A Performance to Die For

A Comedy/Murder Mystery Play

in two Acts

by

Perri Ann Barley

**CHARACTERS**

**PHIL ANDERS** (Prince Charming), 40-50’s, classically trained actor

**DAVINA OVERLEY-HILL** (Cinderella), 35-50’s, lead actress, diva

**NOAH DEERE** (Buttons)30-50’s, nice guy, besotted with Davina

**CAPT JAMES MORGAN** (Ugly Sister), 55-70’s, former Naval Captain

**LUCAS CAMPLEY** (Ugly Sister),20–40’s, artistic, camp

**FREDA BOBBIN** 40-60’s, wardrobe mistress, fiery temper

**MIA RIZENSTARR** (Understudy Cinders), 20’s, newcomer, speaks her mind

**DIRECTOR** any age/gender

**MAXIMUS STRONG** Panto Baddie All four

**SHEREE BAKEWELL** Tea Lady can be played by the

**MR JOINER** Stage Manager same person, any age

**DETECTIVE BOOTLICKER**

**ACT 1 SCENE 1**

*The Prigton Royal And Trenton Theatrical Society (PRATTS) are starting rehearsals for their Annual Pantomime, ‘The Good, The Bad and The Ugly Sisters’. Rehearsals take place in a small Church Hall in the lead up to Christmas with the Panto due to open in just 2 weeks. This is a semi-professional production and two new members are about to join the cast.*

*The scene opens in a small rehearsal room/office in the local Church Hall. There is a bookshelf with books and other items, a coat cupboard, a noticeboard with a big Panto poster, several chairs, possibly a small sofa/Chaise Longue, for the cast to sit. All items can be moved around during the rehearsals.*

*Davina Overley-Hill is sat on the sofa/chaise looking at her phone and ignoring everyone else. Captain James Morgan is boring Lucas to death with another of his Naval exploits. Noah Deere, hopelessly in love with Davina, is just sat watching her. They each have a script, either in hand or within reach.*

*Mia Rizenstarr enters, script in hand. No one pays any attention to her at first.*

**MIA:** Hello! Is this the Panto Rehearsal? *(No response – she goes over to Davina)* Hi! Is this the Panto rehearsal?

*(Davina, abruptly puts her hand up as a ‘wait a moment’ signal, taps at her phone a bit more then puts it down to look at Mia)*

**DAVINA:** *(Curtly)* Yes?

**MIA:** I just want to know if I am in the right place for the Panto rehearsals.

**DAVINA:** Well of course you are. Why else would we all be here in this godforsaken dusthole of a place? *(Goes back to her phone)*

**MIA:** Is the Director around? *(Silence)* I’m the new cast member.

**DAVINA:** Oh I don’t think so. We never get any new cast here. Same old faces, same old script - more or less - every year.

**MIA:** Well this year must be different. I’m here to understudy the part of Cinderella.

**DAVINA:** *(Instantly puts down the phone and stands up)* What! Is this true? **I’m** playing Cinderella, just as I play the female lead every year and I have never once had, **or needed,** an Understudy.

*(The others start to observe the commotion, Noah gets up and walks over to intervene.)*

**NOAH:** Davina! *(trips over a chair as he walks across – very awkward around her)* Davina, is something wrong?

**DAVINA:** This......*(looks Mia up and down)...***person** says she’s my Understudy! How dare she!

**NOAH:** I’m sure there is just some mis-understanding. Let me find out for you Davina, please.

**DAVINA:** Thank you*......(trying to think of his name)....*Norman?

**NOAH:** Noah.

**DAVINA:** Yes.......thank you. *(Sits back down and goes back to her phone)*

*(Noah leads Mia across to the other side away from Davina)*

**MIA:** I didn’t mean to cause any trouble.

**NOAH:** You didn’t. She’ll be fine.

**MIA:** Has she really never had an understudy before?

**NOAH:** She has, every year ...... she just doesn’t know it. The Director thinks it’s best not to tell her. You see, Davina is quite.....what’s the word.?...

**LUCAS:** Nightmare-ish? Monstrous?

**NOAH:** No! She’s not like that at all.

**LUCAS:** Oh come Noah, wake up and smell the very unpleasant, although fairly beautiful and fragrant and on occasions quite fashionable, coffee!

**NOAH:** What do you mean?

**LUCAS:** She’s a Diva, Noah. She will never be interested in you. How can I put this? To her, you are like a ‘pair of old knickers’ – comfortable and like an ‘old friend’ but would rather **die** than parade them around in public.

**NOAH:** *(Noah looks hurt)*  Perhaps you could look after Mia here and keep her away from Davina. *(He leaves Mia with them and takes a seat just behind.)*

**CAPT:** Ah Lucas, you do have a way with words*.* Poor lovestruck Noah. *(To Mia)* Let me introduce myself ma’am. *(Salutes)* Captain James Morgan, Former Naval Commander of the HMS Hennessey, HMS Cognac and HMS Blottoed. I am the The Prigton Royal And Trenton Theatrical Society’s resident Dame and this here is Lucas Campley, my comic sidekick. Together we are playing the Ugly Sisters.

**MIA:** Very pleased to meet you both. I am Mia Rizenstarr.

**CAPT:** Very pleased to make your acquaintance, Mia.

**LUCAS:** Yes, pleased to meet you. Have you done Panto before?

**MIA:** I’ve played many roles on stage but this is a first for me – I’m a complete Panto novice.

**CAPT:** Well stick with us young lady and we will teach you everything we know.

**MIA:** Well actually, I would love to know more about your Naval Career, I have always been fascinated by the sea.

**LUCAS:** Said with such ‘naivety’. Mia, no one ever asks the Captain about his Naval history, unless you are suffering from insomnia and require some much needed sleep.

**CAPT:** Ignore him my dear. I’d be very happy to tell you all about my exploits, although some of the ones from my younger days might not be suitable for young ears – if you know what I mean. *(winks at Mia and nudges Lucas)*

**LUCAS:**Captain, even that speck of dust in the corner up there knows what you mean.

**CAPT:** Tell me Mia, do you know what the difference is between ‘Port’ and ‘Starboard’?

**MIA:** Port and Starboard? I’ve no idea.

**CAPT:** Me neither - I’ve never drunk Starboard! *(Hearty laugh, Mia chuckles a little)*

**LUCAS:**Don’t laugh at him, it will just encourage him to tell more.

**MIA:** I don’t mind. I love jokes.

**LUCAS:** When you hear the same ones every year they wear a little thin. Just like Freda’s costumes.

**MIA:** Who’s Freda?

**LUCAS:** So much to learn.

*(Director enters with new leading man, Phil Anders, who quite obviously thinks he ‘God’s gift’)*

**DIRECT:** Hello everyone! Welcome to the Panto rehearsals for ‘The Good, The Bad and the Ugly Sisters’.

**LUCAS:** *(To the others)* Ooh, who’s the new guy.

**DIRECT:** Please take a seat everyone and get out your scripts. Now, as you know .......

*(Resident Baddie, Max, enters)*

**MAX:** I’m here, don’t panic. Did I miss anything?

**DIRECT:** No Max, I was just about to introduce the cast so we may as well start with you. For those new people amongst us, this is our resident Panto Baddie, Maximus Strong.

**NOAH:** *(To Mia)* Perfectly cast – evil is in his blood. Stay well clear.

**LUCAS:** *(Overhearing)* You only say that because he and Davina had a ‘thing’.

**NOAH:** He treated her really badly.

**DIRECT:** If I may continue..

*(Wardrobe Mistress, Freda Bobbin enters)*

**FREDA:** Don’t mind me! I’ll just find a space right at the back out of the way. Pretend I’m not here.

**MAX:** I always pretend you’re not here.

*(Freda shoots him a ‘look’)*

**DIRECT:** Hello Freda, great to have you back. *(To the new people)* Freda is our Wardrobe Mistress, a real godsend. I don’t know what we’d do without her.

**DAVINA:** Have decent costumes maybe?

**DIRECT:** Yes, thank you Davina – such a joker as always.

*(Freda is not happy about Davina’s comment, she angrily and noisily set up her sewing machine on a table).*

Before we start*... (pauses briefly while Freda still clunks everything around)* ... I’m sure you will have noticed we have a few new members of the cast this year. As most of you will have heard, our former Leading Man, Eric, won’t be able to join us this year.

**CAPT:** Poor old Eric. He was a smashing chap, shame about what happened.

**DIRECT:** Yes. In hindsight, maybe getting a real cow was not the best idea.

**LUCAS:** Cow? You mean bull!

**NOAH:** If only Eric hadn’t bent over at that particular moment.

**DIRECT:** Well, we have certainly learnt the hard way.

**MAX:** Eric certainly did.

*(All cast apart from the 2 newbies groan/wince at the memory of what happened)*

**DIRECT:** But, as they say, onwards and upwards..

**LUCAS:** That was certainly the Bull’s philosophy.

**DIRECT:** Moving on.....

**FREDA:** Can I just ask a quick question? Are there any plans to freshen up the scenery this year? The reason I’m asking is that some of my friends that come every year said they are a bit sick of seeing that same old ‘Beanstalk’ - that show was about 8 years ago now.

**LUCAS:** I have to agree with Freda. I know that first year it made a great entrance for the Dame, but he’s getting a bit old now for sliding down a bean-pole. Although, it’s a great way to rid it of dust!

**FREDA:** Why don’t they chop it up and re-use it for other things?

**NOAH:** But they can’t remove it. If you remember, they were so concerned about that ‘Beanstalk’ not being able to take the Captain’s weight that they concreted it into the stage. That’s why it’s still there.

**FREDA:** You mean it’s there all the time – even for all the other shows throughout the year.

**NOAH:** Of course. It’s a permanent feature now. They adapt it to fit into each show.

**FREDA:** But how do they explain a ‘Beanstalk’ in the middle of normal show – such as ......’Priscilla Queen of the Desert’.

**NOAH:** They make it into a giant cactus.

**FREDA:** What about ‘The Sound of Music’?

**NOAH:** They paint it black and white and pretend it’s a giant nun!

**LUCAS:** I’d have loved to seen what they did with it during ‘The Full Monty”.

**DIRECT:** Let me reassure you that Mr Joiner, our Stage Manager, has already been coming up with different ideas for the Beanstalk and our Dame will just make a ‘walk on’ entrance this year.

**CAPT:** Thank goodness. You’ve no idea the amount of chafing I get – and the friction. I created enough electricity last year to power the lights for the rest of the show!

**DIRECT:** Can we now continue with the introductions? Now, let me introduce you to our new Leading Man, Phil Anders. Welcome to The Prigton Royal And Trenton Theatrical Society, Phil.

**PHIL:** It’s a pleasure to be here. I can’t wait to work with you all and get to know you all a little better *(directs his attention mainly to the ladies).*

**LUCAS:** You can start with me if you like.

**MAX:** *(To Phil)* Have we worked together before? I feel like I know you from somewhere.

**PHIL:** *(Taken aback)*  No......No. I’m quite sure we’ve never met. *(To Director)* Apologies, please continue.

**DIRECT:** Thank you. A warm welcome also to another new member, Mia Rizenstarr. I’ll...err... explain her role a little later.

**DAVINA:** Yes.....**please do**.

**DIRECT:** Erm...yes....now let me remind you of the cast. We have our fabulous Dame over there, Captain James Morgan and next to him Lucas Campley – both of whom will be playing the Ugly Sisters. Cinderella will be played by our lovely leading lady, Davina Overley-Hill.

**MAX:** For the newbies, this company is a huge advocate for peri-menopausal princesses. Helps to gives the character that extra sass!

**DIRECT:** *(Moves on quickly before Davina flips)* Prince Charming is of course Phil Anders, the manservant Buttons will be played by........

*(Interrupted by the sound of a sewing maching – tries to shout over the top)*

BUTTONS WILL BE PLAYED BY....

**CAPT:** We can’t hear you!

**DIRECT:** **BUTTONS WILL** .... *(sewing machine stops)...*that’s better. Buttons will be played .. *(sewing machine starts again)* oh for goodness sake. Freda! **FREDA!**

*(Freda stops and looks up)*

Freda. Please can you leave that til I’ve finished speaking?

**FREDA:** But I have a deadline to keep to.

**DIRECT:** But no one can hear me. Is there somewhere else you could go?

**FREDA:** *(Angry – gets up and starts packing everything away).* FINE! I know when I’m not wanted.

**DIRECT:** Freda, I didn’t mean...

**FREDA:** No, it’s fine. I’ll stop. But don’t be expecting your costumes to look perfect.

**DAVINA:** We don’t usually.

**FREDA:** *(Fuming at Davina’s comment)* Oh, by the way everyone. Davina here is a size 14 and not a size 10! *(She exits rapidly)*

**DAVINA:** *(Gasps in horror)* How dare she! That’s not true!

*(Capt, Lucas and Max are finding this hilarious, Mia trying to hide the fact that she’s also laughing. Phil is totally confused as to what he has walked in to, Noah looks very concerned about Davina)*

**DIRECT:** Ok that’s enough everyone. Please calm down.

**MAX:** You think that’s funny! Those boobs are fake too you know! She uses more chicken fillets than you’ll ever see in a KFC freezer.

*(The others laugh even louder – Noah looks like he’s about to go over and punch Max but Captain holds him back)*

**DAVINA:** Shut up all of you. I’ve never been so insulted in all my life. DIRECTOR! A word.

**DIRECT:** *(Sighs, as if this is a regular occurrence)*  Of course Davina. I’ll be back in a moment everyone.

*(Davina and Director exit –the laughing continues but gradually starts to fizzle out.)*

**LUCAS:** *(Let’s out a little contented sigh)* Ahh*.....(slight pause)............*we never did find out who was playing Buttons.

**END OF SCENE 1**

**ACT 1 SCENE 2**

*The Director is setting scenes with some of the cast in the background. The furniture has been moved around to create rehearsal space – chairs are scattered around the edge for those not in the scene – there is a table and chair pre-set for Max to sit at. Downstage Mia is being measured by Freda.*

**FREDA:** So I said “You won’t get away with this! I’ll see that you pay for what you’ve done.” Now you know me... well you don’t know me yet but you soon will. Well, anyway, I’m not one to make a fuss about nothing but I have to draw the line somewhere. I mean, can you believe what they did?

**MIA:** Shocking!

**FREDA:** Shocking isn’t the word. Although it is quite fitting here. Well I’ll tell you one thing for nothing, if they do it again, believe you me, they will see me **angry** and ‘**that’**..... no one wants to see. Just ask my husband...if he ever decides to come home that is. *(Suddenly sweet)* Right lovie, there you are. All measured up. Who’s next?

*(Freda heads over to the rest of the cast as Phil Anders moves forward, seizing an opportunity to charm Mia)*

**PHIL:** What was all that about?

**MIA:** Oh, apparently someone dared to criticise the neatness of her blanket stitch.

**PHIL:** Wow! Note to self - never upset Ms Bobbin. I must apologise for my manners - I haven’t had the pleasure to meet you until now. The name is Phil Anders, MBE.

**MIA:** I’m Mia. *(She holds out her hand to shake but he kisses it)* MBE? Wow! What was that for?

**PHIL:** My commitment to Acting.

**MIA:** Very impressive. Have I seen you in anything?

**PHIL:** Possibly. Although I don’t follow the usual fold – I tend to take on the ‘emotive’, the ‘fulfilling’, the genuine pieces – you know the type.

**MIA:** *(Slightly confused)* You mean the more ‘serious role’?

**PHIL:** Exactly. Momentous pieces such as ‘Shakespeare’, ‘Dickensian’, Mythological,……….. Casualty.

**MIA:** Fascinating. But if you are a serious actor - why are you doing Panto?

**PHIL:** For my fans! They idolise me you know. They have been begging for a stage debut, so they can see me in the flesh. Panto is often seen as a stage for the ‘fading’ actor – my plan is to *quash* that misconception.

*(Overhearing the conversation, Max joins them.)*

**MAX:** Forgive me for interrupting but I couldn’t help overhear your conversation. It’s finally clicked where I know you from.

**PHIL:** *(Suddenly on edge)* I am still quite sure we have never met, you must have me confused with someone else.

**MAX:** I don’t think so. I never forget a face. I’m thinking 10 years ago, maybe more. I was making my directorial debut - Shakespeare’s ‘Richard III’ with Prigton Methodist Theatre. If I remember rightly, you auditioned for the lead role.

**PHIL:** No, that definitely wasn’t me. I must have a double somewhere*....(desperate to get away)* I think my scene is about to be set.

**MAX:** But wait, now I remember why I didn’t give you the part*...... (laughs)* oh dear, oh dear, oh dear. Does everyone else know about your little ‘problem’. *(Flustered, Phil re-joins the others – Max, gleeful, turns to Mia.)* Talk about skeletons in the closet. We could be in for some fun later.

**DIRECT:** Ok, everyone places please. Let’s run the scene where the Ugly Sisters see Prince Charming for the first time. This scene includes Cinders and Buttons.

*(Scripts in hand, the cast take positions – Max sits at the back and Mia follows the script from the side.)*

**PHIL:** *(To Noah)* Who are you playing?

**NOAH:** Buttons.

**PHIL:** Oh, that makes sense. For a moment I thought we had another Ugly Sister.

**DAVINA:** Can I just point out that there’s something wrong with my script.

**DIRECT:** What do you mean?

**DAVINA:** Some of my lines are missing.

**LUCAS:** Let’s have a gander *(compares her script with his.)* Looks ok to me, it’s the same as mine.

**DAVINA:** So where are all my lines?

**DIRECT:** Davina, dear, you don’t have any lines in this scene.

**DAVINA:** No lines! How on earth can the ‘Leading Lady’ have no lines?

**DIRECT:** Davina! If you had looked through the whole script before now you will have seen you have plenty of lines in others scenes. But in this particular scene your character, Cinderella, needs to blend into the background. Prince Charming is not supposed to notice her yet.

**LUCAS:** Too right! You have plenty of time to get noticed when singing all those sweet but sickly songs – this is my time to shine and I’m going to make the most of it.

**NOAH:** *(Nervously)* Davina, dear. If it makes you feel any better - you always shine on the stage, lines or no lines.

*(Lucas and Captain groan at the cheesiness of his words)*

**MAX:** Ha! That will be her cheap makeup under those lights! When her last review said that she ‘dazzled audiences’ – they weren’t referring to her performance.

**DAVINA:** Shut up Max! Shut up, shut up, shut up! *(Gets louder and shriekier with each one, stuns everyone else into silence)*

**MAX:** Well that told me! I think you need to calm down dear and count yourself lucky. If it was up to me, your understudy here *(indicating Mia)* would be playing the part. Aside from having youth on her side, she has played many great roles already – although from what I’ve heard those roles may not have been acquired in the ‘ethical’ sense.

**MIA:** What’s that supposed to mean? I’ll have you know that every role I have ever been given has been down to my talent and hard work alone. And come to think of it, how do you even know anything about me and my career? We’ve only just met.

**MAX:** I make it my business to know everything about everyone. You never know when you might just need an extra bit of leverage on someone – especially in this business. Every person in this room has something to hide – but at what cost do they want it to remain hidden?

*(Every single one of them stares at him with a look of horror and contempt on their faces)*

**LUCAS:** *(Snaps the air of tension with a joke)* Well, if this was an episode of Midsomer Murders I think we know who will be first on the victim list!

**FREDA:** *(Still looking at Max with contempt – doesn’t turn away as she says next line)* Lucas! Don’t even joke about such a thing.

*(Even Max wipes the smile of his face when he sees the way Freda is looking at him)*

**DIRECT:** Ok, enough fun! Let’s crack on with the scene. Max you won’t be needed in this scene but can you please keep your comments to yourself from now on.

**MAX:** Fine, but can we at least turn the heating up a bit – it’s freezing in here. *(Puts his coat on and sits back down).*

**DIRECT:** Okay, get into the positions for when Prince Charming makes his first entrance. And go!

*(Prince swaggers on as if soaking up all the adulation from the audience)*

Are you going to say your line, Phil?

**PHIL:** I will. I am just giving the audience a chance to calm themselves after such a pivotal moment in the show.

*(Some of the others look at each other rolling their eyes)*

*“*Buttons! I need you to find all the beautiful ladies in the town and give them an invitation to my Ball.”

**NOAH: “**Yes, your highness.”

**PHIL:** “I am convinced I will find my ideal soul mate and confidante at the ball, and in turn *please* my pater, The King.”

**MIA:** Sorry to interrupt but I think there **is** something wrong with the script after all.

**DAVINA:** I told you.

**MIA:** The lines in my script are completely different to what Prince Charming has said just now.

**CAPT:** What do you mean?

**MIA:** Well, he refers to his ‘soulmate and confidante’ – but in my script it just says his ‘perfect Princess’ and instead of ‘pater’ it says here ‘his father, the King of Raisenthrop’.

**DIRECT:** Let me see. *(Looks at Mia’s script)* Ah yes, we had a new updated script sent over from the show’s Producer. It was one of the conditions of Phil here accepting the role. Your agent must have sent you one of the *original* scripts.

**CAPT:** What was wrong with the original script?

**PHIL:** *(Cagey)* Oh it was awful, and totally un-PC. Believe me, this one is much better.

**LUCAS:** Well, now I’m intrigued to know what was in the original script.

**DAVINA:** Me too. Do I have more lines?

*(They all make a beeline for Mia’s script.)*

**DIRECT:** Stop! Back to your places everyone. We are sticking with the new script and that’s that. Now, back to where we left off. Buttons, your line.

*(They return to their places.)*

**NOAH:** “I will do everything I can, your highness, to help you find your bride.”

**DIRECT:** Okay, now you two exit and the Ugly Sisters make their entrances – first up Captain – you will enter then do your ‘bit’ to the audience. Captain,........ Captain?

*(Captain, with his back turned away, has been sneaking a sip from his hip flask, quickly hides it in his jacket and turns around)*

**CAPT:** Am I on? Ok, here goes.....entrance.....applause, applause .... introduce myself etc. etc. and then *(looks at script – then to Lucas)* Oh, this is where you enter. *“*And look, here is my sister now. A vision of loveliness wouldn’t you say? You wouldn’t? No, you’re right, neither would I? Oh look, she’s spat her dummy out now. Talking of dummies. I met a drunk ventriloquist last week who said he wanted to sleep with me. I didn’t know if it was him or the beer talking!”

*(A few titters at the joke but Davina is not amused)*

**DAVINA:** That’s a bit crude don’t you think – making a reference to....you know. This is supposed to be family show.

**CAPT:** That was one of my best jokes.

**DAVINA:** You mean they get worse? God help us.

**DIRECT:** Continue everyone. Cinders you follow on behind after they have done a bit more with the audience *(Davina, still in a mood stands with her arms folded)* and Prince and Buttons you come back on - you are not to pay any attention to Cinders. Ok go.

**LUCAS:** *(Over the top) “* Sister dear, there he is, the man of our dreams, Prince Charming. Yoo hoo!” *(Curtseys)* “Prince Charming, how wonderful to make your acquaintance.”

**PHIL: “**Ladies, the pleasure is all mine. I do hope you will attend my Ball, and if you know of any beautiful young ladies please invite them along.”

**LUCAS:** “Oh, we don’t know of any beautiful ladies, other than ourselves of course. Is it....”

**DIRECT:** Stop! Stop! Buttons....Noah. You are not supposed to notice Cinders – you have been looking at her throughout that whole bit.

**LUCAS:** Now there’s a surprise.

**NOAH:** *(Embarrassed)* I wasn’t looking at Cinders – it was erm.... something behind her. Sorry, I will focus. Carry on.

*(Freda appears with her tape measure and starts to measure Phil – he is taken aback at first but carries on like a true pro)*

**LUCAS:** “Is it true you are looking for your Princess?”

**PHIL:** “That is what I am looking for. I need a woman of beauty*....(each time the Ugly sisters react and show off their qualities)....* a woman of intelligence....”

**LUCAS:** “9 x 8 is 72!”

**PHIL:** “..... a woman with a sense of humour.”

**CAPT:** “Cue me! *(Pushes sister out of the way)* How well did the sailor do in school? He got high ‘C’s.”

*(Others groan)*

**PHIL: “**She also needs to have... *(He reacts to Freda taking his inside leg measurement and goes high pitched on the next word)....* elegance!”

**DIRECT:** Freda!

**FREDA:** Sorry but I need to get my measurements correct.

**MAX:** It’s never bothered you before.

**FREDA:** *(Sudden fury)* Don’t you start with me again Max!

**MAX:** Whoa! Talk about an over-reaction.

**NOAH:** I’m with Freda on this Max. You are positively beastly to everyone. Especially Davina. You need to watch your mouth.

**MAX:** Strong words from such a weak-minded, love-sick fool.

**LUCAS:** I’m with the others too. You really need to watch your back, Max.

*(The others all voice their agreement)*

**MAX:** So you’re all ganging up on me are you? That does surprise me. Especially when a simple ‘slip of the tongue’ from myself could destroy all of your careers. But if that’s what you want - now who should I start with?

*(The lights go out)*

**DAVINA:** What happened to the lights? I’m scared.

**NOAH:** Don’t worry Davina, my dear. It’s probably just a tripped switch. I’ll go and find the electric box.

*(Even though it’s dark the cast move around the stage slightly panicked or unsure of where they are.)*

**LUCAS:** Who just touched me?

**PHIL:** That may have been me, I do apologise.

**LUCAS:** I wasn’t complaining.

*(Lights come back up, Noah appears back on stage, Max is is now slumped over the table)*

**DAVINA:** Thank goodness for that. Well done Nigel.

**NOAH:** Noah.

**DAVINA:** Yes.

**FREDA:** Max, you’ve suddenly gone quiet. I thought you were going to spill all of our secrets.

**CAPT:** Poor old devil’s fallen asleep. *(Goes over to shake him)* Wake up old chap! Max?

*(Max slumps further forward – there is a dagger in his back – he is dead! - Freda screams)*

**END OF SCENE 2**

**ACT 1 SCENE 3**

*The chair and table where Max was murdered is still on stage, minus the body. On the other side of the room Noah is comforting a ‘distressed’ Davina.*

**NOAH:** There, there, Davina dear, let it all out.

**DAVINA:** How could this happen? I mean.... murdered for goodness sake. One minute he was just sitting there being....well... being Max, and the next... *(she starts to weep).* And you know what the most horrifying thing of all is?

**NOAH:**That he was so young?

**DAVINA:**No. That it could have been me!

**NOAH:** Or any one of us.

**DAVINA:** Yes. Or me.

**NOAH:** No one would want to murder you Davina, everyone loves you.

**DAVINA:** You are so kind, Neil.

**NOAH:** Noah.

**DAVINA:** Yes. But I think you’re wrong. I don’t think people **like** me but I accept that. It’s a cross us ‘beautiful’ and ‘talented’ actresses have to bear. *(She starts to weep again)*

**NOAH:** Would you like anything? A strong drink? Another tissue? *(Hopefully)* A hug?

**DAVINA:** *(She smiles at him)*Oh, that sounds perfect. *(Ecstatic he goes in for the hug)* Another tissue would be great, thank you.

*(Visibly disappointed he hands her the tissue and she blows her nose on it and gives it back to him – he looks a bit ‘grossed’ out for a moment but then decides to put it in his pocket)*

*(At this moment Detective arrives)*

**DET:** Are you supposed to be in here? This is a crime scene.

**NOAH:** All the forensics teams have been and gone. We thought it would be ok. I’m assuming you are a Detective?

**DET:** *(Pleased at the assumption)* You assume correctly. I am Detective Bootlicker, Chief Investigator on this case. *(He looks around a bit)* So.....been and gone have they?

**NOAH:** Yes, ages ago. I thought they would have told you.

**DET:** Yes.... *(obviously put out that he has been left out of the loop but tries to cover it up)* ... yes of course they did. I was just testing you. A little trick we ‘Detectives’ like to play..........so......did they find anything?

**NOAH:** I’ve no idea. Shouldn’t I be asking you that?

**DET:** Aha! You fell for it again. Of course I will be the first to hear. *(holds his phone up in the air)* The Chief Investigator is always the first to hear – any minute now this phone will be springing into life....yes...any minute now *(willing it to ring)* – but in the meantime I need to interview the possible suspects. Wait a minute – is this the table where the murder happened?

**NOAH:** Yes

**DET:** Why haven’t the forensics team put Crime Scene Tape around it? Anybody could just come and sit here and destroy all the evidence.

**NOAH:** Well, I think they got everything they needed so maybe didn’t see the need.

**DET:** Didn’t see the need? I have to complete my investigation too. Good job I’ve got some tape on me. *(Gets a roll of tape out of his pocket and tries to find the end of the tape)* Oh for goodness sake – who used this last? How many times do you have to tell people, fold it over after you have used it. Ah, here we go. *(Pulls the tape out and puts it across the table and chair but it all gets tangled up and looks a mess but he leaves it anyway – starts to put the roll away then realises he needs to fold the end over)* There. Right, interviewing suspects! I may as well start with you two.

**DAVINA:** *(Horrified)*But you can’t believe that I would be a suspect, surely.

**DET:** Everyone who was in this building at the time of the murder is a suspect.

**DAVINA:** But I am a victim, not a suspect.

**DET:** And how is that Miss...?

**DAVINA:** Overley-Hill. Davina Overley-Hill. I believe this was a deliberate attempt to ruin my career.

**DET:** You mean to say that someone murdered Mr Strong just to get back at you?

**DAVINA:** Exactly.

**DET:** Can you tell me why someone would want to do that?

**DAVINA:** You’re the Detective. You tell me.

**DET:** Perhaps it was Mr Strong himself who was out to ruin your career?

**DAVINA:** Of course not. Max and I had a very special relationship.

**DET:** In what way?

**DAVINA:** This is all too much for me now and I have a migraine coming on. I need to lie down in a darkened room.

*(She exits – the other two watch her leave)*

**DET:** Wow! She is really something isn’t she?

**NOAH:** She sure is *(adoringly)*.

**DET:** *(He notices)* Tell me Mr...?

**NOAH:** Noah Deere.

**DET:** You don’t know your own name?

**NOAH:** Of course I do. It’s Noah Deere.

**DET:** Noah Deere! *(Starts to laugh but thinks better of it)*  So, tell me, Mr Deere, what do you think of Miss Overley-Hill’s statement that she is the real victim here?

**NOAH:** Poor Davina is terribly upset. She’s had a lot to cope with today, what with finding out she has an understudy, not having enough lines in the script and then Max was just so awful to her and made her so angry.

**DET:** Angry?

**NOAH:** *(Realising)*  Well not **that** angry obviously. To be honest, Detective, he was so horrible to everyone, especially today, so everyone was angry with him.

**DET:** Everyone?

**NOAH:** Yes, everyone. But I seriously doubt anyone of **us** would have murdered him.

**DET:** But someone did.

**NOAH:** Yes, but not one of us.

**DET:** *(Paces while thinking)* You and Ms Overley-Hill.....are you...?

**NOAH:** No, we are not.

**DET:** But I’m sensing you’d like to be.

**NOAH:** We’re just good friends that’s all.

**DET:** And how did it make you feel to hear the deceased being so awful to your ‘friend’?

**NOAH:** I’ll admit that it made me want to punch him in that smarmy little face of his! But I would never kill anyone. Look, if you don’t mind, I think I will go and check on Davina. There is a murderer on the loose and I don’t want her being alone. *(He exits)*

**DET:** *(Writes in notebook)* First two suspects. Two very strong motives. *(Makes a phone call)* Hello? Is that the lab? Well can you put me through? I am Detective Bootlicker. Bootlicker? I am the Chief Investigator on the ‘Pantomime’ murder. Yes, that’s what I said. The ‘Pantomime’ murder. What’s that? ....... *(Suddenly turns around to look behind him)* There’s no one behind me! *(Realises)* Oh ha ha, very funny. *(exits)*

*(Captain James Morgan enters – a little tipsy. Checking no one is around he takes out his hip flask from his pocket, it’s empty so he takes out another hip flask from another pocket and has a swig. Lucas enters holding a beautiful headdress with a large jewel. As Lucas starts to speak the Captain quickly tries to hide the flask.)*

**LUCAS:** Captain, you have to see this*.....(notices)* What are you doing? Is that alcohol?

**CAPT:** No! Well yes. I was just having a little nip. A bit of dutch courage and all that. What’s that you’ve got?

**LUCAS:** My new Headdress for the Panto – do you like it? It will match my ‘Van Cleef and Arpels Yellow Gold and Ruby Trefle Ring’ perfectly.

**CAPT:** It looks great old chap. Did Freda make it?

**LUCAS:** Freda? God no. She couldn’t make a simple headband let alone a headdress. I made it myself, with some things I have collected.

**CAPT:** Is that a real jewel?

**LUCAS:** *(Shifty)* No, of course not. Where would I get a real jewel?

**CAPT:** Did you know, in my days as Naval Commander onboard the HMS Hennessey, we regularly had Royalty onboard.

**LUCAS:** Here we go. This better not be as long as the last story you told me earlier. I don’t usually nap during the day, it’s thrown me all out.

**CAPT:** One particular time we were assigned to take care of the ‘Crown Jewels’. We were taking them on a tour of the Far East. We visited 15 different ports...

**LUCAS:** And drunk a few too I bet!

**CAPT:** ....and paraded the old ‘Crown Jewels’ to tens of thousands of onlookers.

**LUCAS:** Woah, steady on Captain, TMI and all that!

**CAPT:** Now - **they** were jewels.

**LUCAS:** Well, thanks for that story Captain. I’ll remember that the next time I’m laid wide awake at two o’clock in the morning.

*(Freda enters)*

**FREDA:** Ah, there you are gentlemen.......and Lucas. I’m not interrupting anything am I?

**LUCAS:** Not at all. Just old ‘Uncle Albert’ here telling me a ‘gem’ of a Naval story.

**FREDA:** That Detective wants to question you both. Do you know, he had the cheek to suggest that I may have murdered Max because he criticised my costumes.

**CAPT:** Well to be fair, Freda, you do take things a little too personally if anyone makes the slightest negative comment about one of your garments.

**FREDA:** *(Starts to get angry)* That’s because everyone always thinks that they’re the expert. They actually believe that they could do a better job than me!

*(Lucas hides his headdress behind his back)*

Well I’ll tell you something, **none of you** have **any** idea how difficult my job is. And do you know why it’s difficult? Because I have the task of making costumes big enough to fit **EVERYONE’S GIANT EGO!** *(She storms off)*

*(Mrs Bakewell, the Tea Lady enters with a tray of cups of tea – is nearly knocked over by Freda on her exit.)*

**MRS B:** Whoa, watch it Freda! *(To Capt. and Lucas.)*  She nearly knocked all this out of my hands. It’s a fresh brew n’ all. What’s wrong with her now?

**CAPT:** The usual. Would you like me to take that tray from you, Mrs Bakewell?

**MRS B:** No, no. It’s fine. I’ll just pop it down here. *(Puts tray on the table where Max was murdered, ignores the tape.)* And no more of this Mrs Bakewell – call me Sheree, please. Nice cup of tea, gents?

**LUCAS:** Yes please, Sheree.

**MRS B:** It’s Mrs Bakewell to you! Where are your manners?

**LUCAS:** *(Taken aback)* Sor-ree! *(pulls a face at her as she turns away)*

**MRS B:** *(To Lucas)* Here you go. *(starts to hand cup over to him but then looks inside.)* Oh, wait a minute. What’s that floating about in there?

**LUCAS:** *(Goes to look inside the cup.)* Where?

**MRS B:** That there, bobbing up and down. Wait, it’ll bob back up again in a second.

**LUCAS:** I think a fresh brew might be a good idea.

**MRS B:** Nonsense. I’ll easily fish this out. *(Puts her fingers in the tea, Lucas, horrified, reacts to every twist and turn of her fingers)* Almost got the little blighter. *(Final swish then she lifts her finger out of the cup and holds it up)* There it is! Aw, it was just one of them little fruit flies, no harm done. There you are, get that down yer while it’s still warm.

*(Lucas reluctantly takes the cuppa, looks around for somewhere to dump it)*

**LUCAS:** Well, I suppose I’d better put this headdress away before the Detective sees*...(realises)* ..I mean, before Freda sees it.

**MRS B:** *(As she hands Captain a cup of tea she notices the head dress)* Well, that’s beautiful, that is. Look at that jewel. Just a minute. *(She takes a closer look – Lucas looks concerned.)*  That jewel looks familiar.

**LUCAS:** Does it? Oh, well there are plenty of jewels like this around. It’s the latest trend you know.

**MRS B:** Is it now? It’s funny though because only yesterday Betsy, the Cleaner, was showing me one just like it – it was an heirloom from her great aunt Beatrice. Where did you get this one?

**LUCAS:** *(Worried, shifty)* As I said, they are available everywhere at the moment, Amazon, ebay, B&M. I better be going - that Detective is desperate to interview me.

*(She watches him go off, her suspicion heightened, meanwhile Captain is pouring the contents of his hip flask into his cuppa)*

**MRS B:** How’s that tea, Captain?

**CAPT:** *(Hides the flask)* Just perfect Mrs.....Sheree.

**MRS B:** How about a bit of Chocolate Cake to go with it? I’ve made it myself.

**CAPT:** Even better.

**MRS B:** I’ll go get some for you. Not til after I’ve had my slice though – you know I always get the first slice. *(She starts to leave, stops and takes a letter from her apron pocket)* Oh, I almost forgot, Captain. A letter arrived for you. Looks important.

**CAPT:** A letter? For me? Here?

**MRS B:** *(She passes it to him)* Looking at the envelope, I think it’s from the Naval Command Headquarters. I know that because my father was in the Navy too, quite high up I’ll have you know.

**CAPT:** *(Concerned)* I didn’t know your father was in the Navy. Maybe I knew him

**MRS B:** Maybe. You would think they would have sent such an important letter to your home address...... unless you’ve forgotten to update them with your new one, you do move around alot. Although how they managed to track you down here I don’t know. *(Her tone suggests she may have had something to do with it).*

**CAPT:** *(He looks at the front of the envelope).* Yes. Strange that. *(Turns the envelope over.)* Wait a minute. This has been opened.

**MRS B:** T’was like that when it arrived.

**CAPT:** It looks like it’s been steamed open – from a kettle maybe?

**MRS B:** Well I hope no one has been reading your personal mail. I’ll go and get that cake shall I? *(She exits)*

**CAPT:** *(Ponders for a moment looking at the letter – then in the direction of Mrs Bakewell, with ‘purpose’)* Wait a moment, Sheree, I’ll help you with that cake. *(Follows her off)*

*(Mia and Phil Anders enter)*

**PHIL:** That Detective is a bit of an imbecile, don’t you think?

**MIA:** Totally. You know that **this** is his first ever case.

**PHIL:** How do you know that?

**MIA:** My mother works for the force. Apparently he’s a regular PC who’s been desperate to be a Detective for ages. Always hanging around with CID and ‘brown-nosing’. Reckons he’s a master in the powers of deduction.

**PHIL:** Well, we all have to begin somewhere I suppose, good of them to give him a chance.

**MIA:** True. But the only reason they gave him the chance was because all the rest of CID are busy working some really high-profile case. He was the only one available, or willing, to take this on.

**PHIL:** A complete novice then. Makes you wonder whether he will ever catch him.......*(quickly adds)* or her.

**MIA:** Who do you think it was?

**PHIL:** Oh, I don’t know if I should speculate.

**MIA:** Why not? We are the newbies here so we can look at this objectively. Personally, I think it’s Davina.

**PHIL:** Are you just saying that so you can play Cinders?

**MIA:** Of course not. But she **was** very upset with Max. And they did have a bit of a thing going before all this.

**PHIL:** **I** think it could be Lucas. He’s.....what’s the word....... ‘shifty’.

**MIA:** Yes, you’re right there. I could have sworn I saw him earlier going through someone’s coat pockets, but I might have been mistaken. The Captain doesn’t appear to be all that he seems either. And then there’s Noah who appears to be so nice and sweet but is so devoted to Davina he might have felt the need to protect her.

**PHIL:** So it could be any of them.

**MIA:** Yes, back to square one.

**PHIL:** Even us!

**MIA:** Well it certainly wasn’t me!

**PHIL:** Maybe not. But Max did seem to know alot about you.

**MIA:** He knew nothing about me – he was just saying that to rile me. Not that there is anything to know. I have nothing to hide.

**PHIL:** Hmm....

**MIA:** What’s that supposed to mean?

**PHIL:** Nothing. I just said Hmm....

**MIA:** Yes, but it was the way you said it.

**PHIL:** How did I say it?

**MIA:** Kind of.....accusingly.

**PHIL:** How can you sense that from me just saying ‘Hmm’?

**MIA:** I just can. And you’re not so perfect either. Max definitely had something on you.

**PHIL:** Nonsense. I have nothing to hide either.

**MIA:** Hmmm.

*(He gives her a look)*

**PHIL:** *(Switches on the charm)* So....Mia. Not to change the subject or anything but..... do you have any plans for this evening?

**MIA:** What? You are not seriously trying to ‘hit’ on me right in the middle of a murder investigation?

**PHIL:** Why not? It’s the best time. We can look after each other.

**MIA:** No, I don’t think so. (*Sits away from him)*

*(He’s slightly deflated but perks up when Davina walks back into the room)*

**PHIL:** Davina? This must be so difficult for you. Is there anything I can do to ease your pain?

**DAVINA:** I’m not sure there is anything anyone can do. No one seems to understand how difficult it is for someone like me. Being an actress, we always keep our emotions on the surface, you know, which means we can be easily hurt. You, of course. will understand that, being an Actor yourself.

**PHIL:** *(Sympathetic)* I do Davina, I do......*(pauses).....* So - Davina...... not to change to subject or anything but......do you have any plans for this evening?

*(Noah enters and interrupts)*

**NOAH:** Phil! There you are. *(Realises he’s interrupted something.)* What’s going on?

**PHIL:** Nothing, nothing that can’t wait til later. *(winks at Davina, she doesn’t react)* What can I do for you?

**NOAH:** I have just been speaking to Mrs Bakewell, our Tea Lady. She says she thinks she may have upset you just now, when you were in the kitchen helping her with her Chocolate cake.

**PHIL:**Why would she think that?

**NOAH:** She said she laughed at you when you struggled to pronounce her name.

**PHIL:** What? *(Laughs uneasily.)*  ‘Bakewell’ is not exactly a tongue-twister.

**NOAH:** She was maybe talking about her first name, Sheree?

**PHIL:** Oh that! I was just joking with her.

*(Freda enters carrying a rather vulgar looking ballgown)*

**FREDA:** Davina! Have I got a treat for you. I’ve finally finished your beautiful ballgown. I feel like your Fairy Godmother. I can I assure you that no pumpkins were harmed during the making of this. *(Laughs at her own joke.)* Stand up dear. Let’s check it’s the right length.

*(Freda holds the hideous Ballgown up to Davina who has a look of horror on her face at how awful it is, some of the others find it funny.)*

It’s absolutely perfect. *(To the others)* Aw, look at her face, she’s obviously so happy she’s holding back tears. Well, Davina, you keep hold of this for now, try it on, parade around in it if you wish. I know you’re dying to. Off I go back to my sewing machine - I’m working on Phil’s costume next.

**PHIL:** Oh, good god!

*(Freda exits, Davina, in a state of shock, flops back into her chair and throws the dress aside)*

**MRS B:** *(Enters with more tea)* More tea everyone. Ah Mr Phil, there you are, I hope I didn’t upset you back there but hopefully a nice cup of tea and a bit of my chocolate cake will make up for any offense I may have caused. I noticed you eyeing it up earlier, like you couldn’t wait to dive in. *(Notices Davina)* Davina, are you ok my love? You look dreadful – even more than usual. Here Noah, hand this cup of tea over to Davina there, looks like she needs it.

*(Noah takes the tea off Mrs Bakewell but he trips up and spills it all over Davina – she gets up and shrieks)*

**NOAH:** Davina! I’m so sorry. Have I scalded you?

**MRS B:** Oh, don’t worry, it wasn’t hot – it’s been stewing in the pot for the last hour or so.

**NOAH:** Thank goodness. I am so sorry Davina, I truly am.

**DAVINA:** You..... you....... careless idiot!

**MRS B.** Stop making such a fuss. It’ll easily clean up. Here, this’ll do. *(She picks up Davina’s ballgown which she’s mistaken for an old rag and starts to wipe up the tea, she then throws it back on the floor)* Here, come with me to the kitchen, I’ll help you get out that stain. While we’re there you can tell me all about that argument you had with Max before he was murdered.

**DAVINA:** What argument? We just had ‘words’ that’s all. He was beastly to me – everyone here saw it.

**MRS B:** No, I’m talking about that really big argument you had with him, before everyone else arrived. You must feel terrible, threatening to kill him like you did and then he ends up dead!

**DAVINA:** I didn’t do anything of the sort.

**MRS B:** Don’t worry my dear. I’m sure the Detective will understand it was just an argument.

**DAVINA:** The Detective? Have you told him?

**MRS B:** Not yet. But he wants to interview me after I’ve dished out my Chocolate cake. Now come on, let’s get you sorted.

**DAVINA:** *(Ponders for a moment)* Thank you, Mrs Bakewell. Then, maybe, I can help you with that cake.

**MRS B:** That would be great my dear. Oh, which reminds me, I couldn’t find a knife. Noah, do you still have yours?

**NOAH:** *(Surprised)* Mine? I don’t have a knife.

**MRS B:** Yes you do, that sharp looking one. I saw you with it earlier, around the same time Davina and Max were having that heated argument. Anyway, if you find it, it would be useful.

*(Mrs Bakewell and Davina exit)*

**NOAH:** *(Aware that Phil and Mia have overheard this conversation)*  Erm, I’ll go help with the cake.

*(Silence for a moment)*

**MIA:** Hmmm. *(Phil looks at her)*

*(The Captain and Lucas re-enter)*

**CAPT:** Has the cake not arrived yet?

**MIA:** Not yet. It does look amazing though, doesn’t it.

**LUCAS:** I’ve never known such excitement over a chocolate cake.

**CAPT:** I’m surprised there’s any left after the way you were ogling it earlier, ready to pounce.

**LUCAS:** I was not. I’m well aware that Mrs Bakewell always has the first slice – it’s like the law or something.

*(Freda re-enters)*

**FREDA:** Phil, I just needed to check with you that you are not allergic to wool. Our last leading man was covered in an awful rash, right around his groin area. I don’t want the same happening to you if I can help it. *(She sees the ballgown on the floor and picks it up – anger building up.)* What on earth has happened to this?

**MIA:** Mrs Bakewell mistook it for an old rag and used it to clean up some tea.

**FREDA:** An old rag? AN OLD RAG! All the work I have put into this and it’s ruined! How will I ever be able to recreate such a masterpiece. Just wait til I see her. Where is she?

**MIA:** In the kitchen I think.

**FREDA:** Right! *(Starts to march off towards the kitchen)*

**CAPT:** Can’t it wait until after cake?

**FREDA:** Cake! I’ll give her cake. *(She storms off)*

**PHIL:**You know, I don’t actually like Chocolate cake.

*(Huge gasp from everyone)*

**LUCAS:** How can you not like Chocolate cake?

**PHIL:** I just don’t have a sweet tooth.

**LUCAS:** But it doesn’t seem normal. It would be like the Captain here not liking Rum.

**CAPT:** Now there’s a drink to warm the cockles. Why don’t you like Rum?

**PHIL:** I do like it.

**CAPT:** Then why say you didn’t?

**PHIL:** I didn’t. I said I don’t like Chocolate cake.

**CAPT:** Don’t like Chocolate cake! That’s like.... that’s like...

**LUCAS:** It’s ok Captain, we’ve done that.

*(Mrs Bakewell and the others return with the sliced up cake.)*

**MRS B:** Here we are. The time has arrived. Here goes, the first slice*. (She takes a bite - makes some ‘yum’ noises).*

**NOAH***:* How is it, Mrs B?

*(Mrs B, mouthful of cake, nods as if to say ‘it’s great’, she puts the plate down then as she is about to speak she suddenly grabs at her throat)*

**FREDA:** Mrs Bakewell? What’s the matter?

*(Mrs Bakewell continues grabbing at her throat then falls to the floor)*

**MIA:** Is she choking? Someone do something.

*(Mrs B makes a meal out of her ‘death’, then lies still)*

**DAVINA:** Is she...? Is she...?

*(Noah goes over and checks for a pulse)*

**NOAH:** She’s dead.

**END OF SCENE 3**

**ACT 1 SCENE 4**

*No one on stage, there is a ‘CAUTION Wet Floor’ Sign at the very location that Mrs Bakewell died, but a bit of paper saying ‘Dead Body’ over so the sign reads ‘CAUTION Dead Body’. Davina’s handbag is left open on a chair at the other side of the stage. Lucas creeps on stage, making sure he is not seen, then starts to rummage through Davina’s bag, he picks out a bottle and gasps – the bottle says ‘Cyanide’ on it. The Captain enters and sees him.*

**CAPT:** What are you doing?

*(Lucas jumps and shrieks, throwing the bottle into the air behind him – the Captain catches it)*

What’s this?

**LUCAS:** It’s Cyanide.

**CAPT:** Cyanide? Where did you get it?

**LUCAS:** It was in Davina’s bag and I’m willing to guess that this has something to do with Mrs Bakewell’s death.

**CAPT:** Well I never. What were you doing going through Davina’s bag?

**LUCAS:** I wasn’t going through her bag. I saw the bottle sticking out that’s all.

**CAPT:** Cyanide eh? You know back in my seafaring days....

**LUCAS:** Hang on Captain, if you are going to tell me another one of your stories, at least let me have a swig of this first *(Takes the Cyanide back off him).*

*(Detective enters, Lucas hides the bottle behind his back and can’t help looking guilty.)*

**DET:** Ah gents. I need to take a statement from you both as to your whereabouts at the time of, and leading up to, Mrs Bakewell’s murder. *(Looks at Lucas)* Are you ok, Mr Campley?)

**LUCAS:** *(Squeaks)* Yes! *(Clears throat then much lower.)* I mean, yes.

**DET:** Glad to hear it. Any minute now I am expecting a very important phone call from the lab which will tell me the exact cause of death, but I strongly believe that Mrs Bakewell was murdered by.....you’re going to find it hard to believe..........her own Chocolate cake. Literally ‘Death By Chocolate’. *(laughs)* I’ve always wanted to say that. *(His phone rings)* This is it. No doubt the phone call which will prove my theory. *(Answers phone)* Detective Bootlicker here. I know what you are going to say but tell me your findings anyway........what? *(looks confused)* What accident? I don’t know what you mean. I haven’t been **in** a road accident so I certainly don’t need to claim compensation. *(Exits while talking)*

**CAPT:** Why didn’t you show him the Cyanide?

**LUCAS:** Because he might not believe that I found it in Davina’s bag – plus our fingerprints are now all over it.

**CAPT:** Here, use my handkerchief to clean it. *(Looks through his pockets to find hankie, starts to pull out hip flasks)*  Nope, not in there. *(Eventually finds it.)* Here. *(Hands Hankie over to Lucas who just looks at it)*

**LUCAS:** Has that been used?

**CAPT:** No, it hasn’t. Well maybe once. Come on, he’ll be back any second.

*(They start cleaning the bottle as Detective walks back in still on the phone, while he finishes his phone call Lucas and Captain and trying to pass the bottle to each other as neither wants to be caught with it.)*

**DET:** *(Hangs up phone)* Damn nuisance calls. Right gents, where were we?

*(They stand bolt upright, hiding the bottle behind their backs looking guilty again)*

Are you sure everything’s ok?

*(Phil Anders enters)*

Ah, Mr Anders. I have something very important to discuss with you. *(To Lucas and Captain)* If you don’t mind gents, I would like to speak with Mr Anders first.......in private.

**CAPT:** Yes, of course old chap.

*(Lucas and the Captain both exit, knocking into each other as they both are desperate to leave.)*

**PHIL:** What do you need to speak with me about, Detective?

**DET:** Sit down Mr Anders if you would. *(Full interrogation mode)* Something has been brought to my attention. Well actually I found it via Google, but it is something that you failed to mention when I interviewed you about the first murder.

**PHIL:** I told you all you needed to know.

**DET:** So why then, Mr Anders, did you fail to mention that you have served time in Prison?

**PHIL:** Because I haven’t.

**DET:** You are denying this, even though I have strong evidence to the contrary.

**PHIL:** I should know if I have been in the cells or not, and I haven’t.

**DET:** Then can you please explain this photograph. It is quite blatantly a ‘mugshot’ of you dressed in standard Prison issue clothing. Do you confirm or deny this?

**PHIL:** I do not deny that is me.

**DET:** So tell me then why you failed to mention that you have served time.

**PHIL:** I have not been in jail.

**DET:** I am going to give you one more chance to tell me the truth.

**PHIL:** *(Getting angry now)* For the last time I have not been in jail.

**DET:** Then why is there a ‘mugshot’ of you plastered all over the internet?

**PHIL:** Because **that** is a photo from a T.V. Show!

**DET:** *(Silence as he realises his mistake)* Oh!

**PHIL:** I played ‘Cellmate’ no. 5 in an episode of ‘The Bill’. You would think, Detective, you would have better tools available to you than ‘Google’.

**DET:** An honest mistake Mr Anders. Tell me then, where did you learn your craft?

**PHIL:** I went to the best of them all. So good, it need not be named.

**DET:** And what was that?

**PHIL:** I told you. The best acting school of all.

**DET:** Can you not name it?

**PHIL:** I don’t have to, you should know which one I mean.

**DET:** But I don’t so tell me.

**PHIL:** *(Getting angry again)* I don’t have to tell you. You should know.

**DET:** But I don’t.

**PHIL:** Look it up.

**DET:** Just tell me.

**PHIL:** IT WAS ‘WADA’ OK! WADA!

**DET:** *(Surprised)* Wada? Do you mean RADA?

**PHIL:** That’s what I said.

**DET:** Mr Anders, I think I am starting to understand something about you and what I want to know is..... did Mr Strong know about your problem? Did he threaten to ruin your career?

**PHIL:** I have no idea what you are talking about?

*(Detective’s phone rings)*

**DET:** Hello. Yes, hold on a moment. *(To Phil)* I have to take this. We will continue this conversation later. *(Exits)*

*(Phil paces around, looking troubled. Davina enters and doesn’t see Phil at first, she is covered up with a shawl and wearing dark glasses and holding a canister of ‘pepper spray’. She nervously heads over to her handbag. As she gets there, Phil is now behind her, watching her)*

**PHIL:** Davina – is that you?

*(She shrieks, turns around and points the Pepper spray right at him – he holds his arms up as if surrendering)*

**DAVINA:** I’m warning you. I have pepper spray and I’m not afraid to use it!

**PHIL:** Davina STOP! It’s me, Phil. Put your weapon away Davina please.

*(She reluctantly lowers to can – he takes it gently away from her)*

That’s better. *(Relieved but jokes a little.)*  People pay a lot of money to see this face you know. Now tell me, why are you acting like this?

**DAVINA:** Why? WHY? Two people have been murdered. Two people in the same day. And two people who could only have been murdered by someone involved in this Pantomime. I could be next on the victim list.

**PHIL:** But we cannot give up. ‘The show must go on’ as they say.

**DAVINA:** What good will the show be if we are all dead?

**PHIL:** Now that would be some show – ‘The Good, the Bad and the Zombies’. At least those awful costumes would fit the piece.

**DAVINA:** I don’t know how you can joke at a time like this. *(She is rummaging around in her handbag)*  That’s strange.

**PHIL:** Have you lost something?

**DAVINA:** No. *(Hiding the fact that she obviously has)*

**NOAH:** *(Enters – looks a bit put out to see Phil chatting to Davina)* Hi guys. I’ve just seen the Detective. He says they found traces of Cyanide in Mrs Bakewell’s Chocolate cake. So glad I didn’t sneak a taste now, I admit I was tempted.

**PHIL:** Has he finished on the phone?

**NOAH:** Yes. Do you need to see him?

**PHIL:** No. I’m just going to go over my lines for later. If he comes back tell him I’m busy and need total peace and quiet. *(He exits)*

**NOAH:**He’s up to something, I’m sure of it. It wouldn’t surprise me if he was the murderer.

**DAVINA:** You think so. I was actually just starting to trust him.

**NOAH:** But that’s what they do. They are sneaky. They gain your trust and then before you know it *(make slit throat gesture)*

**DAVINA:** *(Panicky again)* Oh god you’re right, Neville.

**NOAH:** Noah.

**DAVINA:** Yes. He was being so nice to me. Too nice. And I think he may have been going through my bag too.

**NOAH:** It wouldn’t surprise me. Lots of things have been going missing. Even the Caretaker’s glass eye. He took it out to remove a piece of wood shaving, put it down for a minute and when he went to pop it back in.....gone! Although, to be fair, it could have just rolled off somewhere, but without his eye he couldn’t do a thorough search.

**DAVINA:** *(She hasn’t been listening at all.)* Do you think that he and Mia are in on it together?

**NOAH:** What? The Caretaker and Mia?

**DAVINA:** No. Phil and Mia? They are both new to the group. Who knows where they have come from.

**NOAH:** Possibly. I think the thing to remember now is...don’t trust anyone. Except me of course, and you.

**DAVINA:** Oh, this just terrible. How on earth I am going to able to give my best performance whilst constantly looking over my shoulder. But if I complain, they will just replace me with my understudy. I bet this was her plan all along. Commit murder, make me paranoid so that I refuse to perform for my own safety and ‘bamm’ – she takes my role. *(Sudden realisation.)* You know, I think I may have solved this whole case - I must remember to tell the Detective when he next interviews me.

*(The Director enters, the cast filter in, Davina is distracted - still searching through her bag.)*

**DIRECT:** Ok everyone. I have an announcement to make. Is everyone here? Good. I have good news from the Producer. We have found a replacement for Max. He is an experienced actor and should have no problem stepping in at short notice.

**DIRECT Cont’d:**

The bad news is that he won’t be available until Dress Rehearsal – but we are all professionals here and should be able to cope with people reading in for now.

**CAPT:** Do we have a replacement Tea Lady?

**DIRECT:** I’m afraid not. Mrs Bakewell was a volunteer and unfortunately our budget would not stretch to hiring someone to fill that role – so you’re going to have to bring your own refreshments.

**LUCAS:** Nothing new for our Captain here, then.

**DIRECT:** I know this has been a very challenging and upsetting day so far but we have a show to put on so let’s get down to business. Our choreographer will be arriving tomorrow for our first dance rehearsal so make sure you are prepared for that.

**PHIL:** Did you say dance? I’m guessing I won’t be needed for that then.

**DIRECT:** **Everybody** will be required.

**PHIL:** But when I accepted the position, dance was not mentioned.

**DIRECT:** Everyone in a Pantomime is required to dance a little. Don’t worry, it won’t be too difficult. Now, we are going to set the scene where Cinders is locked away in the room and sings her first solo. You’ve got half an hour to warm your voice up Davina. Everyone else, please get learning your lines for the following scene.

*(Director exits)*

**LUCAS:** *(To Captain)* Did you see Davina rummaging through her bag the whole time the Director was speaking?

**CAPT:** I can’t say I noticed *(hiccup).* Where did you put the bottle?

**LUCAS:** I wrapped it up in a dishcloth from the kitchen and hid it in a dusty old toolbox at the back of the storage cupboard. No one will ever find it. Although I’m going to keep my eye on Davina from now on – if it *was* hers then she could already be on the lookout for her next victim.

**CAPT:** Good idea. Best stay alert. *(Takes another swig from his hip flask as he exits)*

**FREDA:** *(Heads over to Phil)* Mr Anders, I’ve got part of your costume ready so I think it would be a good idea for you to wear it for the dance rehearsal tomorrow. That way I can watch and see if any adjustments need to be made. Here’s what I’ve done so far.

*(Hands him a pair of very small looking lycra leggings/tights)*

**PHIL:** *(Holds them up.)* Do I have something to go over the top of them?

**FREDA:** No, that’s it for now.

**LUCAS:** *(Seeing the tight leggings)* I usually hate dance rehearsals but now I can’t wait!

*(Then Mr Joiner, the Stage Manager enters)*

**MR J:** Hello folks. Nice to see you all. Can’t believe we are back here already, doesn’t seem five minutes since we were here for last year’s show.

**FREDA:** Oh, hello Mr Joiner, nice to see you. Mia, Phil, this is our Stage Manager. If you need anything sorting behind the scenes, he’s your man.

**MR J:** Aw Freda, you flatter me. Nice to meet you guys. How terrible to hear about Max and poor old Mrs Bakewell. That detective was speaking to me when I arrived. Obviously I have an alibi for when it happened but I said to him that I’ve been involved with this company a long time now and I can’t believe that any of these ‘PRATTS’ would be capable of murder.

**MIA:** *(Taken aback)* I’m sorry, what did you just say?

**FREDA:** *(Clarifies)* PRATTS – Prigton Royal and Trenton Theatre Society.

**MIA:** Ahh.

**MR J:** *(Continues)* Now, I know that Max was a bit of a, excuse my French, ‘barsteward’, but who would want to murder Mrs Bakewell? Everyone loved her ....and her cakes.

**MIA:** We didn’t know her very well, but she seemed lovely.

**MR J:** Of course, you’re both new. Well my money’s on you two then! *(Laughs)* Just kidding. You’ll get used to my humour by the end of the run.

*(Phil, not amused, exits)*

**MIA:** *(Gives a forced laugh)* I’m sure we will. Nice to meet you. *(Exits)*

**MR J:** Eh, Freda, did you ever find out how those bloomers got wrapped around the lighting rig and caught fire during last year’s Panto?

**FREDA:** It’s funny you should say that because I did happen to find out, but only recently – and it wasn’t bloomers, it was some pantaloons I made especially for our leading man last year. He decided it would be funny to attach them to a helium balloon and then let go of it. Obviously when it hit the hot lights the balloon burst, then the pantaloons got stuck on the lights. At the time though I had no idea about any of this. I had a right job trying to think of an explanation for the Chief Fire Officer I can tell you. The lengths some people will go to get out of wearing a costume. This was the same night that the ‘cow’ went rogue.

**MR J:** Ooh yes, nasty incident that. Well hopefully there will be no mishaps this year.

**FREDA:** I should hope not – but everyone seems perfectly happy with their costumes so far so I think we’ll be alright.

**DAVINA:** *(Loudly and rudely)* How on earth am I supposed to prepare for my scene and warm my voice up with all this blabbering going on.

**MR J:** Oh dear. Looks like our Leading Lady is on the verge of one her strops. She’s not gonna be happy that I will be working on scenery in the corridor through there and making a bit of noise.

**FREDA:** Your name will be mud! Oh, actually, while you’ve got your tools. Do you think you could have a look at my sewing machine. It keeps jamming, I think something might have got stuck in the mechanics.

**MR J:** No bother Freda*. (He looks in his toolbox and lifts out a large yellow screwdriver.)* That’s far too big for the job. I’ll go have a look and see if I can find a smaller one. *(He closes up his toolbox and exits with it.)*

**FREDA:** Thank you. I’ll go prep it for surgery. *(laughs at her joke as she exits)*

**DAVINA:** Thank goodness for that. I can now practice in peace. Although how I am expected to sing after all the stress and upset of the day I don’t know.

**NOAH:** You have a beautiful voice Davina, you will be fine. I will leave you alone to warm up. *(Starts to leave but then stops.)* Did you find what you were looking for?

**DAVINA:** No I didn’t, I can’t for the life of me*......(stops suddenly suspicious)* Why do you want to know?

**NOAH:** No reason. *(He exits)*

*(Davina watches him leave then takes position to start warming up)*

**DAVINA:** *(Clears throat)* Ah ah ah ah ah aahhhhhh *(starts off ok but then makes an awful screeching noise – surprises herself. This happens a few times, longer and louder each time.)*

**NOAH:** Davina! Are you ok?

**DAVINA:** Yes, I’m fine why?

*(Others rush on after hearing the terrible noise)*

**PHIL:** What was that? Are you ok Davina?

**DAVINA:** Yes, why does everyone keep asking if I’m ok?

**NOAH:** We were concerned when we heard that noise.

**DAVINA:** What noise?

**LUCAS:** It sounded like a cat being strangled.

**DAVINA:** I can assure you all that I am fine and I was just doing some vocal warm ups.

**LUCAS:** Ah, that explains it then. It’s alright everyone, it was just Davina singing.

**DAVINA:** And I do not sound like a strangled cat.

**NOAH:** No of course you don’t Davina.

**MR J:** *(Enters carrying a dusty old toolbox.)* What on earth was that noise? Sounded like a dog being castrated.

**LUCAS:** That’s a much better description. It wasn’t shrill enough to be a strangled cat. *(Recognises the Tool Box)* Erm, ........... what’s that you’ve got there, Mr J?

**MR J:** This? It’s a shabby old tool box I found at the back of the cupboard through there. I needed a small screwdriver and was hoping I might find one in here.

*(He puts it down and starts brushing the dust off and opening it – the others gather round interested)*

**NOAH:** That looks like it hasn’t been opened in years, I hope there’s not a dead mouse in it.

**MIA:** If there are any spiders I’m off!

*(Lucas tries to get Captain’s attention but he is a little bit worse for wear – Lucas nudges him in the side)*

**CAPT:** Ow! What did you do that for?

**LUCAS:** Look what Mr Joiner has. He found it at the back of the cupboard through there.

**CAPT:** *(Takes a moment to realise)* Oh!

**LUCAS:** Yes, oh! *(To Mr Joiner)* Maybe I can help you with that Mr J?

**MR J:** I wouldn’t hear of it. This is filthy and I wouldn’t want you ruining them beautifully manicured nails of yours. There we are, got it open! *(Opens the lid)*

**MIA:** What’s that there? A dishcloth?

**NOAH:** Yes, it looks new though.

**MR J:** *(Unwraps the cloth)* What on earth? How did this get here?

**PHIL:** What is it?

**MR J:** *(Lifts it up for all to see)* It’s a bottle of Cyanide.

**END OF SCENE**

**ACT 1 SCENE 5**

*(Davina in position for setting a scene, the rest of the cast are*

*milling around.)*

**NOAH:** How’s your throat Davina?

**DAVINA:** Feels a bit better thank you.

**NOAH:** Are you sure you don’t want a vocal sweet? They’re very good.

**DAVINA:** Please don’t be offended but I’d rather not risk eating something someone else has given to me.

*(Mr Joiner enters carrying a bit of wood)*

**PHIL:** Mr Joiner, have you given that bottle to the detective yet?

**MR J:** Not yet. He’s on his way back. He said to wrap it up and keep it safe til he gets here. He’s hoping he can lift some fingerprints from it.

**MIA:** I doubt the murderer would have been stupid enough to leave any fingerprints on it.

**MR J:** Ah, but it’s not just fingerprints now though is it. They can lift DNA from anything. Hair, tiny skin cells, sweat. Oh, it’s very difficult to get away with murder these days. *(Pause while the others digest what he has just said)* Right, I’m nearly done with putting this bit of scenery together but I just need a bit of help with this last piece. Is anyone free to help?

*(They all suddenly are keen to help – ad libs of ‘yes, I’ll help, let me etc. and they follow him off leaving empty stage.)*

**DIRECT:** *(Enters.)* Right, let’s crack on with the scene. *(Looks around.)* Where is everyone? *(Hears noises offstage – goes to see and shouts to them.)* What are you doing? I’m sure Mr Joiner doesn’t need all of you. Come on, I want to get this scene finished and then we can go home for the day.

*(They start to filter back on)*

**DIRECT Cont’d:**

Ok. Take your position please Davina. The rest of you are on straight after this scene so be ready. Ok Davina, this is the bit where Cinders attracts the mice and other animals by singing some beautiful scales. Whenever you’re ready. Go.

**DAVINA: “**Oh I wish I could go to the ball.” *(Starts to sings sweetly.)*

“Ahh, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah....”

*(Loud hammering noise offstage, she stops, the noise stops. She carries on.)*

“Ahh, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah....”

*(Loud drilling noise offstage, she stops - getting more annoyed, the noise stops. She tries again.)*

*(The third time, a very loud clattering and crashing noise offstage. As she is about to reach her last note she turns to look offstage – the last note becomes a scream.)*

**END OF ACT 1**

**ACT 2 SCENE 1**

*Detective Bootlicker, alone on stage, is on the phone to forensics.*

**DET:** For goodness sake, how hard is it to understand? I need to find out from Forensics if there were any fingerprints found on that piece of scenery that killed the latest victim. Well, can you put me through to someone? I’ve told you several times who I am. I am the Chief Investigator for the Pantomime murders. Oh yes I am! *(getting angry)* Oh yes I *...(realises)* WILL YOU STOP DOING THAT! *(Hangs up the phone)* Dammit! They got me again.

*(As he starts to make another call, Phil appears wearing his ‘costume’ leggings. He is completely out of breath, rests against a chair then falls on the floor face down, only the top half of his body can be seen.)*

Mr Anders! Mr Anders are you ok? *(Takes out his phone)*  Not another one – right in front of my eyes this time too. Hello? Ambulance please.

**PHIL:** It’s ok! I’m ok. *(He rolls over onto his back)*

**DET:** *(Hangs up the phone)* What’s wrong?

**PHIL:** They said… *(still very out of breath)…* they said it would be easy.

**DET:** What would be easy?

**PHIL:** The dance. I’ll be ok in a minute – let me just lie here a while.

**DET:** That’s fine, as long as you’re....... Wow! *(Suddenly uncomfortable and doesn’t know where to look)* Is that your costume?

**PHIL:** Yes, the leggings are. They’re a little tight.

**DET:** Just a ‘little’?

*(Mia and Noah enter – have also been dancing)*

**MIA:** Bit of a taskmaster that choreographer isn’t she. *(Sees Phil)* Phil, are you ok? Oh my! *(Notices his ‘costume’ – she covers her face so she can’t look directly at ‘him’)*

**PHIL:**I’m ok, just having a lie down.

*(Noah has also noticed, he reacts and also tries to look elsewhere)*

**NOAH:** Detective, any update on Mr Joiner’s murder?

**DET:** I’m still waiting on Forensics but I believe that Mr Joiner was killed by the large piece of scenery that fell on top of him.

**NOAH:** *(Sarcastically)* I’m glad you told us that Detective as we would never have figured that out for ourselves.

**MIA:** Does this mean that it could have been just an accident?

**DET:** Oh I’m quite certain it was murder. On closer inspection of the scene I noticed that the screws on the hinges that held the scenery together had been worked loose. All the hammering and drilling that Mr Joiner was doing caused them to come away completely – therefore resulting in the scenery collapsing.

**NOAH:** But the scenery flats weren’t that heavy – surely it shouldn’t have killed him outright.

**DET:** No you’re right, Mr Deere. However, I found these on Mr Joiner’s person*. (He holds up a medicine bottle)* Heart pills. Quite a strong dosage. My guess is that he had quite a serious heart condition and that any sudden shock would have finished him off. And it did.

**PHIL:** *(Still on the floor.)* But how would any of **us** know that?

**MIA:** Yes, good point Phil. *(She makes the mistake of looking at him – puts her hand over her face again)*

**DET:**But someone must have known – and I intend to find out.

*(Lucas and Captain enter)*

**LUCAS:** Find out what? *(sees Phil and reacts but he doesn’t look away)* Ooh! That reminds me, Captain. I brought Salami for lunch if you fancy sharing, there’s plenty.

**CAPT:** Suddenly that doesn’t sound very appealing.

**DET:** Mr Anders, I think it might be a good idea for you to go and get changed. I can then take your statement.

**PHIL:** Yes, Detective. I’ll be back in a jiffy. *(Exits)*

**LUCAS:** In a what?

**NOAH:** I think he means he’ll be back in a minute.

*(Freda enters, the Detective sits down to look at his notes)*

**FREDA:** Where’s Phil? I wanted to know if those leggings fit him ok.

**LUCAS:** Oh, they fit him perfectly, thank you. *(Freda looks confused)*

**MIA:** One thing I did notice about Phil today, apart from the obvious – he really struggled with that dance.

**CAPT:** That’s because he’s not exactly a spring chicken. That’s the reason I no longer dance.

**LUCAS:** That and the fact that they refuse to put the ‘Hornpipe’ in every show.

**CAPT:** That too.

**FREDA:** Personally, I think Phil is a little too ‘long in the tooth’ to be playing a young ‘Prince’. The lines on his forehead give him away. I hope the audience are not put off by it.

**LUCAS:** Freda, I can personally guarantee you, with those tights you made him – no one will be looking at his forehead!

**DET:** I’m just going to make another phone call. I still need to speak with you all so please, no one leave the building. Has anyone seen Miss Overley-Hill?

**NOAH:** The last I saw her was just after the murder. She was very distressed.

**CAPT:** I think ‘hysterical’ and ‘paranoid’ are more appropriate words. She’s acting like we are all out to get her. Could be an act to cover up her own guilt.

**DET:** Well let me know if she returns. Oh, and keep a look out for the Murder weapon.

**MIA:**The Murder weapon? I thought he died of a heart attack.

**DET:**He did. But someone must have used a screwdriver to loosen those hinges – and I have been unable to find any such item amongst the victim’s tools.

**FREDA:**I know he had one – when I asked him to fix my sewing machine he looked in his toolbox and held up a yellow screwdriver, he said he would need to find a smaller one.

**DET:**Well best look out for a yellow screwdriver then. *(Exits)*

**LUCAS:** I wonder where Davina is. She is making quite a fuss about all this. Do you think the Captain’s right and it is all just a smokescreen – to cover up the fact that she’s the murderer?

**NOAH:** Definitely not! Why would she?

**MIA:** Let’s look at this objectively shall we. This all started with Max – he treated her terribly. Maybe she wanted him to suffer.

**LUCAS:** If she’d wanted to make him suffer, she should have carried on dating him.

*(They all laugh – except Noah)*

**NOAH:** When you’ve all finished laughing at Davina’s expense – maybe you can help me look for her. I am getting very concerned.

**FREDA:** You’re right Noah. For all we know she could victim no. 4.

**MIA:** Ok, now I’m worried.

**NOAH:** We need to find her now. Let’s split into two groups – Captain, Mia and Freda, you go and check out the kitchen and the toilets. Lucas and I will check the other rooms.

**MIA:** Should we tell the Detective?

**NOAH:** No, not yet. He will just think she’s done a runner.

**LUCAS:** Has anyone tried ringing her? She’s always on that phone of hers.

**MIA:** I don’t have her number.

**CAPT:** I don’t have a phone.

**MIA:** How can you not have a phone in this day and age? How do people get hold of you?

**CAPT:** They don’t – and I want to keep it that way.

*(Mia eyes him suspiciously)*

**NOAH:** *(Has his phone in hand.)* I’ve got her number...........let’s make a start with the search while I try ringing her.

*(They start to exit when a ‘ringing’ is heard)*

WAIT! Can you hear that? It’s coming from over here. *(They all hone in on the cupboard.)*

**FREDA:**It’s coming from inside the cupboard.

**MIA:** Open it Noah.

**NOAH:** *(He goes to open it but he stops)* I can’t. What if she’s.....

**CAPT:** Here, let me do it. I’ve seen plenty of dead and mutilated bodies in my time in the Navy – it won’t do me any harm to see one more.

**LUCAS:** Finally a Navy story I want to hear.

**CAPT:** Ready?

*(They all nod that they’re ready. The Captain yanks open the cupboard door, sat inside is Davina who screams, which makes everyone else jump out of their skin and Lucas scream – a long girly one)*

**NOAH:** Davina! What are you doing in the cupboard? *(He helps her out of cupboard.)*

**DAVINA:** Because I don’t want to die.

**LUCAS:** A word of advice, Davina. If you are hiding from a ruthless Murderer, put your phone on silent.

**DAVINA:** But I might miss an important call.

**NOAH:** Come on out Davina. You’re safe with us*......(looks at the others)* well, you’re safe with me.

**FREDA:** What’s that supposed to mean, Noah? Are you saying you are the only one who could be innocent here?

**NOAH:** All I know is that **I** know that **I** am innocent. I don’t know about the rest of you.

*(They all start to bicker except Mia who has been looking inside the cupboard - she tries to get their attention)*

**MIA:** Guys! GUYS! *(They all shut up and look at Mia)*

Davina, did you lose something in the cupboard?

**DAVINA:** I don’t think so. Why?

**MIA:** Then who put this Screwdriver in there?

*(She holds up a yellow screwdriver, the others gasp.)*

**END OF SCENE 1**

**ACT 2 SCENE 2**

*Detective Bootlicker is sat across from Davina trying to interview her. She is sat with an ice pack on her head.*

**DET:** Miss Overley-Hill, we will get on alot quicker if you co-operate.

**DAVINA:** But I’ve already told you. I had no idea how that screwdriver got into the cupboard. It must have already been in there when I got in. I wasn’t exactly in the frame of mind to be on the lookout for murder weapons was I?

**DET:** Can we go over what happened just before Mr Joiner’s death. He apparently asked for help with the scenery and everyone assisted, is that correct?

**DAVINA:** Yes. We actors can be helpful you know, despite what people say about us.

**DET:** *(Produces a bit of paper with a sketch on)* I have drawn a sketch of where everyone was stood when assisting the victim. Would you say this was correct?

**DAVINA:** *(She takes the sketch – holds the bit of paper quite far away as she looks at it)*  Which one is me?

**DET:** *(Points)*  That’s you there.

**DAVINA:** How dare you!

**DET:** What?

**DAVINA:** There is no way my neck is as long as that – you’ve made me look like a giraffe!

**DET:** Miss Overley-Hill, this was not mean’t to be a masterpiece, merely a sketch so I can ascertain everyone’s position. I did not intend to insult you.

**DAVINA:** Well you did.

**DET:** For that I apologise.

**DAVINA:** You didn’t draw anyone else’s neck that long.

**DET:** Can we return to the case? Thank you. Now, from what I am led to believe, Mr Joiner had found a bottle of Cyanide and was keeping hold of it to show me. Do you happen to know where that came from?

**DAVINA:** I have absolutely no idea.

**DET:** This may have no relevance whatsoever but can you tell me, what were you looking for in your handbag? Some of the others told me that you were desperately trying to find something.

**DAVINA:** Absolute rubbish! How dare they! I was just searching for a tissue. What’s the world coming to when you cannot even look through your handbag for a Kleenex without being accused of Murder.

**DET:**I didn’t accuse you.

**DAVINA:**You may as well have. And all the others too – probably saying ‘Poor little ‘Giraffe necked’ Davina’, let’s pin everything on her and hide evidence in her handbag.

**DET:**So you are saying there was something in your bag?

**DAVINA:**I said nothing of the sort.

**DET:** *(Exasperated)* I think we will wrap this up for now. Thank you for you time.

**DAVINA:** Thank goodness for that. I will now go and find a scarf to cover up my hideous neck. Goodbye Detective.

*(Detective left alone, shaking his head – Captain enters)*

**CAPT:** Detective, the Director was asking if you were going to be much longer.

**DET:** No Captain. I will just grab people when they are not rehearsing. But while you are here can I ask you a question.

**CAPT:** Yes?

**DET:** Why did you leave the Navy?

**CAPT:** *(A little taken aback)* Well, I retired of course. I am getting on a bit now, old chap.

**DET:** But I contacted the Navy Pensions Department and they have no record of your retirement. Apparently you transferred your Pension elsewhere.

**CAPT:** That’s because I found a better deal.

**DET:** Is there anything else you wish to tell me?

**CAPT:** I don’t believe so, no. Why?

**DET:** When we were looking through the first victim, Mr Strong’s computer, we found a deleted email addressed to yourself.

**CAPT:** Oh, really. I don’t remember Max emailing me. Although I don’t really use computers, or phones.

**DET:** Well it was definitely addressed to you and it was entitled, ‘What do you do with a drunken Sailor?’ And he mentioned something about a Press article. Ring any bells?

**CAPT:** Nope, not at all Detective. Max was a bit of a joker, he was probably just having a bit of fun.

**DET:** Mrs Bakewell intercepted a letter for you from the Naval Headquarters, is that correct?

**CAPT:** How do you know about that?

**DETECT:** She was quite sneaky. She had steamed open the envelope and read the letter, then scanned it onto her home computer. It was very a interesting read – and gives you quite the motive.

**CAPT:** Everyone makes mistakes.

**DET:** And you made several, according to the letter. All involving you having the ‘odd’ tipple. Nothing much has changed has it? A Court Marshall is very serious Captain.

**CAPT:** I’m well aware of that Detective. I was already planning to hand myself into the Navy after this production, Detective. Nothing Max or Mrs Bakewell could have said or done would have changed that – so I had no reason to want either of them dead.

**DET:** Thank you for your time Captain. I’ll leave you to your rehearsal. *(Exits)*

*(The Captain, quite stressed now, goes to search his pockets but seems to be having difficulty – The Director and Freda start to enter and see him)*

**CAPT:** What on earth is going on here?

**DIRECT:** Everything ok Captain?

**CAPT:** Yes! Everything is fine. *(He exits still fumbling with his pockets looking bewildered)*

**DIRECT:** (To Freda) What’s up with him?

**FREDA:** Oh, you’re gonna love this. *(She laughs)* To stop him drinking I’ve sewn up all his pockets – now he can’t get to his hip flasks.

**DIRECT:** *(Laughs too)* What a brilliant idea! Just don’t let him borrow any scissors and we might actually have a good rehearsal today, if nobody else is murdered of course.

*(Everyone else starts to re-enter)*

Ok everyone. We have a lot to get through so please pay attention and let me start seeing some performances coming through. Please try to make use of the props that have been provided to get used to using them. We’ll do the scene where Cinders is about to try on the ‘shoe’. Davina, Phil, Noah, plus Ugly Sisters – get into your positions please.

*(They all do, Davina takes position sat on a chair but still has her ice pack on her head)*

Davina? Can you get rid of the ice pack for now please.

**DAVINA:** But I need it for my headache. I couldn’t possibly get through the scene without it. *(She lies back in the chair with it still on her forehead)*

**DIRECT:** If you are not fit to perform Davina, I’m sure Mia could step in for you.

*(Davina sits bolt upright, throws away the ice pack angrily and ‘moodily’ prepares for the scene, throwing the odd ‘evil’ look at the Director.)*

Thank you. Phil, from your line. Go.

**PHIL:** *(Holding a shoe)* **“**Buttons, I despair. I will never find the owner of this shoe. I will never know love again.”

**NOAH: “**Don’t despair, Prince Charming. There is still one more person to try on the shoe. Maybe she’s the one.”

**PHIL :** “But she’s just a peasant girl?”

**NOAH:** “Let me try” *(He takes the shoe and starts to walk over to Cinders)*

**PHIL:** *(He takes the shoe back from Buttons)*  “Dear peasant girl, please place your foot in this shoe.”

**NOAH:** *(Takes the shoe back again)* It says in the script that Buttons places it on her foot.

**PHIL:** Nonsense. I should do it, that’s how it is in the actual book.

**NOAH:** But in the film it’s Buttons that does it.

**PHIL:** I think you will find that you are mistaken.

**NOAH:** I think you will find that I am not!

**PHIL:** Buttons isn’t even in the film. He’s just a pointless pantomime stooge.

**NOAH:** That’s absolute rubbish, now give me the shoe.

*(Davina has her foot stretched out awaiting the shoe, while Phil and Noah are knelt in front of her fighting over the shoe.)*

**PHIL:** Let go of it.

**NOAH:** No, I need it.

*(They fight bit more)*

**DIRECT:** Ok that’s enough! Stop fighting.

*(They stop, Noah has the shoe and looks triumphant)*

Noah, give Phil the shoe. The Prince should be the one to put it on her.

*(Phil looks triumphant now, Noah reluctantly gives him the shoe)*

**PHIL:** *(He puts the shoe on Cinders, with a look of satisfaction to Noah)*  “It fits”

*(Ugly Sisters react, not happy – Prince helps Cinders to her feet) “*My dear, you are the one. Will you do me the honour of becoming my wife?”

**DAVINA: “**Oh, my dear Prince Charming. My answer is ‘yes’”.

*(They embrace – Noah looks completely dejected)*

**DIRECT:** Well done everyone. At this point now Cinders and the Prince sing about her becoming his ‘Soulmate’.

**NOAH:**I thought the song was called ‘Becoming a Princess’.

**DIRECT:**Yes it was, but the lyrics have been changed.

**NOAH:**Well that’s ridiculous. *(Looks at the script)* These lyrics make no sense.

**DIRECT:** Take five everyone. We will recap some scenes from Act 1 on our return.

*(They disperse, the Detective enters and catches Noah before he exits)*

**DET:** Mr Deere. Could I possibly ask a few questions.

**NOAH:** Yes, of course, Detective.

**DET:** I was just observing from the sidelines and I couldn’t help noticing your little spat with Mr Anders. Do you make a habit of fighting with your co-stars?

**NOAH:** Not at all. In fact it’s very out of character for me. Mr Anders just seems to know how to push my buttons for some reason.

**DET:** And would that reason happen to be Ms Overley-Hill?

**NOAH:** Davina? I admit, Detective, I am very fond of her but there is nothing between us.

**DET:** But you would like there to be and that’s why you don’t like Mr Anders, you feel threatened by him and his charm with the ladies.

**NOAH:** Davina is not shallow enough to fall for his charm.

**DET:** What about Max? Davina and Max were in a relationship, were they not?

**NOAH:** That all ended months ago. I know where you are going with this Detective and I will save you time. I did not murder Max and I am not intending to murder Phil either so you can cross me off the suspect list right now. Was there anything else or are we done?

**DET:** We’re done.

**NOAH:** Thank you *(starts to exit)*

**DET:** Actually, just one more thing…..

*(Noah stops and turns slowly)*

Where did you get the knife?

**NOAH:** *(Taken aback)* What Knife?

**DET:** The knife that Mrs Bakewell saw you with just before Mr Strong’s demise. According to her it resembled the murder weapon.

**NOAH:** She was making it up. That woman was completely off her ‘tea trolley’. You can’t believe anything she says. And how did you know about that anyway? She was murdered before she had chance to speak with you.

**DET:** People talk, Mr Deere, especially Mrs Bakewell.

*(Noah looks at him for a second then turns and exits, the Detective, pleased with himself, writes in his notebook as Phil enters, sees him then starts to do a U turn but the Detectives has noticed.)*

Aah, Mr Anders. Just the person I was wanting to see.

**PHIL:** Well, you had better be quick as we need to get back to work.

**DET :** Oh, this won’t take long. I just wanted to clarify what we were talking about earlier. You know, about your ‘problem’.

**PHIL:**You mean my speech impediment.

**DET:** What else would I mean?

**PHIL:** Nothing. Go on.

**DET:** How did Max react when he found out about it?

**PHIL:** He thought it was funny. He then set out to humiliate me by making me go over the lines again and again. He wanted to make me suffer, just for his own enjoyment.

**DET:** If Max were to have revealed your ‘problem’ to the world that would have ruined your career would it not?

**PHIL:** Quite possibly, yes.

**DET:** So that gives you a very strong motive for murder.

**PHIL:** I would never…

**DET:** *(Cuts him off* – *now more forceful – in ‘bad cop’ mode)* You could have murdered Max to keep him quiet. You could have then murdered Mrs Bakewell, or Sheree as she asked you to call her, as she also found out about your secret.

**PHIL**: *(A bumbling mess struggling to get his words out to protest)* No, no I….

**DET**: You then could have murdered Mr Joiner knowing that your fingerprints were on that bottle of Cyanide that he found. *(Gets right in Phil’s face – who is now a complete mess)* Where is that bottle, Mr Anders. Where is it?

*(Director enters – others filter on)*

**DIRECT:** Right back to work everyone, we have a lot to get through. *(Sees the Detective)* You all done for now, Detective?

**DET:** *(Back to ‘good cop’ mode)* Yes of course, thank you for being so helpful, Mr Anders.

*(Phil still a mess and in shock)*

*(To Director)* Is it ok if I stay and observe?

**DIRECT:** I don’t see why not. Ok, let’s go back to Act 1 and Prince Charming’s entrance. Ready Phil? Are you ok?

**PHIL:** Yes, yes of course*.*

*(Takes his position – as do the others, Mia is following the script.)*

**DIRECT:** Ok, go.

**PHIL:** *(Makes his entrance – he’s still very shaken.) “*Buttons! I need you to find all the beautiful ladies in the town and… (*stumbles a bit, tries to remember the lines) …*give them an invitation to my, erm….event? or erm….”

**NOAH:** You mean Ball.

**PHIL:** Yes, that’s it… ball.

**NOAH:** **“**Yes, your highness.”

*(Silence as Phil has forgotten his next line.)*

It’s your line.

**PHIL:** Yes, erm….

**DIRECT:** Is everything ok Phil? Do you not know your lines?

**PHIL:** I do… it’s just…I’m a bit all of a ‘dither’ at the moment’. Could I just have a look at the lines? *(Takes Mia’s script)*

**PHIL:** “I am convinced I will find my ……” Oh dear, this is not mine, it hasn’t got my lines.

**DIRECT:** That’s because Mia had the original script. We need to plod on Phil, can’t you just use that one for now.

**PHIL:** Ok, I suppose. ““I am convinced I will find my ……perfect Pwincess and best fweind at the ball…”

*(Everyone starts to laugh)*

**NOAH:** Your what?

**PHIL**: *(Ignoring them and carrying on)* “…..and in turn please my father, the King of Waisenthwop”.

*(Everyone is just falling about laughing, Davina even cracks a little smile – Phil throws down the script and storms off)*

**CAPT:** Well, that’s one mystery solved. Now we know why he demanded the updated script.

**LUCAS:** I think you mean ‘scwipt’ Captain.

*(They all laugh again)*

**DIRECT:** Ok everyone, calm down now. It’s really not very nice to laugh at such a thing. Poor Phil. Can someone please go and check on him.

**MIA:** I’ll go.

**DIRECT:** While we’re waiting for him to return, we’ll do the scene with the Ugly Sisters. Lucas, you are sat down flicking through a magazine. Captain – you are ‘spot checking’ for ‘dust’.

**FREDA:** *(To Director)*Let’s see how the Captain manages this scene without a sneaky swig from his hipflasks. Look, you can see him now, trying to reach for one, forgetting I’ve sewn his pockets up.

*(They observe the Captain as he feels around for his flask. He gives up and starts his dialogue.)*

**CAPT: “**We must ask Cinders to dust these bookshelves – in particular behind this big book here, it’s just terrible.” *(He lifts the big book so his face is covered and takes a sneaky swig from a pre-set hip flask)*

**FREDA:** *(To Director)* What’s he doing?

**DIRECT:** I have no idea.

**LUCAS:** “She’s downright lazy, that’s what she is. I will be sure to address it with her as soon as she’s finished the kitchen floor.”

**CAPT:** *(He’s now moved toward the coats on the hat stand)*  “And these coats need washing too, they’re filthy and heaven only knows what’s hiding in these pockets” . *(Takes another sneaky swig of another pre-set hip flask in one of the pockets)*

**DIRECT:**He’s hidden booze all over the place. The sneaky little….

**FREDA:** He’s making use of the props though – just like you asked.

**LUCAS:** “If you find a fiver then it’s mine, sister dear!”

**CAPT:** “And then there’s the seat cushions.”

**LUCAS:** “Oh yes, the seat cushions”…….wait a minute, seat cushions are not in the script. *(Sees Captain rummaging behind seat cushion)* Captain? What are you doing? *(Grabs cushion off Captain who hides something behind his back)* Are you drinking?

**CAPT:** Nope. *(hiccups)*

**DIRECT:**Ok Captain, we’ve seen what you’ve been doing. I will have no drinking on the set. Hand me the flask. Come one.

*(Lucas notices something about the ‘flask’)*

**LUCAS:** Wait a minute. That’s not a hip flask, that’s a bottle.

**CAPT:** That’s not mine!

**FREDA:** Oh Captain, it’s bad enough that you have resorted to hiding the liquor but to lie about it as well when we’ve seen you with our own eyes.

**CAPT:** I’m telling you that is not mine.

**DET:** Let me see that. *(Takes a hankie from his pocket and puts it round the bottle to examine it)* It’s a good job you didn’t take a swig of this Captain.

**LUCAS:** Why? What is it Detective?

**DET:** **This..** is a crucial piece of evidence. *(Holds it up)* It’s a bottle of Cyanide.

**END OF SCENE 2**

**ACT 2 SCENE 3**

*(Mia is alone on stage, she is talking on her phone)*

**MIA:** I’m getting closer to finding it. No, no one has any idea who I am, even the Detective. Don’t worry, I’ll be careful. Look someone’s coming, I have to go.

*(Cuts off the phone and looks for somewhere to hide – she gets inside the cupboard – Lucas enters sneakily and goes over to a bag that has been left on by one the cast, he starts to rummage around in the bag. She takes photos of him on her phone. The Detective enters, she closes the door before he can see her.)*

**DET:** Mr Campley? What are you doing?

**LUCAS:** *(Jumps out of his skin)* Nothing, Detective. I was just looking for my bag, I couldn’t remember where I’d left it.

**DET:** *(Suspicious)* While you’re here, Mr Campley. Do you happen to know anything about a missing jewel? An heirloom, to be exact, that belonged to the cleaner?

**LUCAS:** I know nothing about that, why would I?

**DET:** There was a rather interesting text message on Mrs Bakewell’s phone. It was to Betsy, the Cleaner, regarding the jewel. Your name was mentioned.

**LUCAS:** Oh that’s ridiculous. It’s a simple mis-understanding. I happened to have a jewel that looked similar to the one in question and Mrs Bakewell noticed it - that’s all.

**DETECT:** And where is that jewel now, Mr Campley?

**LUCAS:** I have no idea. It was attached it to my new headdress, it must have fallen off somewhere. It was worthless. If I find it I will let you know.

**DET:** Thank you, Mr Campley.

*(Lucas makes a swift exit.)*

You can come out now, Ms Rizenstarr, he’s gone.’

*(Mia gently opens the cupboard, slightly confused)*

**MIA:** How did you know I was in there?

**DET:** I’m not the complete idiot you think I am. I know a lot of things. Like I know you are not who you say you are.

**MIA:** I have no idea what you are talking about Detective.

**DET:** You have always been a bit of a mystery to me since I started this case. There didn’t appear to be much evidence pointing towards you with the murders, unlike the others. But there’s a good reason for that, isn’t there?

**MIA:** What are you referring to?

**DET:** You know exactly what I’m referring to. I would like you to accompany me to the station, Ms Rizenstarr. Help me clear things up a little. *(Has a smile on his face as he is talking)*

**MIA:** Why are you looking so smug, Detective. You are making a huge mistake.

**DET:** Oh I think not. In fact I’m about to blow this case wide open – I now know who the Murderer is.

**END OF SCENE 3**

**ACT 2 SCENE 4**

*Everyone is on stage with the exception of the Director. They are seated/positioned around the stage. Detective Bootlicker is ready to address them.*

**DET:** Thank you all for giving up your valuable rehearsal time to join me.

**NOAH:** You really didn’t leave us much choice.

**DET:** Let’s recap the events. Victim number one, Maximus Strong, undoubtedly the most hated man in the company, was stabbed in the back during a blackout.

Victim number two, Mrs Bakewell, volunteer Tea Lady and notorious gossip, was poisoned by her own Chocolate cake – which had been laced with Cyanide – the bottle of which has recently been found and I am currently awaiting the lab results.

**CAPT:** So you don’t know who the murderer is yet then?

**DET:** Oh, I do. I am just waiting for the confirmation.

Victim number three, Mr Joiner, Stage Manager, Handyman and Veteran - generally loved by all, met his demise by falling scenery which exacerbated his existing heart condition. Evidence shows that the screws on the scenery had been tampered with, the screwdriver involved was later found, wiped clean.

**Everyone** in this room had a strong motive **and** had the opportunity for committing all three murders. Now let’s get to motives shall we.

It’s clear that Mr Joiner was murdered for the sole purpose of getting back that bottle of Cyanide as the murderer couldn’t be sure they had fully cleaned it of all traces. But Mr Joiner was canny – he hid it elsewhere, knowing the murderer would try to retrieve it, with no thought for his own safety.

**FREDA:** Poor Mr Joiner. Such a hero.

**DET:** But what motive for the other two victims? Let’s go through everyone, one at a time shall we.

**DET Cont’d:**

**Miss Overley-Hill**, you had a relationship with Mr Strong that ended in a bitter break-up. You were overheard by

the second victim theatening to ‘kill’ him. That gives you motive.

**DAVINA:** Lots of people have break up’s Detective, but they don’t all commit murder.

**NOAH:** She’s right Detective. Plus, Davina wouldn’t be capable of committing one murder, let alone three.

**DET:** *(Ignores them and continues)*  **Mr Deere**, you couldn’t bear to see the way Mr Strong was treating the woman you adored.

**DAVINA:** Wait. The woman he what?

**DET:** You were seen, allegedly, by Mrs Bakewell in possession of a knife, one that, she believed, bore a striking resemblance to the original murder weapon.

**NOAH:** Absolute rubbish. The woman thrived on gossip and drama – she made it up.

**DET:** **Mr Anders**. Because of Mr Strong, your experience with PMT caused much anguish.

**PHIL:** My expewience with what?

**DET:** PMT. Prigton Methodist Theatre.

**PHIL:** Oh.

**DET:** He found out about your speech impediment and threatened to ruin your career. Mrs Bakewell also stumbled across your secret, meaning being involved with PRATTS……….. The Prigton Royal and Trenton Theatrical Society of course, could also threaten your career and therefore gives **you** motive.

**Ms Bobbin.**

**FREDA:** Oh surely you can’t think I would have anything to do with all this. I just come to work, keep myself to myself and do my job - that’s all.

**CAPT:** And god forbid anyone criticises your work..

**FREDA:** What’s that supposed to mean?

**CAPT:** That temper of yours. I’ve always said it would get you into serious trouble one day.

**FREDA:** I am in full control of my temper thank you very much – and why would I want to murder anyone?

**CAPT:** Max was very critical of your costumes. It wouldn’t surprise me if he was trying to get you fired and you found out. And you were fuming with Mrs Bakewell when she used your so-called ‘masterpiece’, as you called it, as a cleaning rag!

**FREDA:** I’m surprised you remember that Captain, with all the liquor you had consumed at that point in time. And you’re not exactly Mister innocent are you?

**CAPT:** Max had nothing on me.

**DET:** I beg to differ Captain. The first two victims were aware of your secret past and made sure you knew it which gives you plenty of motive. *(Moves on quickly)* **Mr Campley**.

**LUCAS:** Yes, Detective.

**DET:** Mr Strong hinted that he knew something about you and Mrs Bakewell was convinced you were responsible for a stolen heirloom.

**LUCAS:** Utterly ridiculous. I’ve already told you about the misunderstanding.

**DET:** Now that we have concluded the motives - any minute now I should….

**DAVINA:** Wait a minute. You didn’t mention Ms Thingystarr over there. She had motive too. Max knew her from ages ago – he said something about those roles she played and them not being acquired in the ‘ethical sense’.

**MIA:** He was just trying to goad me – he knew nothing about me. You’re only bringing this up because you still feel threatened by me.

**DAVINA:** Why would I feel threatened by a talentless young nobody?

**DET:** Ladies! Now isn’t the time for a cat fight. As I was saying, any minute now I should receive the lab results from the bottle of Cyanide.

*(The Director arrives with an envelope)*

Ah, right on cue. Excuse the pun. *(Silence)* You know, cue? As in line cue? *(No reaction)* No? Never mind*. (To Director)* Thank you for your assistance.

**DIRECT:** Not a problem, Detective. However, I was wondering. I know once the Murderer has been revealed you will have to arrest them, but is it possible for them to continue with Panto and then arrest them after closing night?

**DET:** I don’t think that’s a good idea, do you?

**DIRECT:** Just a thought.

**MIA:** Are you going to open the envelope, Detective? Put everyone out of their misery.

*(He opens the envelope, reads it to himself for a moment – the rest of them await nervously)*

**DET:** Hmm….. just as I thought. The Cyanide bottle has three lots of fingerprints on it.

**NOAH:** Three?

*(Lucas is looking very uncomfortable at this point)*

**DET:** Yes, three. Mr Joiner’s, as he found the bottle……… plus Mr Campley’s and the Captain’s.

*(Audible gasp)*

**LUCAS:** There’s a perfectly good explanation for that, tell them Captain. *(Captain appears to be oblivious to what’s just been said)*

**FREDA:** So Lucas and the Captain were there murderers?

*(Captain now sits up and takes notice)*

**DET:** I didn’t say that. Their fingerprints just happened to be on the bottle. Do you want to explain, either of you.

**LUCAS:** Both the Captain and I did find the bottle, but we had nothing to do with the murder. We found the bottle in Davina’s bag.

**CAPT:** Correction, YOU found it in Davina’s bag.

**DAVINA:** What were you doing in my bag?

**FREDA:** So Davina is the murderer?

**DAVINA:** I know nothing about the bottle of Cyanide – and were you not listening? My fingerprints are not on it.

**LUCAS:** But you kept rummaging through your bag afterwards, looking for something. We saw you.

**DAVINA:** I was looking for something else.

**LUCAS:** Like what?

**DAVINA:** None of your business.

**MIA:** Maybe I can help clear up that mystery. Here Davina, read this. *(She hands her a piece of paper)*

**DAVINA:** Why should I?

**MIA:** Because it could prove your innocence.

*(Reluctantly Davina holds up the piece of paper – she holds it really far away from her, squinting. Mia then hands her a diamond encrusted glasses case.)*

Will these help?

**DAVINA:** Where did you get these?

**MIA:** That doesn’t matter just now. But I am guessing that is what you were looking for in your handbag, but you didn’t want everyone to know you needed glasses.

**PHIL:** I don’t follow.Why make such a big deal about a pair of glasses?

**MIA:** Davina, so obsessed with her appearance, didn’t want to admit that her eyesight was failing, as it does to everyone when you get to a certain age. She was willing to incrimminate herself in order to keep up the façade of youthfulness.

**NOAH:** Oh Davina, you have nothing to worry about. You don’t look a day over 21.

**DAVINA:** *(Smiles at the compliment)* Thank you, Noah.

**NOAH:** *(Realises she got his name right)* Wait, did you just call me Noah?

**FREDA:** Aww, so sweet. Now, can we get on with revealing the murderer, I have costumes to make.

**LUCAS:** God help us all!

**DET:** After examining all the evidence and the motives I actually stumbled across something quite by accident that was missed by the Forensics team. That first murder weapon.

**PHIL:** The knife?

**DET:** Yes, or to be more precise, the ‘African Hunting Knife’. *(He gets out the knife, which is in a plastic evidence bag)* To the untrained eye this looks just like any ‘old’ kitchen knife. But if you look closer you can just make out the ‘country of origin’ marking. I had experts look at this and they located it back to it’s original manufacturer – it dates back to the 1970’s and was made in Mombassa, Kenya.

**NOAH:** Kenya? That’s a long way to go for murder weapon.

**DET:** I did a little more digging and found out that Mombassa has it’s very own Naval Port.

**PHIL:** So we are looking for someone who had been to Mombassa in the 70’s.

**LUCAS:** And has had involvement with the Navy.

*(All eyes turn to the Captain – he becomes defensive.)*

**CAPT:** You can’t prove that I even visited Kenya, or that this had anything to do with the Navy.

**LUCAS:** I suppose he’s right. He has told so many boring stories about places he has visited I would never remember if Kenya was one of them. And the knife could have already been in the UK when the murderer got hold of it - another heirloom perhaps.

**DET:** I did consider that possiblility, so I did more research and found out these knives were commonly used on African sailing vessels in those days. I also found out, with the help of Naval Headquarters, that the Kenyan Navy gave one as a gift to a visiting British Naval Ship in 1975. That ship was called……HMS Cognac.

**MIA:** And let me guess…..the Commander of that ship, as he loves to remind us regularly in his stories, was a Captain James Morgan.

**DET:** Precisely.

**DAVINA:** So the Captain is the Murderer?

**DET:** Yes, Captain James Morgan is our murderer.

**CAPT:** Absolute rubbish. You still can’t prove anything. I don’t have a strong enough motive for a start.

**DET:** Which brings me to this press cutting from 1979 that was found on Max’s computer. I have a copy here. *(Brings out another evidence bag with a copy of the press cutting.)*  Would someone like to do the honours and read it out for everyone.

**FREDA:** *(Jumps up enthusiastically)* I’ll do it. *(Detective hands her the cutting)* “The British Navy are investigating a serious collision with a US Warship, carrying potentially lethal cargo, and a British Naval Ship - HMS Blottoed, which was under the command of Captain James Morgan. Morgan was said to have been under the influence of a vast amount of alcohol when he set sail from a US Naval port on the East Coast. The collision occurred only 10 minutes into the voyage. There were no reported injuries but experts say that, due to the volatile nature of the cargo on board the US ship, the result could have been ‘catastrophic’. Captain Morgan has been relieved of his duty and is currently awaiting Court Marshall. A prison term for his negligence is likely.” *(She hands the article back to the Detective, everyone is stunned into silence)* Wow!

**DET:** Max threatened to inform the Navy of your whereabouts, Captain, and also release the story to all the National Papers – this would ultimately lead to your arrest and you would serve the rest of your days in Prison. Now try to tell me you don’t have a motive, Captain.

**CAPT:** *(Resigned to the fact he’s been found out)* That man was evil, pure evil! I had managed to stay one step ahead of the Navy all these years, keeping my nose clean, living my life. Then that fool comes along and tries to sabotage everything. I don’t regret murdering him though, he deserved it. And I did everyone else a favour too.

**NOAH:** But what about poor Mrs Bakewell? Did she deserve to die?

**CAPT:** She was an interferring old busy body. Maybe she didn’t deserve it but I had no choice. And Mr Joiner, well… that was just unfortunate, but necessary.

**DAVINA:** So you put the Cyanide in my handbag? And the screwdriver in the cupboard where I was hiding?

**CAPT:** You were the most irrational person in the cast – I thought if I framed you everyone would believe it. You hiding in the wardrobe provided me the perfect opportunity to get rid of the screwdriver, which I popped in there while everyone was distracted trying to calm you down. Lucas ruined my original plan with the Cyanide, although you searching through your handbag looking for something helped with that. So there you have it. *(Takes out his hip flask to make a toast)* To Max – may you rot in hell! *(Takes a swig)*

**DET:** Captain James Morgan, I am arresting you for the murders of Maximus Strong, Cheree Bakewell and Joseph Joiner. You do not have to say anything, but anything you do say may be used in evidence against you. Is that understood?

**CAPT:** Perfectly.

*(Detective starts to lead the Captain offstage but stops as Lucas says his next line).*

**LUCAS:** So what happens now?

**DET:** *(Stops)* Funny you should ask that Mr Campley. There was something else. Miss Rizenstarr, over to you.

**MIA:** Thank you, Detective Bootlicker. *(Mia goes over to Lucas and puts his hands behind his back)*

**LUCAS:**Hey! What are you doing?

**MIA:** Lucas Campley. I am arresting you on suspicion of a series of thefts that have occurred in several rehearsal venues and theatres over the past five years.

**DAVINA:** What? Lucas is a thief?

**LUCAS:** She’s a mad woman! Get her off me.

**NOAH:** I don’t understand. How can you be arresting him? I thought you were Davina’s understudy.

**DAVINA:** She is NOT my UNDERSTUDY.

**NOAH:** Evidently.

**MIA:** I am not an actress. Well not anymore. I am Detective Larceny of the Fraud Squad. We have been following Mr Campley around for months, knowing he was guilty of all those thefts but hoping to catch him in the act. *(She takes out a Gem from her pocket)* Does this look familiar?

**DET:** That’s the cleaner’s heirloom that Mrs Bakewell was referring to.

**MIA:** That’s right. And I found it, along with several other valuable items, inside the lining of Lucas’ coat. That’s where I found your glasses case, Davina.

**DAVINA:** So, you were never hired to be my understudy?

**DIRECT:** No, of course she wasn’t, Davina. It was just a cover. You don’t need an understudy. *(Obviously lying to appease her.)*

**DAVINA:**I knew it.

**FREDA:** I’d best get on with making you another beautiful ballgown, Davina.

*(Davina looks horrified, the Director uncomfortable.)*

**DIRECT:** Erm, yes. I’ve been meaning to talk to you about that Freda. I think, perhaps, we may hire a ballgown instead. What you made before was lovely and all that, but I think it just needs to be a little bit more…..’special’. I hope you are not too upset.

**FREDA:** *(Fuming)* Not at all.

**MIA:** We best get these two back to the station and processed. Nice to meet you all.

**LUCAS:** Wait! I protest. That stuff wasn’t mine.

**MIA:** We know that, that’s why you’re being arrested.

**LUCAS:** You know what I mean.

*(Both Detectives leave with their prisoners – the others are left on stage, still in disbelief)*

**NOAH:** So what happens now, Director? Are we still going to rehearse?

**DIRECT:** Well, we have lost three of our main cast members so maybe we should give it a miss for the rest of the day. I’ll make some calls and see if I can get some replacements.

**PHIL:** I may be able to help you with that. Now that you know of my ‘impediment’, I can put you in touch with other actors just like myself. We are all part of a social media support group. They’re always available at short notice.

**DIRECT:** *(Not convinced)* I’m sure they are. *(They exit)*

**DAVINA:** So, as we have some free time…….would you like to go for a coffee……Noah?

**NOAH:** *(Ecstatic)* I would love to.

**DAVINA:** Are you coming too, Freda?

*(Noah’s face drops)*

**FREDA:** No, you two go ahead. I’ve just got to make a phone call. *(She gets out her phone)*

**NOAH:** That’s a shame Freda. *(Quickly to Davina, before Freda changes her mind)* Right, let’s go celebrate.

**FREDA:** What are you celebrating?

**NOAH:** No more murders, of course!

**DAVINA:** I’ll drink to that.

*(Noah and Davina exit)*

**FREDA:** *(Makes her phone call)* Hello, it’s me. What you were saying before about Davina’s ballgown. It’s your decision, after all you are the Director, but I would like to discuss it further. Yes, I’ll be there in a minute. *(Hangs up phone)*

No more murders eh? That’s what they think. *(She takes a gun out of her pocket – shouts offstage as she makes her way off)*. Oh, Director!

**THE END**