programme.] Mrs Drudge the Help.

RADIO  [Without preamble, having been switched on by MRS DRUDGE] We interrupt our programme for a special police message. Mrs Drudge stops to listen.

The search still goes on for the escaped madman who is on the run in Essex.

MRS DRUDGE  [Fear and dismay.] Essex!

RADIO  County police led by Inspector Hound have received a report that the man has been seen in the desolate marshes around Muldoon Manor. [Fearful gasp from MRS DRUDGE.]

The man is wearing a darkish suit with a lightish shirt. He is of medium height and build and youngish. Anyone seeing a man answering to his description and acting suspiciously, is advised to phone the nearest police station.

[A man answering this description has appeared behind MRS DRUDGE. He is acting suspiciously. He creeps in. He creeps out. MRS DRUDGE does not see him. He does not see the body.]

That is the end of the police message.

[MRS DRUDGE turns off the radio and resumes her cleaning. She does not see the body. Quite fortuitously, her view of the body is always blocked, and when it isn't she has her back to it. However, she is dusting and polishing her way towards it.]

BIRDBOOT  So that's what they say about me, is it?

MOON  What?

BIRDBOOT  Oh, I know what goes on behind my back—sniggers—slanders—hole-in-corner innuendo—What have you heard?

MOON  Nothing.

BIRDBOOT  [Urnbanely.] Titl talki. Titl talki. My dear fellow, talki. I take no notice of it—the sly envy of scandal mongers—I can afford to ignore them, I'm a respectable married man—

MOON  Incidentally—

5. Charwoman, house cleaner.
BIRDBOOT  Water off a duck's back, I assure you.
MOON  Who was that lady I saw you with last night?
BIRDBOOT  [Unexpectedly stung into fury.] How dare you! [More quietly.]
      How dare you. Don't you come here with your slimy insinuations! My
      wife Myrtle understands perfectly well that a man of my critical standing
      is obliged occasionally to mingle with the world of the footlights, simply
      by way of keeping au fait with the latest—
      MOON  I'm sorry—
      BIRDBOOT  That a critic of my scrupulous integrity should be vilified and
      pilloried in the stocks? Of common gossip—
      MOON  Ssssh—
      BIRDBOOT  I have nothing to hide—why, if this should reach the ears of
      my beloved Myrtle—
      MOON  Can I have a chocolate?
      BIRDBOOT  What? Oh—[Mollified.] Oh yes—my dear fellow—yes, let's
      have a chocolate—No point in—yes, good show. [Pops chocolate into
      his mouth and chews.] Which one do you fancy?—Cherry? Strawberry?
      Coffee cream? Turkish delight?
      MOON  I'll have montelimar.
      [Chewing stops.]
      BIRDBOOT  Ah. Sorry. [Just missed that one.]
      MOON  Gooseberry fondue?
      BIRDBOOT  No.
      MOON  Pistachio fudge? Nectarine cluster? Hickory nut praline? Chateau
      Neuf du Pape '55 cracknell?
      BIRDBOOT  I'm afraid not... Caramel?
      MOON  Yes, all right.
      BIRDBOOT  Thanks very much. [He gives MOON a chocolate. Pause.] Inci-
      dentally, old chap, I'd be grateful if you didn't mention—I mean, you
      know how these misunderstandings get about... .
      MOON  What?
      BIRDBOOT  The fact is, Myrtle simply doesn't like the theatre... .
      [He tails off hopelessly. MRS DRUDGE, whose discovery of the body
      has been imminent, now—by way of tidying the room—slides the couch
      over the corpse, hiding it completely. She resumes dusting and hum-
      ming.]  
      MOON  By the way, congratulations, Birdboot.
      BIRDBOOT  What?
      MOON  At the Theatre Royal. Your entire review reproduced in neon!
      BIRDBOOT  [Pleased.] Oh... that old thing.
      MOON  You've seen it, of course.
      BIRDBOOT  [Vaguely.] Well, I was passing... .
      MOON  I definitely intend to take a second look when it has settled down.
      BIRDBOOT  As a matter of fact I have a few colour transparencies—I don't
      know whether you'd care to... ?
      MOON  Please, please—love to, love to... .

6. In touch (French).
7. Slandered and abused. The pillory was a wooden framework with holes for the head and
   hands of an offender condemned to be exposed to public ridicule; the stocks was a similar framework
   with holes for feet and occasionally hands in which offenders were confined in a sitting position.
BIRDBOOT hands over a few colour slides and a battery-powered viewer which MOON holds up to his eyes as he speaks.

Yes...yes...lovely...awfully sound. It has scale, it has colour, it is, in the best sense of the word, electric. Large as it is, it is a small masterpiece—I would go so far as to say—kinetic8 without being pop, and having said that, I think it must be said that here we have a review that adds a new dimension to the critical scene. I urge you to make haste to the Theatre Royal, for this is the stuff of life itself. [Handing back the slides, morosely.] All I ever got was "Unforgettable" on the posters for...What was it?

BIRDBOOT Oh—yes—I know...Was that you? I thought it was Higgs.

[The phone rings. MRS DRUDGE seems to have been waiting for it to do so and for the last few seconds has been dusting it with an intense concentration. She snatches it up.]

MRS DRUDGE [Into phone.] Hello, the drawing-room of Lady Muldoon’s country residence one morning in early spring?...Hello!—the draw—Who? Who did you wish to speak to? I’m afraid there is no one of that name here, this is all very mysterious and I’m sure it’s leading up to something. I hope nothing is amiss for we, that is Lady Muldoon and her houseguests, are here cut off from the world, including Magnus, the wheelchair-ridden half-brother of her ladyship’s husband Lord Albert Muldoon who ten years ago went out for a walk on the cliffs and was never seen again—and all alone, for they had no children.

MOON Derivative,9 of course.

BIRDBOOT But quite sound.

MRS DRUDGE Should a stranger enter our midst, which I very much doubt, I will tell him you called. Good-bye.

[She puts down the phone and catches sight of the previously seen suspicious character who has now entered again, more suspiciously than ever, through the french windows. He senses her stare, freezes, and straightens up.]

SIMON Ah!—hello there! I’m Simon Gascoyne, I hope you don’t mind, the door was open so I wandered in. I’m a friend of Lady Muldoon, the lady of the house, having made her acquaintance through a mutual friend, Felicity Cunningham, shortly after moving into this neighbourhood just the other day.

MRS DRUDGE I’m Mrs Drudge. I don’t live in but I pop in on my bicycle when the weather allows to help in the running of charming though somewhat isolated Muldoon Manor. Judging by the time [she glances at the clock] you did well to get here before high water cut us off for all practical purposes from the outside world.

SIMON I took the short cut over the cliffs and followed one of the old smugglers’ paths through the treacherous swamps that surround this strangely inaccessible house.

MRS DRUDGE Yes, many visitors have remarked on the topographical quirk in the local strata whereby there are no roads leading from the Manor, though there are ways of getting to it, weather allowing.
SIMON Yes, well I must say it's a lovely day so far.
MRS DRUDGE Ah, but now that the cuckoo-beard is in bud there'll be fog
before the sun hits Foster's Ridge.
SIMON I say, it's wonderful how you country people really know weather.
MRS DRUDGE [Suspiciously.] Know whether what?
SIMON [Glancing out of the window.] Yes, it does seem to be coming on
a bit foggy.
MRS DRUDGE The fog is very treacherous around here—it rolls off the sea
without warning, shrouding the cliffs in a deadly mantle of blind man's
buff.
SIMON Yes, I've heard it said.
MRS DRUDGE I've known whole week-ends when Muldoon Manor, as this
lovely old Queen Anne$^2$ House is called, might as well have been floating
on the pack ice for all the good it would have done phoning the police.
It was on such a week-end as this that Lord Muldoon who had lately
brought his beautiful bride back to the home of his ancestors, walked
out of this house ten years ago, and his body was never found.
SIMON Yes, indeed, poor Cynthia.
MRS DRUDGE His name was Albert.
SIMON Yes indeed, poor Albert. But tell me, is Lady Muldoon about?
MRS DRUDGE I believe she is playing tennis on the lawn with Felicity
Cunningham.
SIMON [Startled.] Felicity Cunningham?
MRS DRUDGE A mutual friend, I believe you said. A happy chance. I will
tell them you are here.
SIMON Well, I can't really stay as a matter of fact—please don't disturb
them—I really should be off.
MRS DRUDGE They would be very disappointed. It is some time since we
have had a four for pontoon bridge$^3$ at the Manor, and I don't play cards
myself.
SIMON There is another guest, then?
MRS DRUDGE Major Magnus, the crippled half-brother of Lord Muldoon
who turned up out of the blue from Canada just the other day, completes
the house-party.
[MOON leaves on this, SIMON is undecided.]
MOON [Ruminating quietly.] I think I must be waiting for Higgs to die.
BIRDBOOT What?
MOON Half afraid that I will vanish when he does.
[The phone rings. SIMON picks it up.]
SIMON Hello?
MOON I wonder if it's the same for Puckeridge?
BIRDBOOT AND SIMON [Together.] Who?
MOON Third string
BIRDBOOT Your stand-in?
MOON Does he wait for Higgs and I to write each other's obituary—does
he dream—?

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1. A game in which a blindfolded person has to
catch and identify others not blindfolded.
2. Built in the reign of Queen Anne (1702–14),
or in the architectural style of that period.
3. Pontoon (otherwise sixty-six) and bridge are
two quite different card games. A pontoon bridge,
crossing a river, is supported by a line of barges,
rafs, or hollow metal cylinders.
SIMON To whom did you wish to speak?
BIRDBOOT What's he like?
MOON Bitter.
SIMON There is no one of that name here.
BIRDBOOT No—as a critic, what's Puckeridge like as a critic?
MOON [Laughs poisonously.] Nobody knows—
SIMON You must have got the wrong number!
MOON —there's always been me and Higgs.
[BIRDBOOT replaces the phone and paces nervously. Pause. BIRDBOOT consults his programme.]
BIRDBOOT Simon Gascoyne. It's not him, of course.
MOON What?
BIRDBOOT I said it's not him.
MOON Who is it, then?
BIRDBOOT My guess is Magnus.
MOON In disguise, you mean?
BIRDBOOT What?
MOON You think he's Magnus in disguise?
BIRDBOOT I don't think you're concentrating, Moon.
MOON I thought you said—
BIRDBOOT You keep chattering on about Higgs and Puckeridge—what's the matter with you?
MOON [Thoughtfully.] I wonder if they talk about me ...?
[RADIO Here is another police message. Essex county police are still searching in vain for the madman who is at large in the deadly marshes of the coastal region. Inspector Hound who is masterminding the operation, is not available for comment but it is widely believed that he has a secret plan. ... Meanwhile police and volunteers are combing the swamps with loud-hailers, shouting, "Don't be a madman, give yourself up." That is the end of the police message.]

BIRDBOOT [Knowingly.] Oh yes. . .
MOON Yes, I should think my name is seldom off Puckeridge's lips ... sad, really. I mean, it's no life at all, a stand-in's stand-in.
BIRDBOOT Yes ... yes. . .
MOON Higgs never gives me a second thought. I can tell by the way he nods.
BIRDBOOT Revenge, of course.
MOON What?
BIRDBOOT Jealousy.
MOON Nonsense—there's nothing personal in it—
BIRDBOOT The paranoid grudge—
MOON [Sharply first, then starting to career ...] It is merely that it is not enough to wax at another's wane,4 to be held in reserve, to be on hand, on call, to step in or not at all, the substitute—the near offer—the tem-

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4. Increase and decrease, respectively. Cf. Isaac Watts's hymn Jesus shall reign where'er the sun, lines 3–4: "His kingdom stretch from shore to shore, / Till moons shall wax and wane no more."
porary-acting—for I am Moon, continuous Moon, in my own shoes, Moon in June, April, September and no member of the human race keeps warm my bit of space—yes, I can tell by the way he nods.

BIRDBOOT Quite mad, of course.

MOON What?

BIRDBOOT The answer lies out there in the swamps.

MOON Oh.

BIRDBOOT The skeleton in the cupboard is coming home to roost.

MOON Oh yes. [He clears his throat ... for both he and BIRDBOOT have a "public" voice, a critic voice which they turn on for sustained pronouncements of opinion.] Already in the opening stages we note the classic impact of the catalytic figure—the outsider—plunging through to the centre of an ordered world and setting up the disruptions—the shock waves—which unless I am much mistaken, will strip these comfortable people—these crustaceans in the rock pool of society—strip them of their shells and leave them exposed as the trembling raw meat which, at heart, is all of us. But there is more to it than that—

BIRDBOOT I agree—keep your eye on Magnus.

[As tennis ball bounces through the french windows, closely followed by FELICITY, who is in her twenties. She wears a pretty tennis outfit, and carries a racket.]

FELICITY [Calling behind her.] Out!

[It takes her a moment to notice SIMON who is standing shiftily to one side. MOON is stirred by a memory.]

MOON I say, Birdboot. ...

BIRDBOOT That's the one.

FELICITY [Catching sight of SIMON.] You!

[FELICITY's manner at the moment is one of great surprise but some pleasure.]

SIMON [Nervously.] Er, yes—hello again.

FELICITY What are you doing here?

SIMON Well, I. . .

MOON She's—

BIRDBOOT Sssh. . .

SIMON No doubt you're surprised to see me.

FELICITY Honestly, darling, you really are extraordinary.

SIMON Yes, well, here I am.

FELICITY You must have been desperate to see me—I mean, I'm flattered, but couldn't it wait till I got back?

SIMON [Bravely.] There is something you don't know.

FELICITY What is it?

SIMON Look, about the things I said—it may be that I got carried away a little—we both did—

FELICITY [Stiffly.] What are you trying to say?

SIMON I love another!

FELICITY I see.

SIMON I didn't make any promises—I merely—

FELICITY You don't have to say any more—

SIMON Oh, I didn't want to hurt you—

FELICITY Of all the nerve!
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SIMON  Well, I—
FELICITY  You philandering coward—
SIMON  Let me explain—
FELICITY  This is hardly the time and place—you think you can barge in anywhere, whatever I happen to be doing—
SIMON  But I want you to know that my admiration for you is sincere—I don't want you to think that I didn't mean those things I said—
FELICITY  I'll kill you for this, Simon Gascoyne!
          [She leaves in tears, passing MRS DRUDGE who has entered in time to overhear her last remark.]
MOON  It was her.
BIRDBOOT  I told you—straight to the top—
MOON  No, no—
BIRDBOOT  Sssh... .
SIMON  [To MRS DRUDGE.] Yes, what is it?
MRS DRUDGE  I have come to set up the card table, sir.
SIMON  I don't think I can stay.
MRS DRUDGE  Oh, Lady Muldoon will be disappointed.
SIMON  Does she know I'm here?
MRS DRUDGE  Oh yes, sir, I just told her and it put her in quite a tizzy.
SIMON  Really?... Well, I suppose now that I've cleared the air... Quite a tizzy, you say... really... really...
          [He and MRS DRUDGE start setting up for card game. MRS DRUDGE leaves when this is done.]
MOON  Felicity!—she's the one.
BIRDBOOT  Nonsense—red herring.
MOON  I mean, it was her!
BIRDBOOT  [Exasperated.] What was?
MOON  That lady I saw you with last night!
BIRDBOOT  [Inhales with fury.] Are you suggesting that a man of my scrupulous integrity would trade his pen for a mess of potage?! Simply because in the course of my profession I happen to have struck up an acquaintance—to have, that is, a warm regard, if you like, for a fellow toiler in the vineyard of greasepaint—I find it simply intolerable to be pillified and villoried—
MOON  I never implied—
BIRDBOOT  —to find myself the object of uninformed malice, the petty slanders of little men—
MOON  I'm sorry—
BIRDBOOT  —to suggest that my good opinion in a journal of unimpeachable integrity is at the disposal of the first coquette who gives me what I want—
MOON  Ssssssh—
BIRDBOOT  A ladies' man!... Why, Myrtle and I have been together now for—Christ!—who's that?
          [Enter LADY CYNTHIA MULDOON through french windows. A beautiful

5. In the Old Testament, Esau sold his birthright for "a mess of pottage" (dish of soup); see Genevan Bible, Genesis 25.
A woman in her thirties. She wears a cocktail dress, is formally coiffured, and carries a tennis racket.

[Her effect on Birdboot is also impressive. He half rises and sinks back agone.]

Cynthia [Entering.] Simon!

A dramatic freeze between her and Simon.

Moon Lady Muldoon.

Birdboot No, I mean—who is she?

Simon [Coming forward.] Cynthia!

Cynthia Don’t say anything for a moment—just hold me.

[He seizes her and glues his lips to hers, as they say. While their lips are glued——]

Birdboot She’s beautiful—a vision of eternal grace, a poem . . .

Moon I think she’s got her mouth open.

[Cynthia breaks away dramatically.]

Cynthia We can’t go on meeting like this!

Simon We have nothing to be ashamed of!

Cynthia But darling, this is madness!

Simon Yes!—I am mad with love for you!

Cynthia Please—remember where we are!

Simon Cynthia, I love you!

Cynthia Don’t—I love Albert!

Simon He’s dead! [Shaking her.] Do you understand me—Albert’s dead!

Cynthia No—I’ll never give up hope! Let me go! We are not free!

Simon I don’t care, we were meant for each other—had we but met in time.

Cynthia You’re a cad, Simon! You will use me and cast me aside as you have cast aside so many others.

Simon No, Cynthia!—you can make me a better person!

Cynthia You’re ruthless—so strong, so cruel——

[Ruthlessly he kisses her.]

Moon The son she never had, projected in this handsome stranger and transformed into lover—youth, vigour, the animal, the athlete as aesthete—breaking down the barriers at the deepest level of desire.

Birdboot By jove, I think you’re right. Her mouth is open.

[Cynthia breaks away. Mrs Drudge has entered.]

Cynthia Stop—can’t you see you’re making a fool of yourself!

Simon I’ll kill anyone who comes between us!

Cynthia Yes, what is it, Mrs Drudge?

Mrs Drudge Should I close the windows, my lady? The fog is beginning to roll off the sea like a deadly——

Cynthia Yes, you’d better. It looks as if we’re in for one of those days.

Are the cards ready?

Mrs Drudge Yes, my lady.

Cynthia Would you tell Miss Cunningham we are waiting.

Mrs Drudge Yes, my lady.

Cynthia And fetch the Major down.

Mrs Drudge I think I hear him coming downstairs now. [As she leaves.]

[She does: the sound of a wheelchair approaching down several flights]
of stairs with landings in between. It arrives bearing MAGNUS at about 15 m.p.h., knocking SIMON over violently.]

CYNTHIA Simon!
MAGNUS [Roaring.] Never had a chance! Ran under the wheels!
CYNTHIA Darling, are you all right?
MAGNUS I have witnesses!
CYNTHIA Oh, Simon—say something!
SIMON [Sitting up suddenly.] I'm most frightfully sorry.
MAGNUS [Shouting yet.] How long have you been a pedestrian?
SIMON Ever since I could walk.
CYNTHIA Can you walk now . . . ?

[SIMON rises and walks.]

Thank God! Magnus, this is Simon Gascoyne.
MAGNUS What's he doing here?
CYNTHIA He just turned up.
MAGNUS Really? How do you like it here?
SIMON [To CYNTHIA.] I could stay for ever.

[FELICITY enters.]

FELICITY So—you're still here.
CYNTHIA Of course he's still here. We're going to play cards. There's no need to introduce you two, is there, for I recall now that you, Simon, met me through Felicity, our mutual friend.
FELICITY Yes, Simon is an old friend, though not as old as you, Cynthia dear.
SIMON Yes, I haven't seen Felicity since——
FELICITY Last night.
CYNTHIA Indeed? Well, you deal, Felicity. Simon, you help me with the sofa. Will you partner Felicity, Magnus, against Simon and me?
MAGNUS [Aside.] Will Simon and you always be partnered against me, Cynthia?
CYNTHIA What do you mean, Magnus?
MAGNUS You are a damned attractive woman, Cynthia.
CYNTHIA Please! Please! Remember Albert!
MAGNUS Albert's dead, Cynthia—and you are still young. I'm sure he would have wished that you and I——
CYNTHIA No, Magnus, this is not to be!
MAGNUS It's Gascoyne, isn't it? I'll kill him if he comes between us!
CYNTHIA [Calling.] Simon!

[The sofa is shoved towards the card table, once more revealing the corpse, though not to the players.]

BIRD BOOT Simon's for the chop all right.
CYNTHIA Right! Who starts?
MAGNUS I do. No bid.
CYNTHIA Did I hear you say you saw Felicity last night, Simon?
SIMON Did I—Ah yes, yes, quite—your turn, Felicity.
FELICITY I've had my turn, haven't I, Simon?—now, it seems, it's Cynthia's turn.

6. Will be cut down (slang).
CYNTHIA That's my trick, Felicity dear.
FELICITY Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned, Simon.
SIMON Yes, I've heard it said.
FELICITY So I hope you have not been cheating, Simon.
SIMON [Standing up and throwing down his cards.] No, Felicity, it's just that I hold the cards! 
CYNTHIA Well done, Simon!
[MAGNUS pays SIMON, while CYNTHIA deals.]
FELICITY Strange how Simon appeared in the neighbourhood from nowhere. We know so little about him.
SIMON It doesn't always pay to show your hand!
CYNTHIA Right! Simon, it's your opening on the minor bid.
[SIMON plays.]
CYNTHIA Hmm, let's see... [Plays.]
FELICITY I hear there's a dangerous madman on the loose.
CYNTHIA Simon?
SIMON Yes—yes—sorry. [Plays.]
CYNTHIA I meld.
FELICITY Yes—personally, I think he's been hiding out in the deserted cottage [Plays.] on the cliffs.
SIMON Flush!
CYNTHIA No! Simon—your luck's in tonight!
FELICITY We shall see—the night is not over yet, Simon Gascoyne! [She exits.
[MAGNUS pays SIMON again.]
SIMON [To MAGNUS.] So you're the crippled half-brother of Lord Muldoon who turned up out of the blue from Canada just the other day, are you? It's taken you a long time to get here. What did you do—walk? Oh, I say, I'm most frightfully sorry!
MAGNUS Care for a spin round the rose garden, Cynthia?
CYNTHIA No, Magnus, I must talk to Simon.
SIMON My round, I think, Major.
MAGNUS You think so?
SIMON Yes, Major—I do.
MAGNUS There's an old Canadian proverb handed down from the Blad-foot Indians, which says: He who laughs last laughs longest.
SIMON Yes, I've heard it said.
[MAGNUS turns away to CYNTHIA.]
MAGNUS Well, I think I'll go and oil my gun! [He exits.]
CYNTHIA I think Magnus suspects something. And Felicity... Simon, was there anything between you and Felicity?
SIMON No, no—it's over between her and me, Cynthia—it was a mere passing fleeting thing we had—but now that I have found you—
CYNTHIA If I find that you have been untrue to me—if I find that you have falsely seduced me from my dear husband Albert—I will kill you, Simon Gascoyne!

7. Cf. Congreve, The Mourning Bride 3:7: “Heaven has no rage, like love to hatred turned, / Nor Hell a fury, like a woman scorned.”
8. Have the advantage (slang).
9. Term used in certain card games, as also “meld” and “flush,” below.
1. Go to the lavatory (slang).
[MRS DRUDGE has entered silently to witness this. On this tableau, pregnant with significance, the act ends, the body still undiscovered. Perfunctory applause.]

[MOON and BIRDBOOT seem to be completely preoccupied, becoming audible, as it were.]

MOON Camps it around the Old Vic in his opera cloak and passes me the tat.  
BIRDBOOT Do you believe in love at first sight?  
MOON It's not that I think I'm a better critic—  
BIRDBOOT I feel my whole life changing—  
MOON I am but it's not that.  
BIRDBOOT Oh, the world will laugh at me, I know. . .  
MOON It is not that they are much in the way of shoes to step into. . .  
BIRDBOOT . . . call me an infatuated old fool. . .  
MOON . . . They are not.  
BIRDBOOT . . . condemn me. . .  
MOON He is standing in my light, that is all.  
BIRDBOOT . . . betrayer of my class. . .  
MOON . . . an almost continuous eclipse, interrupted by the phenomenon of moonlight.  
BIRDBOOT I don't care, I'm a goner.  
MOON And I dream. . .  
BIRDBOOT The Blue Angel all over again.  
MOON . . . of the day his temperature climbs through the top of his head. . .  
BIRDBOOT Ah, the sweet madness of love. . .  
MOON . . . of the spasm on the stairs. . .  
BIRDBOOT Myrtle, farewell. . .  
MOON . . . dreaming of the stair he'll never reach. . .  
BIRDBOOT . . . for I only live but once. . .  
MOON Sometimes I dream that I've killed him.  
BIRDBOOT What?  
MOON What?  

[They pull themselves together.]  
BIRDBOOT Yes . . . yes. . . A beautiful performance, a collector's piece. I shall say so.  
MOON A very promising debut. I'll put in a good word.  
BIRDBOOT It would be as hypocritical of me to withhold praise on grounds of personal feelings, as to withhold censure.  
MOON You're right. Courageous.  
BIRDBOOT Oh, I know what people will say—There goes Birdboot butttering up his latest—  
MOON Ignore them—  
BIRDBOOT But I rise above that—The fact is I genuinely believe her performance to be one of the summits in the range of contemporary theatre.  
MOON Trim-buttocked, that's the word for her.

2. Leaves me the drudgery (not is slang for rubbish or junk). "Old Vic" famous London theater.  
3. A novel (1932) by Heinrich Mann, adapted as a film starring Marlene Dietrich, which tells of an old man's infatuation for a heartless young singer.
— the radiance, the inner sadness—

Does she actually come across with it?

The part as written is a mere cipher but she manages to make Cynthia a real person—

And should she, as a result, care to meet me over a drink, simply by way of er— thanking me, as it were—

Well, you fickle old bastard!

[Aggressively.] Are you suggesting . . . ?

[Birdboot shudders to a halt and clears his throat.]

Well now— shaping up quite nicely, wouldn't you say?

Oh yes, yes. A nice trichotomy* of forces. One must reserve judgement of course, until the confrontation, but I think it's pretty clear where we're heading.

I agree. It's Magnus a mile off.

[Small pause.]

What's Magnus a mile off?

If we knew that we wouldn't be here.

[Clears throat.] Let me at once say that it has elan while at the same time avoiding éclat. Having said that, and I think it must be said, I am bound to ask— does this play know where it is going?

Well, it seems open and shut to me, Moon— Magnus is not what he pretends to be and he's got his next victim marked down—

Does it, I repeat, declare its affiliations? There are moments, and I would not begrudge it this, when the play, if we can call it that, and I think on balance we can, aligns itself uncompromisingly on the side of life. Je suis, it seems to be saying, ergo sum. But is that enough? I think we are entitled to ask. For what in fact is this play concerned with? It is my belief that here we are concerned with what I have referred to elsewhere as the nature of identity. I think we are entitled to ask— and here one is irresistibly reminded of Voltaire's cry, "Voilà!"— I think we are entitled to ask— Where is God?

[Stunned.] Who?

Go-od.

[Peeping furtively into his programme.] God?

I think we are entitled to ask.

[The phone rings.]

[The set re-illuminates to reveal Cynthia, Felicity, and Magnus about to take coffee, which is being taken round by Mrs Drudge. Simon is missing. The body lies in position.]

[Into phone.] The same, half an hour later? . . . No, I'm sorry— there's no one of that name here. [She replaces phone and goes round with coffee. To Cynthia.] Black or white, my lady?

White please.

[Mrs Drudge pours.]

[To Felicity.] Black or white, miss?

4. Division into three.
5. Brilliant display (French). "Elan": vivacity (French).
6. Cf. Descartes' "Cogito, ergo sum" (I think, therefore I am— Latin). "Je suis": I am (French).
7. The French philosopher and author François Marie Arouet de Voltaire is not on record as saying any such thing.
FELICITY  White please.
            [MRS DRUDGE pours.]
MRS DRUDGE  [To MAGNUS.] Black or white, Major?
MAGNUS  White please.
            [Ditto.]
MRS DRUDGE  [To CYNTHIA.] Sugar, my lady?
CYNTHIA  Yes please.
            [Puts sugar in.]
MRS DRUDGE  [To FELICITY.] Sugar, miss?
FELICITY  Yes please.
            [Ditto.]
MRS DRUDGE  [To MAGNUS.] Sugar, Major?
MAGNUS  Yes please.
            [Ditto.]
MRS DRUDGE  [To CYNTHIA.] Biscuit, my lady?
CYNTHIA  No thank you.

BIRDBOOT  [Writing elaborately in his notebook.] The second act, however, fails to fulfil the promise.

FELICITY  If you ask me, there's something funny going on.
            [MRS DRUDGE's approach to FELICITY makes FELICITY jump to her feet in impatience. She goes to the radio while MAGNUS declines his biscuit, and MRS DRUDGE leaves.]

RADIO  We interrupt our programme for a special police message. The search for the dangerous madman who is on the loose in Essex has now narrowed to the immediate vicinity of Muldoon Manor. Police are hampered by the deadly swamps and the fog, but believe that the madman spent last night in a deserted cottage on the cliffs. The public is advised to stick together and make sure none of their number is missing. That is the end of the police message.
            [FELICITY turns off the radio nervously. Pause.]
CYNTHIA  Where's Simon?
FELICITY  Who?
CYNTHIA  Simon. Have you seen him?
FELICITY  No.
CYNTHIA  Have you, Magnus?
MAGNUS  No.
CYNTHIA  Oh.
FELICITY  Yes, there's something foreboding in the air, it is as if one of us——
CYNTHIA  Oh, Felicity, the house is locked up tight—no one can get in—and the police are practically on the doorstep.
FELICITY  I don't know—it's just a feeling.
CYNTHIA  It's only the fog.
MAGNUS  Hound will never get through on a day like this.
CYNTHIA  [Shouting at him.] Fog!
FELICITY  He means the Inspector.
CYNTHIA  Is he bringing a dog?
FELICITY  Not that I know of.
MAGNUS  —never get through the swamps. Yes, I'm afraid the madman can show his hand in safety now.
            [A mournful baying hooting is heard in the distance, scary.]
CYNTHIA What's that?!
FELICITY [Tensely.] It sounded like the cry of a gigantic hound!
MAGNUS Poor devil!
CYNTHIA Ssssh!
[They listen. The sound is repeated, nearer.]
FELICITY There it is again!
CYNTHIA It's coming this way—it's right outside the house!
[MRS DRUDGE enters.]
MRS DRUDGE Inspector Hound!
CYNTHIA A police dog?
[Enter INSPECTOR HOUND. On his feet are his swamp boots. These are two inflatable—and inflated—pontoons with flat bottoms about two feet across. He carries a foghorn.]
HOUND Lady Muldoon?
CYNTHIA Yes.
HOUND I came as soon as I could. Where shall I put my foghorn and my swamp boots?
CYNTHIA Mrs Drudge will take them out. Be prepared, as the Force's* motto has it, eh, Inspector? How very resourceful!
HOUND [Divesting himself of boots and foghorn.] It takes more than a bit of weather to keep a policeman from his duty.
[MRS DRUDGE leaves with chattels. A pause.]
CYNTHIA Oh—er, Inspector Hound—Felicity Cunningham, Major Magnus Muldoon.
HOUND Good evening.
CYNTHIA AND HOUND [Together.] Well?—Sorry—
CYNTHIA No, do go on.
HOUND Thank you. Well, tell me about it in your own words—take your time, begin at the beginning and don't leave anything out.
CYNTHIA I beg your pardon?
HOUND Fear nothing. You are in safe hands now. I hope you haven't touched anything.
CYNTHIA I'm afraid I don't understand.
HOUND I'm Inspector Hound.
CYNTHIA Yes.
HOUND Well, what's it all about?
CYNTHIA I really have no idea.
HOUND How did it begin?
CYNTHIA What?
HOUND The . . . thing.
CYNTHIA What thing?
HOUND [Rapidly losing confidence but exasperated.] The trouble!
CYNTHIA There hasn't been any trouble!
HOUND Didn't you phone the police?
CYNTHIA No.
FELICITY I didn't.

8. Cf. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *Hound of the Baskervilles*: "Mr. Holmes, they were the footprints of a gigantic hound!"
9. "Be prepared" is the motto of the Boy Scouts, not the British police force.
MAGNUS What for?
HOUND I see. [Pause.] This puts me in a very difficult position.
[Steady pause.] Well, I'll be getting along, then. [He moves towards the door.]
CYNTHIA I'm terribly sorry.
HOUND [Stiffly.] That's perfectly all right.
CYNTHIA Thank you so much for coming.
HOUND Not at all. You never know, there might have been a serious matter.
CYNTHIA Drink?
HOUND More serious than that, even.
CYNTHIA [Correcting.] Drink before you go?
HOUND No thank you. [Leaves.]
CYNTHIA [Through the door.] I do hope you find him.
HOUND [Reappearing at once.] Find who, Madam?—out with it!
CYNTHIA I thought you were looking for the lunatic.
HOUND And what do you know about that?
CYNTHIA It was on the radio.
HOUND Was it, indeed? Well, that's what I'm here about, really. I didn't want to mention it because I didn't know how much you knew. No point in causing unnecessary panic, even with a murderer in our midst.
FELICITY Murderer, did you say?
HOUND Ah—so that was not on the radio?
CYNTHIA Whom has he murdered, Inspector?
HOUND Perhaps no one—yet. Let us hope we are in time.
MAGNUS You believe he is in our midst, Inspector?
HOUND I do. If anyone of you have recently encountered a youngish good-looking fellow in a smart suit, white shirt, hatless, well-spoken—someone possibly claiming to have just moved into the neighbourhood, someone who on the surface seems as sane as you or I, then now is the time to speak!
FELICITY I—
HOUND Don't interrupt!
FELICITY Inspector—
HOUND Very well.
CYNTHIA No, Felicity!
HOUND Please, Lady Cynthia, we are all in this together. I must ask you to put yourself completely in my hands.
CYNTHIA Don't, Inspector. I love Albert.
HOUND I don't think you quite grasp my meaning.
MAGNUS Is one of us in danger, Inspector?
HOUND Didn't it strike you as odd that on his escape the madman made a beeline for Muldoon Manor? It is my guess that he bears a deep-seated grudge against someone in this very house! Lady Muldoon—where is your husband?
CYNTHIA My husband?—you don't mean—?
HOUND I don't know—but I have a reason to believe that one of you is the real McCoy!

1. The genuine article (slang).
FELICITY The real what?
HOUND William Herbert McCoy who as a young man, meeting the madman in the street and being solicited for sixpence for a cup of tea, replied, "Why don't you do a decent day's work, you shift old bag of horse manure," in Canada all those many years ago and went on to make his fortune. [He starts to pace intensely.] The madman was a mere boy at the time but he never forgot that moment, and thenceforth carried in his heart the promise of revenge! [At which point he finds himself standing on top of the corpse. He looks down carefully.]
HOUND Is there anything you have forgotten to tell me?
[They all see the corpse for the first time.]
FELICITY So the madman has struck!
CYNTHIA Oh—it's horrible—horrible—
HOUND Yes, just as I feared. Now you see the sort of man you are protecting.
CYNTHIA I can't believe it!
FELICITY I'll have to tell him, Cynthia—Inspector, a stranger of that description has indeed appeared in our midst—Simon Gascoyne. Oh, he had charm, I'll give you that, and he took me in completely. I'm afraid I made a fool of myself over him, and so did Cynthia.
HOUND Where is he now?
MAGNUS He must be around the house—he couldn't get away in these conditions.
HOUND You're right. Fear naught, Lady Muldoon—I shall apprehend the man who killed your husband.
CYNTHIA My husband? I don't understand.
HOUND Everything points to Gascoyne.
CYNTHIA But who's that? [The corpse.]
HOUND Your husband.
CYNTHIA No, it's not.
HOUND Yes, it is.
CYNTHIA I tell you it's not.
HOUND I'm in charge of this case!
CYNTHIA But that's not my husband.
HOUND Are you sure?
CYNTHIA For goodness sake!
HOUND Then who is it?
CYNTHIA I don't know.
HOUND Anybody?
FELICITY I've never seen him before.
MAGNUS Quite unlike anybody I've ever met.
HOUND This case is becoming an utter shambles.
CYNTHIA But what are we going to do?
HOUND [Snatching the phone.] I'll phone the police!
CYNTHIA But you are the police!
HOUND Thank God I'm here—the lines have been cut!
CYNTHIA You mean—?
HOUND Yes!—we're on our own, cut off from the world and in grave danger!
FELICITY You mean—?
HOUND Yes!—I think the killer will strike again!
MAGNUS You mean—?
HOUND Yes! One of us ordinary mortals thrown together by fate and cut off by the elements, is the murderer! He must be found—search the house!

[All depart speedily in different directions leaving a momentarily empty stage. SIMON strolls on.]

SIMON [Entering, calling.] Anyone about?—funny . . .

[He notices the corpse and is surprised. He approaches it and turns it over. He stands up and looks about in alarm.]

BIRDBOOT This is where Simon gets the chop.

[There is a shot. SIMON falls dead.]

[INSPECTOR HOUND runs on and crouches down by SIMON’s body. CYNTHIA appears at the French windows. She stops there and stares.]

CYNTHIA What happened, Inspector?!

[INSPECTOR HOUND turns to face her.]

HOUND He’s dead . . . Simon Gascoyne, I presume. Rough justice even for a killer—unless—unless—we assumed that the body could not have been lying there before Simon Gascoyne entered the house . . . but . . . [he slides the sofa over the body] there’s your answer. And now—who killed Simon Gascoyne? And why?

["Curtain," freeze, applause, exequed.]
If we examine this more closely, and I think close examination is the least tribute that this play deserves, I think we will find that within the austere framework of what is seen to be on one level a country-house week-end, and what a useful symbol that is, the author has given us—yes, I will go far—he has given us the human condition—

—More talent in her little finger—

—An uncanny ear that might have belonged to a Van Gogh—

—A public scandal that the Birthday Honours to date have neglected—

Faced as we are with such ubiquitous obliquity, it is hard, it is hard indeed, and therefore I will not attempt, to refrain from invoking the names of Kafka, Sartre, Shakespeare, St. Paul, Beckett, Birkett, Pinero, Pirandello, Dante, and Dorothy L. Sayers.

A rattling good evening out. I was held.

[The phone starts to ring on the empty stage. Moon tries to ignore it.]

Harder still—Harder still if possible—Harder still if it is possible to be—Neither do I find it easy—Dante and Dorothy L. Sayers.

Harder still—

Others taking part included—Moon!

[For Moon has lost patience and is bearing down on the ringing phone. He is frankly irritated.]

[Picking up phone, barks.] Hello! [Pause, turns to Birdboot, quietly.] It's for you. [Pause.]

[Birdboot gets up. He approaches cautiously. Moon gives him the phone and moves back to his seat. Birdboot watches him go. He looks round and smiles weakly, expiating himself.]

[Birdboot.] Hello.... [Explosion.] Oh, for God's sake, Myrtle!—I've told you never to phone me at work! [He is naturally embarrassed, looking about with surreptitious fury.] What? Last night? Good God, woman, this is hardly the time to—I assure you, Myrtle, there is absolutely nothing going on between me and—I took her to dinner simply by way of keeping au fait with the world of the paint' and the motley—

—Yes, I promise—Yes, I do—Yes, I said yes—I do—and you are mine too, Myrtle—darling—I can't—[Whispers.] I'm not alone—[Up.] No, she's not!—[He looks around furtively, licks his lips and mumbles.] All right! I love your little pink ears and you are my own fluffy bunny—Now for God's sake—Good-bye, Myrtle—[Puts down phone.]

[Birdboot mops his brow with his handkerchief. As he turns, a tennis ball bounces in through the french windows, followed by Felicity, as before, in tennis outfit. The lighting is as it was. Everything is as it was. It is, let us say, the same moment of time.]

[Calling.] Out! [She catches sight of Birdboot and is amazed.]

You!

3. The painter Vincent Van Gogh, in his madness, severed his ear and sent it to his brother.

4. Titles given on the British sovereign's official birthday.


6. i.e., theater (literally, greasepaint and the particular costume of the jester).
BIRDBOOT  Er, yes—hello again.
FELICITY  What are you doing here?!
BIRDBOOT  Well, I . . .
FELICITY  Honestly, darling, you really are extraordinary—
BIRDBOOT  Yes, well, here I am. [He looks round sheepishly.]
FELICITY  You must have been desperate to see me—I mean, I'm flattered,
but couldn't it wait till I got back?
BIRDBOOT  No, no, you've got it all wrong——
FELICITY  What is it?
BIRDBOOT  And about last night—perhaps I gave you the wrong impres-
    sion—got carried away a bit, perhaps——
FELICITY  [Stiffly.] What are you trying to say?
BIRDBOOT  I want to call it off.
FELICITY  I see.
BIRDBOOT  I didn't promise anything—and the fact is, I have my reputa-
    tion—people do talk——
FELICITY  You don't have to say any more——
BIRDBOOT  And my wife, too—I don't know how she got to hear of it, but——
FELICITY  Of all the nerve! To march in here and——
BIRDBOOT  I'm sorry you had to find out like this—the fact is I didn't mean
    it this way——
FELICITY  You philandering coward!
BIRDBOOT  I'm sorry—but I want you to know that I meant those things I
    said—oh yes—shows brilliant promise—I shall say so——
FELICITY  I'll kill you for this, Simon Gascoyne!
    [She leaves in tears, passing MRS DRUDGE who has entered in time to
    overhear her last remark.]
BIRDBOOT  [Wide-eyed.] Good God . . .
MRS DRUDGE  I have come to set up the card table, sir.
BIRDBOOT  [Wildly.] I can't stay for a game of cards!
MRS DRUDGE  Oh, Lady Muldoon will be disappointed.
BIRDBOOT  You mean . . . you mean, she wants to meet me . . .
MRS DRUDGE  Oh yes, sir, I just told her and it put her in quite a tizzy.
BIRDBOOT  Really? Yes, well, a man of my influence is not to be sneezed
    at—I think I have some small name for the making of reputations—
    mmm, yes, quite a tizzy, you say?
    [MRS DRUDGE is busied with the card table. BIRDBOOT stands marooned
    and bemused for a moment.]
MOON  [From his seat.] Birdboot!—[A tense whisper.]. Birdboot!
    [BIRDBOOT looks round vaguely.]
What the hell are you doing?
BIRDBOOT  Nothing.
MOON  Stop making an ass of yourself. Come back.
BIRDBOOT  Oh, I know what you're thinking—but the fact is I genuinely
    consider her performance to be one of the summits——
    [CYNTHIA enters as before. MRS DRUDGE has gone.]
CYNTHIA  Darling!
BIRDBOOT  Ah, good evening—may I say that I genuinely consider——
CYNTHIA  Don't say anything for a moment—just hold me.
[She falls into his arms.]

**BIRD BOOT** All right! [They kiss.] My God!—she does have her mouth open! Dear lady, from the first moment I saw you, I felt my whole life changing—

**CYNTHIA** [Breaking free.] We can't go on meeting like this!

**BIRD BOOT** I am not ashamed to proclaim nightly my love for you!—but fortunately that will not be necessary—I know of a very good hotel, discreet—run by a man of the world—

**CYNTHIA** But darling, this is madness!

**BIRD BOOT** Yes! I am mad with love.

**CYNTHIA** Please!—remember where we are!

**BIRD BOOT** I don't care! Let them think what they like, I love you!

**CYNTHIA** Don't—I love Albert!

**BIRD BOOT** He's dead. [Shaking her.] Do you understand me—Albert's dead!

**CYNTHIA** No—I'll never give up hope! Let me go! We are not free!

**BIRD BOOT** You mean Myrtle? She means nothing to me—nothing!—she's all cocoa and blue nylon fur slippers—not a spark of creative genius in her whole slumping knee-length-knickered body—

**CYNTHIA** You're a cad, Simon! You will use me and cast me aside as you have cast aside so many others!

**BIRD BOOT** No, Cynthia—now that I have found you—

**CYNTHIA** You're ruthless—so strong—so cruel—

[BIRD BOOT seizes her in an embrace, during which MRS DRUDGE enters, and MOON's fevered voice is heard.]

**MOON** Have you taken leave of your tiny mind?

**CYNTHIA** Stop—can't you see you're making a fool of yourself!

**MOON** She's right.

**BIRD BOOT** [To MOON.] You keep out of this.

**CYNTHIA** Yes, what is it, Mrs Drudge?

**MRS DRUDGE** Should I close the windows, my lady? The fog—

**CYNTHIA** Yes, you'd better.

**MOON** Look, they've got your number—

**BIRD BOOT** I'll leave in my own time, thank you very much.

**MOON** It's the finish of you, I suppose you know that—

**BIRD BOOT** I don't need your twopenny Grubb Street prognostications?—I have found something bigger and finer—

**MOON** [Bemused, to himself.] If only it were Higgs . . .

**CYNTHIA** . . . And fetch the Major down.

**MRS DRUDGE** I think I hear him coming down stairs now.

[She leaves. The sound of a wheelchair's approach as before. BIRD BOOT prudently keeps out of the chair's former path but it enters from the next wing down and knocks him flying. A babble of anguish and protestation.]

**CYNTHIA** Simon—say something!

**BIRD BOOT** That reckless bastard [as he sits up].

**CYNTHIA** Thank God!—

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7. Forecasts of literary hack. Grub Street in London was inhabited by hack writers in the 17th and 18th centuries.
MAGNUS What's he doing here?
CYNTHIA He just turned up.
MAGNUS Really? How do you like it here?
BIRDBOOT I couldn't take it night after night.

[FELICITY enters.]
FELICITY So—you're still here.
CYNTHIA Of course he's still here. We're going to play cards. There is no need to introduce you two, is there, for I recall now that you, Simon, met me through Felicity, our mutual friend.
FELICITY Yes, Simon is an old friend——
BIRDBOOT Ah—yes—well, I like to give young up and comers the benefit of my—er—Of course, she lacks technique as yet——
FELICITY Last night.
BIRDBOOT I'm not talking about last night!
CYNTHIA Indeed? Well, you deal, Felicity. Simon, you help me with the sofa.
BIRDBOOT [To MOON.] Did you see that? Tried to kill me. I told you it was Magnus—not that it is Magnus.
MOON Who did it, you mean?
BIRDBOOT What?
MOON You think it's not Magnus who did it?
BIRDBOOT Get a grip on yourself, Moon—the facts are staring you in the face. He's after Cynthia for one thing.
MAGNUS It's Gascoyne, isn't it?
BIRDBOOT Over my dead body!
MAGNUS If he comes between us . . .
MOON [Angrily.] For God's sake sit down!
CYNTHIA Simon!
BIRDBOOT She needs me, Moon. I've got to make up a four.8

[CYNTHIA and BIRDBOOT move the sofa as before, and they all sit at the table.]
CYNTHIA Right! Who starts?
MAGNUS I do. I'll dummy for a no-bid ruff and double my holding on South's queen. [While he moves cards.]
CYNTHIA Did I hear you say you saw Felicity last night, Simon?
BIRDBOOT Er—er——
FELICITY Pay twenty-ones or trump my contract. [Discards.] Cynthia's turn.
CYNTHIA I'll trump your contract with five dummy no-trumps there [discards], and I'll move West's rook for the re-bid with a banker ruff on his second trick there. [Discards.] Simon?
BIRDBOOT Would you mind doing that again?
CYNTHIA And I'll ruff your dummy with five no-bid trumps there, [discards] and I support your re-bid with a banker for the solo ruff in the dummy trick there. [Discards.]
BIRDBOOT [Standing up and throwing down his cards.] And I call your bluff!

8. For a game of cards. In what follows, the players employ a nonsensical medley of terms from a variety of card games, interspersed with terms from chess ("rook," "king's gambit," "check"), roulette ("Faites vos jeux," "Rien ne va plus," "Rouge et noir"), and cricket ("How's that?" "Not out").
CYNTHIA  Well done, Simon!
[ MAGNUS pays BIRDBOOT while CYNTHIA deals.]
FELICITY  Strange how Simon appeared in the neighbourhood from nowhere, we know so little about him.
CYNTHIA  Right, Simon, it's your opening on the minor bid. Hmm. Let's see. I think I'll overbid the spade convention with two no-trumps and King's gambit offered there—[discards] and West's dummy split double to Queen's Bishop four there!
CYNTHIA  Simon?
BIRDBOOT  [Triumphant, leaping to his feet.] And I call your bluff!
CYNTHIA  [Imperturbably.] I meld.
FELICITY  I huff.
MAGNUS  I ruff.
BIRDBOOT  I bluff.
CYNTHIA  Twist.
FELICITY  Bust.
MAGNUS  Check.
BIRDBOOT  Snap.
CYNTHIA  How's that?
FELICITY  Not out.
MAGNUS  Double top.
BIRDBOOT  Bingo!
CYNTHIA  No! Simon—your luck's in tonight.
FELICITY  We shall see—the night is not over yet, Simon Gascoyne! [She quickly exits.]
BIRDBOOT  [Looking after FELICITY.] Red herring—smell it a mile off. [To MAGNUS.] Oh, yes, she's as clean as a whistle, I've seen it a thousand times. And I've seen you before too, haven't I? Strange—there's something about you—
MAGNUS  Care for a spin round the rose garden, Cynthia?
CYNTHIA  No, Magnus, I must talk to Simon.
BIRDBOOT  There's nothing for you there, you know.
MAGNUS  You think so?
BIRDBOOT  Oh, yes, she knows which side her bread is buttered. I am a man not without a certain influence among those who would reap the limelight—she's not going to throw me over for a heavily disguised cripple.
MAGNUS  There's an old Canadian proverb—
BIRDBOOT  Don't give me that—I tumbled to you right from the start—oh, yes, you chaps are not as clever as you think. . . . Sooner or later you make your mistake. . . . Incidentally, where was it I saw you? . . . I've definitely—
MAGNUS  [Leaving.] Well, I think I'll go and oil my gun. [Exits.]
BIRDBOOT  [After MAGNUS.] Double bluff!—[To CYNTHIA.] I've seen it a thousand times.
CYNTHIA  I think Magnus suspects something. And Felicity? Simon, was there anything between you and Felicity?

9. Place your bets. No more betting. Red and black (French).
BIRDBOOT  No, no—that's all over now. I merely flattered her a little over a drink, told her she'd go far, that sort of thing. Dear me, the fuss that's been made over a simple flirtation.

CYNTHIA  [As Mrs Drudge enters behind.] If I find you have falsely seduced me from my dear husband Albert, I will kill you, Simon Gascoyne!

[The "curtain" as before. Mrs Drudge and Cynthia leave. Birdboot starts to follow them.]

MOON  Birdboot!

[Birdboot stops.]

MOON  For God's sake pull yourself together.

BIRDBOOT  I can't help it.

MOON  What do you think you're doing? You're turning it into a complete farce!

BIRDBOOT  I know, I know—but I can't live without her. [He is making erratic neurotic journeys about the stage.] I shall resign my position, of course. I don't care I'm agonner, I tell you—[He has arrived at the body. He looks at it in surprise, hesitates, bends and turns it over.]

MOON  Birdboot, think of your family, your friends—your high standing in the world of letters—I say, what are you doing?

[Birdboot is staring at the body's face.]

Birdboot . . . leave it alone. Come and sit down—what's the matter with you?

BIRDBOOT  [Dead-voiced.] It's Higgs.

MOON  What?

BIRDBOOT  It's Higgs.

[Pause.]

MOON  Don't be silly.

BIRDBOOT  I tell you it's Higgs!

[MOON half rises. Bewildered.]

I don't understand. . . He's dead.

MOON  Dead?

BIRDBOOT  Who would want to . . .?

MOON  He must have been lying there all the time . . .

BIRDBOOT  . . . kill Higgs?

MOON  But what's he doing here? I was standing in tonight . . .

BIRDBOOT  [Turning.] Moon? . . .

MOON  [In wonder, quietly.] So it's me and Puckeridge now.

BIRDBOOT  Moon . . . ?

MOON  [Faltering.] But I swear I . . .

BIRDBOOT  I've got it—

MOON  But I didn't—

BIRDBOOT  [Quietly.] My God . . . so that was it . . . [Up.] Moon—now I see—

MOON  —I swear I didn't—

BIRDBOOT  Now—finally—I see it all—

[There is a shot and Birdboot falls dead.]

MOON  Birdboot! [He runs on, to Birdboot's body.]

[Cynthia appears at the French windows. She stops and stares. All as before.]

CYNTHIA  Oh my God—what happened, Inspector?
MOON [Almost to himself.] He's dead. . . . [He rises.] That's a bit rough, isn't it?—A bit extreme!—He may have had his faults—I admit he was a fickle old . . . Who did this, and why?

[MOON turns to face her. He stands up and makes swiftly for his seat. Before he gets there he is stopped by the sound of voices.]

[Simon and Hound are occupying the critics' seats.]

[MOON freezes.]

SIMON To say that it is without pace, point, focus, interest, drama, wit or originality is to say simply that it does not happen to be my cup of tea. One has only to compare this ragbag with the masters of the genre to see that here we have a trifle that is not my cup of tea at all.

HOUND I'm sorry to be blunt but there is no getting away from it. It lacks pace. A complete ragbag.

SIMON I will go further. Those of you who were fortunate enough to be at the Comédie Française on Wednesday last, will not need to be reminded that hysterics are no substitute for éclat.

HOUND It lacks élan.

SIMON Some of the cast seem to have given up acting altogether, apparently aghast, with every reason, at finding themselves involved in an evening that would, and indeed will, make the angels weep.

HOUND I am not a prude but I fail to see any reason for the shower of filth and sexual allusion foisted on to an unsuspecting public in the guise of modernity at all costs. . . .

[Behind MOON, Felicity, Magnus, and Mrs Drudge have made their entrances, so that he turns to face their semicircle.]

MAGNUS [Pointing to Birdboot's body.] Well, Inspector, is this your man?

MOON [Warily.] . . . Yes . . . Yes . . .

CYNTIA It's Simon . . .

MOON Yes . . . yes . . . poor . . . [Up.] Is this some kind of a joke?

MAGNUS If it is, Inspector, it's in very poor taste.

[MOON pulls himself together and becomes galvanic, a little wild, in grief for Birdboot.]

MOON All right! I'm going to find out who did this! I want everyone to go to the positions they occupied when the shot was fired—[They move; hysterically.]. No one will leave the house! [They move back.]

MAGNUS I think we all had the opportunity to fire the shot, Inspector—

MOON [Furious.] I am not—

MAGNUS —but which of us would want to?

MOON Perhaps you, Major Magnus!

MAGNUS Why should I want to kill him?

MOON Because he was on to you—yes, he tumbled you right from the start—and you shot him just when he was about to reveal that you killed—[MOON points, pauses and then crosses to Higgs's body and falters]—killed—[He turns Higgs over.]—this . . . chap.

MAGNUS But what motive would there be for killing him? [Pause.] Who is this chap? [Pause.] Inspector?

2. Cf. Measure for Measure 2.2.117-22: "But man, proud man, like an angry ape / Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven / As makes the angels weep."
MOON  [Rising.] I don't know. Quite unlike anyone I've ever met.  
[Long pause.] Well...now... 
MRS DRUDGE  Inspector? 
MOON  [Eagerly.] Yes? Yes, what is it, dear lady? 
MRS DRUDGE  Happening to enter this room earlier in the day to close the  
windows, I chanced to overhear a remark made by the deceased Simon  
Gascoyne to her ladyship, viz.—"I will kill anyone who comes between  
us." 

MOON  Ah—yes—well, that's it, then. This...chap...[Pointing.] was  
obviously killed by [Pointing.] er...by [Pause.] Simon. 
CYNTHIA  But he didn't come between us! 
MAGNUS  And who, then, killed Simon? 
MRS DRUDGE  Subsequent to that reported remark, I also happened to be  
in earshot of a remark made by Lady Muldoon to the deceased, to the  
effect, "I will kill you, Simon Gascoyne!" I hope you don't mind my mentioning it. 
MOON  Not at all. I'm glad you did. It is from these chance remarks that  
we in the force build up our complete picture before moving in to make  
the arrest. It will not be long now, I fancy, and I must warn you, Lady  
Muldoon that anything you say—- 
CYNTHIA  Yes!—I hated Simon Gascoyne, for he had me in his power!—  
But I didn't kill him! 
MRS DRUDGE  Prior to that, Inspector, I also chanced to overhear a remark  
made by Miss Cunningham, no doubt in the heat of the moment, but it  
stuck in my mind as these things do, viz., "I will kill you for this, Simon  
Gascoyne!" 
MOON  Ah! The final piece of the jigsaw! I think I am now in a position to  
reveal the mystery. This man [The corpse.] was, of course, McCoy, the  
Canadian who, as we heard, meeting Gascoyne in the street and being  
solicited for sixpence for a toffee apple, smacked him across the ear, with  
the cry, "How's that for a grudge to harbour, you sniffling little workshy!" all those many years ago. Gascoyne bided his time, but in due course  
tracked McCoy down to this house, having, on the way, met, in the  
neighbourhood, a simple ambitious girl from the provinces. He was  
charming, persuasive—told her, I have no doubt, that she would go  
g straight to the top—and she, flattered by his sophistication, taken in by  
his promises to see her all right on the night, gave in to his simple  
desires. Perhaps she loved him. We shall never know. But in the very  
hour of her promised triumph, his eye fell on another—yes, I refer to  
Lady Cynthia Muldoon. From the moment he caught sight of her there  
was no other woman for him—he was in her spell, willing to sacrifice  
everything, even you, Felicity Cunningham. It was only today—unexpectedly finding him here—that you learned the truth. There was a bitter  
argument which ended with your promise to kill him—a promise that you carried out in this very room at your first opportunity! And I must  
warn you that anything you say—- 
FELICITY  But it doesn't make sense! 
MOON  Not at first glance, perhaps.
MAGNUS  Could not Simon have been killed by the same person who killed McCoy?

FELICITY  But why should any of us want to kill a perfect stranger?

MAGNUS  Perhaps he was not a stranger to one of us.

MOON  [Faltering.] But Simon was the madman, wasn't he?

MAGNUS  We only have your word for that, Inspector. We only have your word for a lot of things. For instance—McCoy. Who is he? Is his name McCoy? Is there any truth in that fantastic and implausible tale of the insult inflicted in the Canadian streets? Or is there something else, something quite unknown to us, behind all this? Suppose for a moment that the madman, having killed this unknown stranger for private and inscrutable reasons of his own, was disturbed before he could dispose of the body, so having cut the telephone wires he decided to return to the scene of the crime, masquerading as—Police Inspector Hound!

MOON  But . . . I'm not mad . . . I'm almost sure I'm not mad . . .

MAGNUS  . . . only to discover that in the house was a man, Simon Gascoyne, who recognized the corpse as a man against whom you had held a deep-seated grudge—!

MOON  But I didn't kill—I'm almost sure I—

MAGNUS  I put it to you!—are you the real Inspector Hound?!

MOON  You know damn well I'm not! What's it all about?

MAGNUS  I thought as much.

MOON  I only dreamed . . . sometimes I dreamed—

CYNTHIA  So it was you!

MRS DRUDGE  The madman!

FELICITY  The killer!

CYNTHIA  Oh, it's horrible, horrible.

MRS DRUDGE  The stranger in our midst!

MAGNUS  Yes, we had a shrewd suspicion he would turn up here—and he walked into the trap!

MOON  What trap?

MAGNUS  I am not the real Magnus Muldoon!—it was a mere subter-fuge!—and [Standing up and removing his moustaches.] I now reveal myself as—

CYNTHIA  You mean—?

MAGNUS  Yes!—I am the real Inspector Hound!

MOON  [Pause.] Puckeridge!

MAGNUS  [With pistol.] Stand where you are, or I shoot!

MOON  [Backing.] Puckeridge! You killed Higgs—and Birdboot tried to tell me—

MAGNUS  Stop in the name of the law!

[MOON turns to run. MAGNUS fires. MOON drops to his knees.]

I have waited a long time for this moment.

CYNTHIA  So you are the real Inspector Hound.

MAGNUS  Not only that!—I have been leading a double life—at least!

CYNTHIA  You mean—?

MAGNUS  Yes!—It's been ten long years, but don't you know me?

CYNTHIA  You mean—?

MAGNUS  Yes!—it is me, Albert!—who lost his memory and joined the force, rising by merit to the rank of Inspector, his past blotted out—until
fate cast him back into the home he left behind, back to the beautiful woman he had brought here as his girlish bride—in short, my darling, my memory has returned and your long wait is over!

CYNTHIA Oh, Albert!

[They embrace.]

MOON [With a trace of admiration.] Puckeridge . . . you cunning bastard.

[MOON dies.]

THE END

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