

An Evening With Lord Bramley

A Musical 'Whodunnit?'

By David Barrett

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An Evening With Lord Bramley - Dramatis Personae

Lord Edward Bramley (impersonating Jenkins, the butler)

Lady Alice Bramley

Gerard Hissington-Wasserby

Constance Whetherby, Gerard's fiancée

Enid Smythe

Colonel Ballister

Jenkins, the Butler

Mabel, the maid

Archibald, aka Inspector Witherspoon, (Lord Bramley's estranged heir)

Chorus of servants

Actors of The Poirot Players:

Mike, playing Lord Bramley

Geoff, playing Sir Richard Braithwaite M.P for Rutland

Claire, playing Lady Pamela, Richard's wife

Steve, playing O'Malley, the detective

Synopsis

Lord Bramley throws a dinner party with a difference. Many of the guests are not yet acquainted with him and he has invited a small company of actors to mingle with the guests posing as aristocrats. One of them is even to pose as Lord Bramley himself while Bramley takes the place of the butler, whom he has dismissed for the evening. Thus the stage is set for Bramley's first and only murder-mystery evening. Things go horribly wrong when the 'murder' turns out to be all too real.

Set

The period is nineteen-sixties. There are two doors UL and UR, two pairs of easy chairs DR and DL and a three-seater sofa slightly to L of C stage. The side board/drinks cabinet is UR and there is a card table and coffee table (with table cloth) in the seating area. There is a further small table pushed up against the wall UL, covered with a cloth. Entrances and exits should be swift and timely as in a farce. Where there is a simultaneous entrance and exit, both doors should be used.

Character Sketches

Lord Bramley: Quite a brash and outspoken peer with an eccentric sense of humour. Very hard-up but tries not to show it. Has a network of aristocratic friends and frequently name-drops. Has a slight stutter when he gets excited.

Lady Bramley: very straight-laced and serious with a habit of glaring at people when they speak to her. Abrupt with the servants. Hair always immaculately coiffured and decorated with a tiara. Fingers full of rings. Married into the aristocracy so not fully at ease with her station and needs to be ostentatious. Speaks in a slow, upper-crust drawl as if it is an effort.

Gerard Hissington-Wasserby: A wimp who was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. His hair is slicked back in fifties style and he frequently mops his brow. Father is a wealthy banker and he has used his connections to get into parliament. Engaged to Constance but nervous of marriage. Cannot roll his rs. Is hen-pecked by Constance.

Constance Whetherby: Always has a cigarette-holder in her hand, even when it is empty. Seems to need a prop. She is very squeamish and prissy. Wears a big hair band. Wants to marry soon and frequently drops hints to Gerard, which he ignores. Has a rather silly laugh which always ends in a snort.

Enid Smythe: speaks to everyone as if they were a class of five year-olds. Speaks slowly and deliberately, emphasizing key-words in a sentence. She is rather frumpy and dresses like an old spinster. Secretly has a wicked sense of humour and is not easily shocked. Likes the booze. Large coloured, cheap-looking earrings.

Colonel Ballister: All tweed and bravado. Likes to talk about the regiment and bores people stiff. Very chivalrous and always jumps up for ladies, pulls their chairs out, pours wine etc. He takes a fancy to Enid. Paranoid and thinks there is a conspiracy.

ACT 1

Scene 1 *The Drawing Room at Bramley Hall*

(The drawing room is decorated in a rather dated style with traditional frilled standard lamps, leather chairs and sofa, several card tables, an ornate sideboard, candelabra on the mantle-piece and numerous family portraits around the walls. Jenkins, aka Lord Bramley, dressed as a butler, is busy arranging trays of glasses and pumping up the cushions in the drawing room. Enter the real Jenkins, in less-formal dress.)

BRAMLEY Ah, Jenkins, just in the nick of time. I need to ask you about the wine list.

JENKINS Certainly, my lord.

BRAMLEY You know I never venture into the cellar these days - damn gout. I've only a dim memory of the lie of the land. Will I be able to find the necessary intoxicants.

JENKINS My lord, permit me to remain and advise you.

BRAMLEY Certainly not, Jenkins, I've given you the night off and the night off you shall have.

JENKINS But, my lord,

BRAMLEY No buts..... You know how I like a practical joke, Jenkins. Tonight, I shall be Jenkins. My guests shall be arriving soon, including those from the Poirot Players and I shall wait on them.

JENKINS But, my lord, will your guests not recognise you?

BRAMLEY Absolutely not! Two of them have met Lady Bramley but none of them are yet known to me. I suppose they may have seen me from a distance, at the polo or the races, but they'll not recognise me out of my tweeds. And three of them are not really guests; they are actors. One will be playing myself and the two others will be masquerading as guests.

JENKINS And is Lady Bramley.....?

BRAMLEY In on the game, of course. She's always wanted to go to a murder-mystery dinner - and tonight she shall - in her own dining room.

JENKINS As you wish my lord. *(Aside)* I wouldn't want to be the one to spoil your little game.

BRAMLEY Now, about the cellar....

JENKINS Very well, my lord: *(The following dialogue should be rhythmic and increasing in dynamics and tempo.)*

Your first task, my lord, is to fill a flask with the best Madeira from the dark oak cask

BRAMLEY *(Parrot-fashion, attempting to memorise the instructions.)* A flask of Madeira from the dark oak cask.

JENKINS The next thing to do is to carry up the brew in the bottles coloured blue with a turquoise hue.

BRAMLEY Bottles coloured blue with a turquoise hue.

JENKINS Then take a quart of wine from the rack of pine made from burgundy grapes from the Duke's best vine.

BRAMLEY A quart of wine from the rack of pine.

JENKINS Don't forget to chill the champagne from Brazil but warm the brandy and keep it handy.

BRAMLEY Warm the brandy and keep it handy.

JENKINS From the back of the rack at the top of the stack, take a bottle of port with a light brown cork.

BRAMLEY A bottle of pork with a light brown court.

JENKINS The new red rum's in the rose coloured drum but you'd better watch out for the leaky spout.

BRAMLEY I'd better watch out for the speaky lout.

JENKINS That's everything, my lord.

BRAMLEY *(Aside)* Thank goodness for that. Thank you, Jenkins.

JENKINS Will that be all my Lord,

BRAMLEY Yes thank you, Jenkins.

JENKINS Very good sir, and good night sir.

BRAMLEY Good night Jenkins. *(To himself)* My first task is to fill a flask with the best Madeira from the dark oak cask.
(He exits, then re-enters, takes a decanter and exits again. Enter Mike, through the other door, dressed as Lord Bramley. He wanders around to take in the surroundings, inspects the drinks on the sideboard and sinks into one of the chairs.)

MIKE *(Practising his banter, he repeats the following line in several voices, eventually settling on a gravelly, slow aristocratic drawl with an occasional stutter. He jumps up to say the line the last time as if welcoming a guest.)*
Ah, good evening Sir Richard, Lady Pamela. Good of you to come at short notice.
(Jumping to one side and impersonating Lady Pamela) The pleasure is all ours, my lord. How gracious of you to invite us.
(Enter Bramley, as Jenkins, with the decanter, unseen by Mike.)
(In Bramley's voice) Do have a seat, my dear. Anywhere you like.
(Lady P) I think I'll sit over here in the corner. That way I won't make a nuisance of myself....

BRAMLEY Ahem!

MIKE Cor blimey, you made me jump. I mean, goodness, my man, you did give me a start.

BRAMLEY I say, you are a very good likeness, very aristocratic-looking. You haven't quite got the voice yet though.

MIKE I'm working on it. *(Mistaking Bramley for one of the servants)* Where is the crazy old fart anyway?

BRAMLEY I...I...I....

MIKE He asked me to get here early so that I could acclimatise myself before welcoming the guests.

BRAMLEY *(Goes to speak, but is interrupted.)*

MIKE Don't tell me, he's in the library reading a leather-bound tome, or perhaps in his counting house, counting out his money, or in front of a mirror with a plumb in his mouth, practising his la-di-dah. I know what these stuck-up lords are like.
(Enter Mabel)

MABEL *(To Bramley)* My Lord, Lady Bramley has requested your assistance in the hall.

(Mike is frozen into a position of horror with a wide open mouth.)

BRAMLEY Certainly, Mabel - and remember, from now on I'm Jenkins, the butler.

MABEL Certainly, my lo..... Mister Jenkins.

BRAMLEY (Turning to Mike) A splendid start, Mike. Keep it up. (Exits)

MIKE (Unfreezing) Cor, strike a light, that was never 'im.

MABEL That was Lord Bramley.

MIKE (Aside) You've put your foot in it again, Mikey!
(To Mabel) But I just called him a crazy old fart.

MABEL You....you (Pointing from Mike to the door repeatedly)...a crazy old fart?
(She breaks into hysterical giggles. Mike goes to the door but as he opens it a long line of servants enters, carrying bowls of fruit, dusters, feather-dusters and brushes with dust pans. At the same time the introduction to the song starts. During the song, the servants dust sweep, wipe and set out the fruit on silver plates. Mabel continues to giggle throughout the song.)

SONG 1 The Family Pedigree

Our story starts in Gloucestershire in nineteen twenty-three,
At Bramley hall the family were as happy as could be,
The master had come up trumps at last and sired a Bramley heir,
Alas, the boy was a product of an extra-marital affair.
It happened that a good nine months before this great event
To the Ducal ball at Marden Hall, his lordship upped and went,
The croquet lawn was filled with noble girls in frills and laces,
But our gallant earl did not much care for noble airs and graces.

Chorus:

His mother simply did not count, his father was a peer,
The old marquis was round the twist, the baron was a queer;
His lordship's wild insanity and infamy is global,
His counter-tenor's world-renowned, for he was born with nobles.
The Bramley family pedigree with poor breeding is so tinged,
The bright blue blood affects the brain and makes them quite unhinged.
With heads held high, their battle cry: Lord Bramley is a crazy old fart.

It appears the peer did much prefer a girl of lower class,
With rough white hands and aitches dropped and padding on her arse,
With talk of love and romance he beguiled her as his match,
He led her up the garden path and to the cabbage patch.
The noble stud was seen in the mud with the buxom kitchen wench,
And then the earl and the servant girl were seen on a garden bench.
And so quite soon, on a full blue moon, beneath the duke's best vine.
With a glass of wine they did entwine to propagate the Bramley line.

As months went by the Duke observed his maid become more plump,
His hair did curl when the servant girl explained her swollen bump,
In the blink of an eye the hue and cry spread through the noble community,
The Duke packed her off to a convent with the promise of an annuity.

The poor young wench gave birth on cue though afterwards berated,
She lost her wits on that dreadful day, when the babe was confiscated.
Now, dear old lady Bramley she deserves to be a martyr,
For she took the baby as her own, although he was a bastard.

(During the last verse, Bramley enters with a hop and a skip, carrying a silver tray of glasses, which he places on the side-board. As the song ends Bramley and all the servants exit except Mabel. Mike pours himself a drink from the decanter, which he downs in one.)

MIKE You can't beat good old Dutch courage!
(He takes a silver bowl of grapes and moves to the corner chair. He continues to practise the dialogue as before and discovers that this is easier with some grapes in his mouth. As he practises he puts more and more grapes in his mouth. Meanwhile, Mabel still has the giggles. Picking up the Madeira decanter, she takes a long swig then notices the level looks a bit low. So, she looks around, takes some flowers out of a vase and tops up the decanter with the dirty vase water. She then wipes her mouth on the corner of the table-cloth and as she does so, enter Bramley. He does not notice Mike in the chair. While wiping her mouth, Mabel crouches and sings 'Lord Bramley is a Crazy Old Fart, then giggles.)

BRAMLEY *(Peering around the table.)* Mabel, what on earth are you doing?

MABEL My Lord, you startled me.
(She hiccups due to the effects of the Madeira.)

BRAMLEY My name is Jenkins, Mabel!

MABEL Yes, sorry Jenkins-Mabel

BRAMLEY No, just Jenkins.

MABEL Just Jenkins.

BRAMLEY *(Aside)* Now, where was I? Oh, yes, *(he does a little dance as he heads towards the door, chanting)* the next thing to do is to carry up the brew in the bottles coloured blue with a turquoise hue.

MABEL I beg your pardon, my lord?

BRAMLEY Mabel!

MABEL I mean, Mabel; I mean, Just Jenkins.
(The doorbell rings. Mike jumps up holding the bowl of grapes.)

BRAMLEY Tally Ho, they arrive at last. *(Exits)*

MABEL He really is a crazy old fart!

MIKE My goodness the t.t...t...time has arrived.
(He looks around for somewhere to put the bowl of grapes and places them on the chair he has just vacated.)
Good evening, Duchess, how nice to see you. *(He practises a few times. The last time he stutters. Enter Bramley with Lady Bramley, Gerard and Constance. Bramley stays upstage)*

BRAMLEY The Lady Bramley, Mr Gerard Hissington-Wasserby and fiancée,
Miss Constance Whetherby.

MIKE Thank you Jenkins I do know my own wife.
(He guffaws with laughter. Lady Bramley glares at him but Gerard and Constance join in politely with the laughter.)

MIKE Gerard, how nice to meet you; Constance I am charmed.

(*He bows slightly and kisses her hand.*)

CONST Why, thank you, your lordship.

MIKE I hear you're a cousin of the dear Lady Bramley, Gerard, from Australia.

GERARD New Zealand, actually, and quite a distant cousin. It would take too long to explain. In fact, I last saw Alice when I was a baby. Don't remember it, of course.

LADY I remember you - all wind, dribbles and boo hoos.

CONST I think that applies to all babies, my lady.

MIKE Well, what brings you here from the colonies.

CONST A boat! (*She guffaws.*)

GERARD A wedding, in fact - another cousin.

MIKE Oh, what jolly fun, eh! And they let you into the country with no problems?

LADY Edward! I said no convict jokes.

CONST Some of the populace are bred from good aristocratic stock, you see.

MIKE Breeding good stock, eh?

LADY You mean 'good breeding stock!'

GERARD Constance, dear, are you warm enough? There is a chill in the air tonight. (*Mike turns to the audience and mimics Gerard.*)

CONST Yes, thank you, darling.

GERARD Here, my love, come and sit down. (*He gestures to the corner chair where Mike put the bowl of grapes. She sits down abruptly on the bowl of grapes.*)

CONST (*Screams*) Oh, my gosh, what on earth?

LADY I'm so sorry, Constance, I have no idea how those got there.

CONST My dress, it's ruined!

LADY Come, my dear, let's get you cleaned up. I have a dress you can wear for tonight. (*They exit, Constance weeping.*)

MIKE Well, I must say, that's a novel way to press grapes. (*He dips his finger in the bowl.*)

Hmm, not bad, but I don't think this will be a vintage year. (*Gerard glares at him.*)

Now, t...t...t...tell me, old boy, what is your relationship with my wife.

GERARD I assure you, my lord, I have never..... Oh, I see what you mean. Now, let me see..... My great aunt Ada had a son called Hugh who married a girl that was well-to do. Their tenth child was weak and fair but she lived long enough to produce an heir. The heir was male of poor repute, whose affairs ended up with a paternity suit. If the lawyers were right on judgement day, without the benefit of D.N.A., each common-law wife who the scamp beguiled had ended up with just one child. He must have worked like a blue-tailed fly as the total count was rather high. Your dear wife was top of the tree and I was number thirty-three.

MIKE I wish I had never asked.

GERARD Oh, what does it matter anyway? It's all relative.

During the song, servants enter and exit doing chores. They contribute punch lines as they do so. Towards the end, Lady B and Constance return.

SONG 2 Relatively Speaking

Chorus

Relatively speaking we share a family tree,
Descended from our cousin the humble chimpanzee;
You can argue otherwise but they say 'the truth will out'!
If you take a look at cousin Percival, that's proof beyond all doubt.

Verse 1

Adam trusted Eve, his wife, with all his worldly goods,
Then one day she went out for a stroll and got lost in the woods;
Then all because a nasty snake promised Eve a jamboree,
She stole a juicy Granny Smith from Yahweh's favourite tree.
If you trace your family tree back through the mists of time,
You're sure to find your ancestors were guilty of some crime,
They may have robbed a highway coach or thieved a cask of wine,
And most would end up in the clink to do their stretch of time.

Chorus

Verse 2

Even first class citizens were not beyond reproach,
They used to water down the beer, put sand grains in the oats;
You may surely wonder why, with their educated brains,
They knew they'd go down under with their legs bound up in chains
They set off on the Mayflower, a most intrepid bunch,
Their bible in their left hand and in the other lunch;
They landed some months later in antipodean paradise,
But soon they got malaria, bubonic plague and lice.

Chorus

Verse 3

A budget class cruise liner at his majesty's expense,
Soon set off for this promised land, hold full of malcontents;
Instead of showing them the noose the judge he did propose,
To chuck 'em out of England to live amongst the dingoes

Final Chorus

Relatively speaking we're family you see,
You'll never meet a noble with a perfect pedigree;
We're all a load of mongrels - and if you don't agree;
We shall send you down to old Sydney town to join the colony.

(Doorbell Rings, servants exit hurriedly and Bramley exits to answer it.)

MIKE I say, more visitors, what jolly fun.
GERARD How many are you expecting, my lord.

MIKE Do call me Edward, young man. There will be four others; Colonel Ballister, retired, ex-army and now shooting pheasants, Enid Smythe, former headmistress and new arrival in the village, never met either of them before, then there's Sir Richard Braithwaite, M.P. for Rutland and his wife, Lady Pamela. Richard's an old friend.

CONST How super!
(Enter Bramley/Jenkins, followed by Sir Richard and Lady Pamela, aka Geoff and Claire. Bramley stands stiffly up-stage.)

JENKINS Sir Richard Braithwaite and Lady Pamela, your lordship.

MIKE Ah, good evening Sir Richard, Lady Pamela. Good of you to come at short notice.

GEOFF My Lord.
(He shakes hands with Richard and kisses Pamela on both cheeks.)

CLAIRE The pleasure is all ours, my lord. How gracious of you to invite us.

MIKE Do have a seat, my dear. Anywhere you like.

CLAIRE I think I'll sit over here in the corner. That way I won't make a nuisance of myself....

GEOFF *(Aside)* That will make a change.

CLAIRE You didn't say you lived in the middle of a swamp, Edward.

MIKE N...n...n...not a swamp, my dear Pamela, a marsh.

CLAIRE It's all the same colour.

MIKE Allow me to introduce the distant cousin! Gerard and his fiancée, Constance.

GEOFF How do you do Gerard, Constance.

CLAIRE Cousin eh? Accept our condolences. *(She giggles)*

MIKE Jenkins, aperitif, if you please, for the guests.

CONST Not for us, thank you. We'll wait for the meal.

GEOFF Don't mind if I do, Edward.
(Bramley pours a glass from the decanter.)
Thank you er.....

BRAMLEY Jenkins, sir.

GEOFF Thank you, Jenkins.
(Geoff takes a swig and gags on the taste. He immediately spits it into the flower-pot and empties the rest of the glass.)

CLAIRE So, Gerard, how are you related to Lady Bramley?

GERARD Well, it's like this.....
(The door-bell rings. Exit Jenkins.)

MIKE *(Aside.)* Thank goodness, saved by the bell.
That'll be the Colonel and Miss Smythe.

GEOFF Colonel? Which regiment would that be?

MIKE One of those in the army, I believe.

GERARD Oh, you are a wit, my lord.
(Enter Bramley, followed by Enid and the Colonel.)

BRAMLEY Miss Enid Smythe and Colonel Ballister, my lord.

MIKE Thank you Jennings.

BRAMLEY Jenkins, my lord.

MIKE As you wish.

COLONEL *(To Bramley)* I say, have we met before?

BRAMLEY I believe not, C.....C.....C..... *(The Colonel looks most confused.)*

ENID Colonel!

BRAMLEY Quite.

MIKE Ah, good evening Miss Smythe, Colonel. Good of you to come at short notice.

COLONEL Evening, my lord.

ENID Short notice? We received the invitation three months ago.

MIKE Of course you did. How forgetful of me.
Do have a seat my dear, anywhere you like.

ENID Thank you, my lord.

MIKE Now, we have had enough bowing and scraping for one evening. You may all call me - Mike, er I mean Edward.

BRAMLEY Thank you, Edward.

MIKE Not you, Jenkins, you're the b...b....b.....

ENID Butler?

BRAMLEY Very good, my lord.

COLONEL Brilliant observation, Edward. I suppose the black tie, white gloves and tails give it away rather.
(The dinner gong sounds)

GEOFF *(Looking at his watch)* I say, is there something wrong with the clock? It just struck one.

LADY That was the dinner gong!

COLONEL Where's it gone?

MIKE Ladies and gentlemen, If you would be so kind as to give me your attention. I have a pre-prandial announcement to make.

ENID What fun!

MIKE Tonight is no ordinary dinner party; it is a murder-mystery evening.

CLAIRE Oh goody!

COLONEL Murder-mystery? Does he think he's Poirot or something?

LADY He reads too many of those detective novels.

CONST Oh, you mean like Maygret!

MIKE As the evening progresses, you will realise that some of my guests are in fact actors!
(There is a murmur of surprise and they all look at one-another suspiciously.)
I would ask you not to be alarmed if anything....untoward should happen, such as a m....m....m.....

ENID A murder?

MIKE It is all part of the f....f.....f.....

ENID Fun?

CONST I don't call it fun. I don't like murders and blood and that sort of thing.

GERARD Don't fret, my petal, it is just a game.

MIKE And now....if you'd like to join me for dinner. This way if you please.
(He holds out a white-gloved hand and the ladies file out first, chatting excitedly.)

COLONEL Do you know, I feel General Bingley is at last losing his marbles. He is an old acquaintance of yours and yet the description he gave me was quite inaccurate. I expected you to be much fatter.
(Bramley looks indignant and tries to pull in his stomach.)
(To Bramley, as they exit) Are you sure we haven't met, Jenkins.

BRAMLEY Quite sure, sir.

COLONEL Your face is quite familiar. I say, you don't ever have the odd flutter at the races, do you?
BRAMLEY Certainly not, sir. My wife would have a fit.
COLONEL Only if she knew about it, eh? (*Guffaws of laughter*)
(*They exit.*)

End of Scene

Scene 2 *The Drawing Room, After Dinner*

Sounds of merriment and cordiality off. Enter Colonel with Enid on his arm.

COLONEL *(In an undertone)* I must say, Miss Smythe, that there is something very strange in the air.

ENID *(Sniffing)* It must be the stilton - and do call me Enid.

COLONEL And you must call me Everard.

ENID *(Sniggers)* No thank you. I'll stick to Colonel if you don't mind.

COLONEL It's a very ancient name. It means 'strong boar' in old English.

ENID *(Aside)* Strong bore *(yawns)*, how could his parents have guessed?
(The Colonel guides her towards the sofa and they sit. The Colonel is on the edge of the seat.)

COLONEL His Lordship and Lady Bramley seem so unsuited to each-other, I can't image why she married him.

ENID I'd marry the devil if he had a house like this.

COLONEL The reality, my dear, is that the old boy's probably broke. I expect most of the mansion belongs to his bank.

ENID Oh, the poor fellow.

COLONEL And for an earl, he does not seem to mind his Ps and Qs

ENID Surely an earl doesn't have to Q to P! Anyway, at his age, men don't always P on Q.

COLONEL Quite! And that Sir Richard fellow, he knows precious little about politics, for a member of parliament.

ENID Perhaps he's one of the actors.

COLONEL There is something very queer here and I intend to get right to the bottom of it.

ENID Each to his own.

COLONEL Enid, you must take this seriously, I appeal to you.

ENID What are you, a bell?

COLONEL No, I mean, I'm appealing to you.

ENID What on earth makes you think that?

COLONEL Please hear my pleas.

ENID There's no need to say it twice.

COLONEL I beseech you.

ENID Yes, this is rather like being besieged.

COLONEL Can you not hear my pleading tone.

ENID There's no need to swear.

COLONEL My motion is of the utmost urgency.

ENID Along the hall, second door on the left.

COLONEL *(Moving closer)* I must press this upon you.

ENID *(Moving further away)* Is there not someone else you can press it upon?

COLONEL You don't understand - I have a proposition

ENID I've been married once and I don't intend to make the same mistake again.

COLONEL I think I've uncovered a fallacy.

ENID My goodness, whose was it?

COLONEL I mean, I have exposed an artifice.

ENID You can be arrested for that, you know. *(He gives up in disgust.)*
 Look, Everard *(said with a big smirk)* I know you're, you're ... Aaah!

COLONEL What on earth is it, Enid?

ENID It's - aah, my leg.....cramp!

COLONEL Don't panic, I know what to do. I'm highly trained in first aid.

ENID Then do something, quickly.

COLONEL Lie back on the sofa.

ENIDaah!

COLONEL I'll just massage your calf muscle.

ENID *(Rhythmically)* Aah, aah, ooh, ooh that's it.

COLONEL Is it better now.
(Enter Mike and Lady B upstage.)

ENID No keep going - don't stop. Ah, ah, oh, oh yes, that's it, again,
 again.....oh yes, oh yes.
(Exit Mike and Lady B (backwards) with a look of horror on their faces.)

LADY *(Off)* They certainly didn't waste time getting to know one-another.
(They re-enter.)

MIKE Ahem!

COLONEL *(Looking over the back of the sofa.)* Ah, Edward, I was just treating Enid for
 cramp.

BRAMLEY And I'm H....H....Henry the eighth!

*(Mike and Lady Bramley sit near Enid and the Colonel, who continues
 with the massage.)*
*(Enter Gerard, Geoff and Claire. Gerard and Geoff occupy the two seats
 on the other side and Claire sits on the arm of Geoff's chair. Bramley
 enters and stands upstage with a tray of glasses and a bottle of Cognac.)*

GEOFF Now, tell me Gerard, when will you and Constance seal the knot.

GERARD Seal the knot? I'd rather try and knot a seal.

GEOFF But you seem so in love.

GERARD Certainly we are, but you haven't met her mother?

GEOFF No, I can't say I have.

GERARD They come as a package, you see. You can't have the one without the
 other.

GEOFF My goodness, how unusual.

GERARD She is a most fearsome woman . Compared with her, Genghis Khan was
 a pansy. I remember being given some advice by the vicar who married
 my parents.

GEOFF Sounds like a cosy threesome.

GERARD Well he didn't actually marry them, he performed the ceremony.

GEOFF Oh, you mean he joined them in wedlock.

GERARD Wedlock sounds like a poison.

GEOFF I believe that's hemlock.

GERARD Amounts to the same thing in this case. He told me that marriage is a
 binding legal contract - and who would want to be bound to Genghis
 Khan?

CLAIRE But just imagine the idyllic honeymoon on a tropical island.

GERARD Yes, but honeymoons are meant for two, not three. There'd be me, a wife
 and a jailor; I'd have a chain and two balls.

GEOFF That would be rather novel.
 CLAIRE Just think, you could walk hand in hand with your wife on the sand.
 GERARD I'd rather walk tongue in cheek with an Iguana on hot coals. Come to think about it, I'd even rather have a porcupine as a concubine.

GEOFF That would really give you the needle.
 CLAIRE But would you not like to hear the patter of tiny feet?
 GERARD Only if it's my mother in-law running away. But, of course, she has size twelve feet.

CLAIRE You and Constance would make a lovely bride and groom.
 GERARD Yes, but the groom does not normally take his horse along does he!
 GEOFF You could be like Adam and Eve.
 GERARD And the mother-in-law would be the serpent.
 CLAIRE Do you not fancy a soul-mate?
 GERARD Certainly, but not a cell-mate.
 GEOFF I can just imagine the organ playing as she comes through the church door and down the aisle.
(Enter Constance, upstage.)

GERARD We'd have to have the doors widened for her mother.
 GEOFF Aha, here comes the lady herself.
 CONST I do hope you're not telling them about my mother, Gerard.
 GERARD *(Aside)* How on earth did she guess?
 LADY Ah, Constance, my dear, won't you join Miss Smythe and myself for a cognac. Jenkins! *(Bramley brings the tray and serves the cognac.)*

CONST Why thank you, Alice, I expect I will find the conversation more stimulating over here.
(Constance glares at Gerard as she crosses to the sofa. Mike does not move and Lady B elbows him.)

MIKE *(Rising unsteadily, slightly inebriated.)* Allow me, C...C....Constance. I shall keep the C....C....Colonel here company.
(Mike and the Colonel now sit apart on the other two chairs.)
(In the following dialogue attention switches between Constance and Lady B and the Colonel and Mike. Actors not speaking should continue to mime conversation. Enid is now seated between the two groups and she stares, goggle-eyed, from one to the other as the dialogue unfolds.)

COLONEL I say, old man, shouldn't there have been a murder by now.
 MIKE All in good time, C....C....Colonel.
 COLONEL I hear you were in India, Edward.
 MIKE I certainly was old boy. By the way, you can call me Eddie.
 COLONEL Did you ever hunt big game....Eddie?
 MIKE Did I ever hunt....? The biggest and wildest game in India, old boy.

CONST I'm so glad I joined the bridge club, Alice. It's given me a new interest.
 ALICE I am glad to have you as a companion, my dear. Some of the other women are so pretentious.

LADY I agree. Have you met that new lady from the village, Mrs Pinkerton.
 CONST Oh yes, she's very dour looking, isn't she.

COLONEL Yes, I've never seen horns like hers. What a fearsome creature. She put her head down and charged at me.

MIKE Did you catch her in the end.
COLONEL That's exactly where I did catch her - an anaesthetic dart in the buttock. She did not like that one bit.

LADY No she wouldn't would she.
CONST Do you think it was painful?
LADY Well giving birth to a twenty-four pound baby can never be easy.
CONST Twenty-four pounds! Were all her babies that big?
(Gerard joins Enid in the centre and tries to speak but can't get word in.)

MIKE Much bigger! The first one weighed about ten stone and the others were all larger.
COLONEL My goodness, how big?
MIKE Each one was as big as a boulder. *(He gestures with both hands.)*

CONST Well, I simply don't know how she ever manages to squeeze those into a bra.
LADY Probably has one made specially.
CONST She certainly is a big lass.
LADY Yes. And she's got quite a tongue on her, I can tell you.
(Geoff and Claire stop their conversation and listen with amusement.)

MIKE You have to keep out of the way when it swings from side to side.
COLONEL It's used as a sort of weapon.
MIKE Well I certainly wouldn't want to get lashed with that.
COLONEL Did you know they hide their babies in their mouths when danger threatens.

LADY Well her mouth's big enough. She just does not know when to stop.
CONST Just like that young floozy with the short skirt - Stella, is it? She doesn't seem the sort to belong to a bridge club, more like a strip club.
LADY Yes, I know her type.

COLONEL Always procreating. Any excuse, any time of day, in the jungle, in the river, any chance they get, they're at it.
MIKE I'm surprised the country is not wall to wall with crocodiles.
COLONEL Natural wastage, I suppose. Tell me, did you ever wrestle with one?

CONST No but I did dance the tango with one once.
LADY How romantic, and what happened after the dance.

COLONEL I jumped on her back, wrestled her to the floor and clamped her jaws shut with my pith helmet.
MIKE Did she resist?
COLONEL At first, but she soon calmed down with me whispering in her ear.
(Enid stands to stretch her leg and crosses to stand upstage centre.)

GERARD I say, steady on old boy. There are ladies present, you know.
COLONEL Yes, I suppose blood sports are not appropriate for ladies, eh!
CLAIRE Blood sports - is that what you call it?

COLONEL I don't know what else you could call it.
 MIKE Hunting wild p...p....prey, I suppose.
 LADY Edward, that's enough!
 COLONEL We were simply comparing our experiences on the sub-continent, my lady.
 LADY Yes, I bet you were.
 MIKE Those were the days - blue skies, s...s....sunshine, lots of lovely girls for s...s....
 ENID Sex? *(Every time Enid speaks, the others turn to look at her in disgust.)*
 MIKE Supper.
 GEOFF And the rest, eh, Bramley.
 MIKE Well I must say I was rather p...p....partial to a large pair of n.n.n..
 ENID Knockers?
 MIKE Norwegian girls who cooked for us.
 GEOFF Vikings eh, Bramley. Bit of a reputation for aggression.
 MIKE Yes, when we were b...b...bored they would entertain us in the officers' c...c...club with the odd game of s...s....
 ENID Strip poker?
 MIKE Scrabble. And then there was the native servant-girl. She had a lovely firm b...b...b....
 ENID Bottom?
 MIKE Baseball grip. Those were the days; lazing around with all the local girls in the club.
 LADY Edward, you're drunk.
 MIKE Yes dear, but not drunk enough. Jenkins, it's time for the port. Anything for you ladies?
 ENID Why thank.....
 LADY Certainly not. It's beneath our dignity to become intoxicated.
 COLONEL My dear Lady Bramley, don't ever undervalue the medicinal properties of alcohol.
(Bramley serves the port.)

SONG 3 The Medicinal properties of alcohol.

Doctor Herzbaum, dietary expert of old,
 Recommends daily tipples for warding of coughs and colds;
 Why, the man was no fool, you should follow his rule,
 He was weaned on pure ethanol.

No prescription, cheap at the breweries own rate,
 You can get a great deal if you buy it in bulk by the crate;
 Or you buy by the yard and pay on your card,
 Its medicinal power is first rate.

Landlord's remedy, curer of all that ails,
 Taken in moderation its healing power never fails;
 Try our best home-made brew, don't mind if I do,
 It's distilled in the landlady's pails.

If you wake with fever and pains in the arm,

Toothache and headache, a fever and sweaty palms;
Just a moderate tot will get rid of the lot
And it won't do you too much harm.

Sunday morning, hangover pays what you're owed,
With a head that's so swollen that surely it soon must explode;
Why not kill all that pain and the ache in your brain,
With a bottle or two for the road.

(On the last line Geoff chokes and collapses but recovers. Constance faints and Gerard fans her with a newspaper then gives up and starts to read it as she starts to revive.)

LADY Well, now you've got that out of your system, perhaps we can settle down to a game of back-gammon.

MIKE Certainly, my dear. Jenkins, please fetch the back-gammon set.

BRAMLEY At once, my lord. *(He crosses upstage)*

MIKE Now, after all that singing another cognac is in order, I believe.
(Mike crosses towards the sideboard upstage right. Suddenly, the lights fail. Claire and Constance scream.)

GERARD Don't panic, ladies, I'm sure the power will be restored soon.

LADY Jenkins, go and see if you can fix the lights.

BRAMLEY Certainly, my dear, er - my lady.
(There is a thump and a groan.)

ENID My goodness, can you feel that draught.

CONST What was that noise? Am I the only one who heard it? Gerard! Gerard, where are you? Are you alright.

GERARD Here I am my kitten.....

CLAIRE *(Screams)* Get your hands off me.

GERARD I'm so sorry, I thought you were Constance.

CLAIRE *(Angrily)* Do I feel like Constance?

GERARD *(With impish delight)* No, not at all, in fact

CONST I'm here, Gerard.....
(The lights come on and Constance runs to Gerard.)

LADY Thank goodness for that. Now perhaps we can get on with the back-gammon game.

CONST *(Screams and points to Mike, lying U.R. with a dagger between his ribs.)*
Look! It's Lord Bramley, he's, he's....

GEOFF Dead!
(Constance gets hysterical)

GERARD It's alright, my dear. This is a murder-mystery evening, remember.

COLONEL It's rather strange for the host to be the victim.

CONST But it's horrible, Gerard. It looks so real.

LADY What should we do now?

GEOFF I'll telephone the police. *(Exits)*
(The Colonel crosses to examine the body.)

GERARD I say, do you think that's necessary? It's not a real murder, you know.

COLONEL This is jolly realistic, though; the blood's drained from his face and he's going quite cold.

ENID *(Harshly)* Don't touch the body. The police will want it to remain untouched.

GERARD I say, Enid, you're really getting into this. What jolly fun.

SONG 4 Don't Touch the Body

(Enid starts the song but is soon joined by the chorus. Geoff re-enters part-way through.)

1 Don't touch the body whatever you do,
Don't touch the body, when it's cold and blue,
The corpse always will provide the evidence of homicide;
So let the deceased speak for itself,
(echo from body) Yes, let the deceased speak for itself!

2 Let forensic experts deal with this case,
Photographs and fingerprints, examine every trace,
Saliva swabs and DNA and biopsies they'll use;
So just let the body yield up the clues;
(echo from body) Yes, just let the body yield up the clues;

3 Let the dear departed take centre stage,
Don't try to upstage him, let him earn his wage.
He'll miss his only chance once rigor mortis has set in,
He's already frozen and wearing a grin,
(echo from body) I'm already frozen and here's my grin

4 Don't touch the body whatever you do,
Don't touch the body, when it's cold and blue,
The corpse always will provide the evidence of homicide;
So let the deceased speak for itself,
(echo from body) Yes, let the deceased speak for itself!

(The doorbell rings and Bramley exits to answer it.)

GEOFF Ah, the dinner gong!

LADY That's the doorbell.

(Enter Bramley, followed by Steve.)

BRAMLEY Detective Sergeant O'Malley, my lord, *(He looks for his lordship then remembers he's dead so he looks at Lady B)* er, my lady

STEVE Now what seems to be the problem here?

(They all talk at once. Steve raises his hand for silence.)

I have been called to investigate a disturbance. Where is Lord Bramley.

(Gerard points to the body. Steve looks surprised to see the dagger.)

My goodness, I think I can see what the problem is.

I will need to interview you one at a time. Is there another room where you can all wait?

BRAMLEY If I might suggest the library, sir.

STEVE Very good.

GERARD Well, I think it was the Colonel.... in the drawing room..... with..

COLONEL How dare you?

GERARD What is the murder weapon?

LADY An ornamental dagger. Look! *(Pointing to the wall.)* It was hanging there above the mantle-piece before the lights went out. And now there's blood on the carpet. They promised they would not ruin my carpet.

BRAMLEY Never fear, my lady, Jenkins will wash it off later.

ENID You are Jenkins, you silly man.

BRAMLEY That is correct, madam, I meant myself.
(Steve attempts to speak but cannot get a word in.)

GERARD How do you know it's a genuine ornamental dagger?

LADY Lord Bramley brought it back from India where it was presented to his regiment in gratitude by the Maharajah.

GERARD Wow, it's from the Raj! But how can you tell it's genuine?
(He pulls the dagger out of the body and wipes the blood off on a napkin. The others cringe at this.)

COLONEL It's easy when you know how. *(Crossing to stand next to Gerard and taking the dagger from him.)*

LADY Careful of your hand when you handle the handle.

COLONEL Just look at these markings on the hilt and blade.

GERARD They mean nothing to me.
(Steve again tries to speak and coughs politely but he is ignored. Lady B crosses and stands on Gerard's other side. The following dialogue should gain rhythm and pace throughout.)

COLONEL See the way it's finished with a fine guilt hilt,

LADY With a stamp of a badger, stamped on a badge;

COLONEL The feet of a creature create a feature.

LADY And the impressive seal with the impression of a seal.

GERARD This means nothing to me. How do you know it's not a fake?

COLONEL When forgeries are forged the frivolous forger forgets the finer frills.

LADY And frequently the fashionable filigree frippery,

COLONEL Or the elaborately emblazoned and encrusted emblems,

LADY Not so on sapphire-studded scimitars from the sultan's silversmiths,
Or silver-starred sabres from the sheik's spectacular storehouse.

COLONEL Just remember to look for the arms of a coat on the coat of arms.
You will find a bone on a bona fide jewel,
In the chilling crypts and chambers of the caliph's covert coffer.

GERARD Don't they ever forge these?

LADY The Shah shan't, the khan can't, the raja'd rather not,

COLONEL The Sheik's a fake, the Kaiser's a miser and the Viceroy's quite a nice boy - really!

STEVE Ahem! If I might continue, ladies and gentlemen.

LADY Very well, Sergeant.

STEVE Now if you will excuse me, I really should examine the body.
(They all begin to exit, muttering. Bramley is last and casts a curious glance at Steve. then lingers in the doorway. Steve takes out a pair of rubber gloves and has a great deal of difficulty with them. First he can't get them on properly - then he gives up but can't get them off. Finally he

treads on the fingers and tugs. The gloves come off suddenly and he falls over onto the body.)

JENKINS Oh, I'm terribly sorry!

STEVE Why on earth are you apologising to a dead body?

STEVE Oh yes, quite!
(He begins a commentary in the style of the T.V. pathologist.)
Male Caucasian, approximately 180 lbs, dark hair, sallow complexion; cause of death, one stab wound to the chest; no signs of any other obvious injuries.

JENKINS Get on with it, Quincy!
(He feels Mike's neck for a pulse.)

STEVE Good Lord, he's stone cold. *(Looks around.)* The window, I'd better shut it. *(He does so then whispers to Mike and shakes him but there is no response. Steve pushes back his eye-lids.)*
(Screams) My God, he's dead! Help, help!
(Enter the Colonel followed by the others. Bramley stays upstage by the door, shaking his head in disbelief.)

COLONEL What on earth is the matter man? *(Crosses to the body to examine it.)*

STEVE *(Beginning to get hysterical)* He's dead, he's dead!

LADY We can all see that. What sort of a policeman are you?

STEVE But, I mean he's **really** dead. He's not that good an actor.

GERARD It's alright, O'Malley, it's a murder mystery evening, remember?

COLONEL *(Covering the body with a cloth.)* I'm afraid he's right: Lord Bramley is dead!

LADY No, he can't be!

CLAIRE *(Weeping hysterically.)* No! It's just a game. *(Runs to Mike)*

GEOFF But he was not supposed to be stabbed. I was to shoot him with a revolver - look! He pulls out a gun and shoots. *(All duck except Steve.)*

STEVE I'll take that, Sir, if you don't mind. It's evidence.

GEOFF *(Puts the gun behind his back.)* How can it be evidence? He was stabbed!

ENID Arrest him, Sergeant, at once!

STEVE Very well, Madam.
(He takes out his handcuffs, struggles for a while with them, puts one cuff on his own hand and then jostles with Geoff. Eventually he gets the cuff on him. Lady B takes the gun from Geoff.)

LADY I think I should look after this.

STEVE Just a moment - I can't arrest anyone! I'm not a policeman. I'm an actor and so's he. *(Pointing to Geoff.)*

COLONEL *(Attempting to cross the room but putting his foot on the body.)*
Good Lord! I knew there was something afoot.

ENID You're treading on the body, you fool.

GEOFF *(Struggling with the handcuffs.)* Get these things off me, won't you?
(Steve fidgets in his pockets with his free hand.)

COLONEL I knew you were an impostor - even politicians are not that ignorant.

CLAIRE Who are you calling ignorant, you silly old fart?

ENID *(To Claire)* And you're no more of a lady than Gerard.

CLAIRE No, I'm an actress.

GERARD Not you as well.

COLONEL Well, actually Gerard's not far off, is he!

GERARD Now, you look here.....

(A big argument follows, during which Lady B fires the gun. Silence follows.)

LADY Now will you please stop this infantile bickering. There's been a murder here and we must call the police.

GERARD But he's here already....

LADY The **real** police, Gerard.

GEOFF Just get these cuffs off me.

STEVE *(Rummaging in his pockets again.)* I can't! I can't find the key!

ENID Here, I'll help you. *(She puts her hand in Steve's pocket.)*

STEVE No, no, NO, THANK YOU! *(Shaking her off.)* I can manage. *(Clock strikes.)*

GEOFF There's someone at the door.

LADY That's the clock!

CONST I'm so sorry, Lady Bramley, how selfish of us. It must be such a shock for you to lose your husband like this.

LADY Oh, but he's not **my** husband.

CLAIRE He's **my** husband. *(She wails and runs to him.)*

GERARD You mean, you're Lady Bramley?

GEOFF No, he's not Lord Bramley.

GERARD Then who....?

STEVE Just another actor like the rest of us.

COLONEL But a dead actor!

LADY Colonel, how could you? *(Claire wails.)*

GERARD Then - the real Lord Bramley?

BRAMLEY I am he!

ENID But, the butler?

BRAMLEY I gave him the evening orf. *(Calling through door.)* Mabel, Mabel.

MABEL *(Entering)* Yes, Mister Jenkins.

BRAMLEY I'm not Jenkins anymore, you silly girl.

MABEL Excuse me, My Lord. *(She curtsies.)*

BRAMLEY That's alright, Mabel. Now please telephone the police. Tell them there's been a murder at Lord Bramley's.

MABEL But, my lord, it's not a real murder.

BRAMLEY Oh, but it is, my dear.

MABEL I'm not scared; I know it's only a game.

CONST If you feel his body, you'll notice he's quite stiff.

MABEL Well really, Miss.

CONST He's mortified.

MABEL I should think he is if he hears you talking like that.

CONST He's quite late.

MABEL Where's he going then?

CONST I'm afraid he's already departed. His spirit has gone up.

MABEL You mean he's dead drunk?

CONST Not dead drunk - just dead.

COLONEL Take a look for yourself. *(He pulls down the coat to reveal Mike's staring eyes. Mabel screams and runs off.)*

GERARD Oh my! What a mess - what a paradox!

SONG 5: A Paradox Unfolds

Things rapidly deteriorate, the paradox unfolds,
The body should be play-acting but now it's gone quite cold,
What started off as make-believe has ended up quite real,
We've opened up a can of worms and heard the death knell's peal.

This story of deception seemed so simple at the start,
But now the actors are confused about who plays which part;
So you must find it twice as hard to keep up with the plot,
Perhaps we'll hire a hit man now to bump off the whole lot.

Our actors all are experts in the art of masquerade,
Their training back at theatre school made masters of their trade;
And if you are not entertained and disbelief suspended;
Perhaps you'd better bugger off before we get offended.

And now the great deception has momentum of its own,
The actors are unmasked at last, their cover has been blown;
But just in case you're too confused and still you sit and wonder,
We'd better have an interval to go away and ponder.

*(The servants enter a few at a time and join in the song. At the end the
body sits up and sings a line.)*

Blackout

End of Act One

ACT 2

Scene 1 *The Drawing Room, Immediately Following*

(The body has now gone. Steve and Geoff are still handcuffed. The Poirot Players are now addressed by their real names. Lady Bramley is brandishing the revolver.)

SONG 5 Reprise (first two verses solo, then chorus join in)

Although you all discussed the plot as you knocked back your ale,
You won't know who the killer is till later in the tale;
For now the plot is thickening with intrigue and foul play,
Our storyline proceeds apace towards the close of day.

So don't pretend to him next door that you can guess whodunit,
And if you made a bet with him he has already won it;
So stay awake and vigilant and sift through every clue,
For rest-assured the murd'rer makes an entrance in act two.

Although you all discussed the plot as you knocked back your ale,
You won't know who the killer is till later in the tale;
For now the plot is thickening with intrigue and foul play,
Our storyline proceeds apace towards the close of day.

So don't pretend to him next door that you can guess whodunit,
And if you made a bet with him he has already won it;
So stay awake and vigilant and sift through every clue,
And be assured the murd'rer makes an entrance in act two.

RICHARD Get these things off me will you. *(Shaking the handcuffs.)*

COLONEL I'll do it. *(He grabs the gun and shoots through the chain. Constance screams and everyone dives to the floor.)*

BRAMLEY My dear Colonel, there is no need to be quite so dramatic.

GERARD Why would anyone wish to kill you, my lord?

BRAMLEY Kill me? What on earth do you mean? Oh, my goodness, you think that dagger was meant for me?

GERARD It stands to reason. A clear case of mistaken identity. A darkened room; Mike impersonating you; I think the killer got the wrong man.

LADY Oh, my dear Edward, what a ghastly business.

CLAIRE Not half as ghastly as it is for Mike. My poor Munchkins, he's... he's dead..... *(She faints.)*

COLONEL *(To Bramley)* Quick, Jenkins go and get some water.

ENID But he's not Jenkins, is he!

BRAMLEY It's alright Enid, the servants will take her upstairs for a lie down. *(He rings a bell and two servants enter.)* Take the poor lady upstairs will you.

SERVANT Certainly, My Lord. *(They carry her off, rather unceremoniously.)*
 GEOFF Can't we just go home now?
 COLONEL That's out of the question until we have all been interviewed by the police.
(Doorbell rings.)
 GEOFF *(Looking at his watch.)* Why is the clock striking?
 LADY That's the doorbell, Richard.
 GEOFF It's Geoff.
 COLONEL Who's Geoff?
 GEOFF I am.
 GERARD That may be the police now.
(Enter Inspector Witherspoon with a note-book and a slight limp.)
 BRAMLEY Thank goodness you're here, constable.
 INSPECTOR Inspector, your lordship. Inspector Witherspoon, Nether Wallop C.I.D.
 BRAMLEY Well, inspector, I hope you are able to make some sense of this murder. I say, have we met before?
 INSPECTOR I believe not, my lord. Now, please explain what has happened here.
(They all start trying to explain at the same time. A cacophony ensues.)
 INSPECTOR *(Raising his hand until it quietens down.)* Let's start at the beginning if you please.
 BRAMLEY As you wish, constable.
 INSPECTOR Inspector!

SONG 6 An Evening With Lord Bramley

An evening with Lord Bramley is never quite routine,
 At first glance the historic pile sets a tranquil scene,
 But underneath the surface things aren't quite how they appear,
 The writer of this crazy plot takes after Edward Lear.

Chorus:
 Don't believe your eyes or trust your ears,
 This den of vice and haunt of noble peers,
 Has many secrets foul and grim,
 In attics dark and cellars dim.

Now take the host, Lord Bramley, though he looks the noble stuff,
 With gravy on his dickie-bow and red wine on his cuff;
 We heard him practising his lines as though this were a play,
 And saw him kissing Pamela and leading her astray.

Chorus

And what about the butler with his fancy talk and airs,
 We saw him squeeze the Lady's bum, passing on the stairs;
 Take one look at the body with a knife stuck in the chest,
 It's not the way he planned to go - a cardiac arrest.

Chorus

And then there's that O'Malley, he just doesn't have a clue,
No, even with a man-u-al, he'd not know what to do;
And posh Sir Richard Braithwaite, though he claims he's an M.P.
He's less idea of politics than a chimpanzee!

Chorus

INSPECTOR *(Looking thoughtful)* Well, I'm not sure I'm any the wiser now, but let's get started, anyway. Firstly, we'll look at opportunity: who was in the room when the lights went out?
(Another hubbub)

BRAMLEY We all were, inspector.

INSPECTOR Aha! So any one of you could have committed the crime, even you, Lady Bramley.

LADY Don't be preposterous!

GERARD How could we have turned the mains electricity off if we were here in the room.

INSPECTOR An accomplice, perhaps, er mister....?

GERARD Hissington-Wasserby.

INSPECTOR Mr Pissington Wannabe.

ENID Just a moment: the wind. *(She looks at Gerard, expectantly.)*

INSPECTOR You may be excused, madam, if necessary.

ENID There was a sudden breeze, you see, when the lights went out. O'Malley noticed an open window and shut it after the murder.

STEVE That's right, I did. Steve's the name, by the way.

INSPECTOR Thank you, Mister O'Malley.

STEVE No, I'm not actually..... oh, never mind.

BRAMLEY I'm sure it was not open earlier.

ENID He must have climbed in through the window.

GERARD Who?

ENID The murderer.

GERARD Or maybe 'she'.

CONST *(To inspector)* How do we know you are who you say you are? Show us your credentials. *(She steps towards him opening his jacket and feeling inside).*

INSPECTOR Madam, how dare you frisk me?

COLONEL You can frisk me, if you like.

CONST Couldn't you just show us your truncheon?

LADY This is intolerable.

INSPECTOR Now what about motive? Tell me, Lord Bramley do you have any heirs?

BRAMLEY How dare you be so impertinent? As it happens, I used to have a very full head.

LADY Now he's got a pretty empty head.
(Constance and Gerard snigger.)

INSPECTOR What I mean is; if you had died, who would have succeeded?

BRAMLEY The murderer, presumably.
(More sniggers.)

INSPECTOR Quite so.

LADY We do have one son, Archie, but he is dispossessed.

INSPECTOR And how did this happen? *(He limps over to Lady Bramley.)*

LADY Well, he and his father never really got on. One day Archibald had a riding accident and broke his leg very badly; could never walk without a limp. He blamed his father, you see. They never really spoke again after that day. Eventually, Edward and Archie had a huge row and he walked out.

BRAMLEY We examined the will and decided to cut his part out once and for all.

COLONEL Sounds very painful to me.

BRAMLEY It was an unnecessary appendage and not essential for the furtherance of the line.

COLONEL On the contrary, I would have thought it rather essential old boy.

LADY You see, Edward has a younger brother, inspector, and his lordship's seat will be bequeathed to the brother when he dies.

COLONEL (*Looking at Bramley's bottom.*) I can think of better things to leave your little brother.

INSPECTOR And is his lordship well endowed?

COLONEL I say, that's a bit near the knuckle, old boy.

LADY Once he was, but his assets have been shrinking over the years.

COLONEL That's only to be expected at his age.

INSPECTOR Tell me, has anyone seen your heir recently?

LADY What impertinence! Oh, I see; no, he has not been seen for eighteen years

INSPECTOR And how old would he be now?

LADY He would be thirty-eight years old; about your age, in fact.

INSPECTOR And so, we have another suspect.

GERARD What do you mean **another** suspect?

INSPECTOR I'm afraid you're all suspects until I am able to eliminate you from my enquiries.

GERARD What about motive? None of us has a motive.

INSPECTOR On the contrary, my dear Mister Ponsington-Willy-Nilly. I believe that each and every one of you has a motive.

BRAMLEY Well, I sincerely hope you can substantiate that allegation, constable.

INSPECTOR Inspector! Indeed I can. Let's start with Miss Smythe; ex-headmistress, who took early retirement when her school was bulldozed to make way for new riding stables. Is that so, Miss Smythe?

ENID Well, yes, I...I...I...

INSPECTOR And would you confirm who closed the school? Whose riding stables were they?

ENID I believe the Bramley Estate's.

INSPECTOR Aha, Lord Bramley himself.

BRAMLEY Now just look here....

INSPECTOR If I might finish, my Lord. Colonel Ballister here became a farm manager on his retirement from the guards. I believe you were sacked, Colonel, when your farm was taken over by a larger corporation. Is that correct?

COLONEL Correct, the Bramley Estate. Look, how do you know all of this?

INSPECTOR It is my business, Colonel. Constance Whetherby - a familiar name, in military circles.

BRAMLEY Of course, you must be old Whetherby's daughter. Major Whetherby, formerly of the Guards.

CONST I might be. What's it to you?

INSPECTOR I believe he did not leave the guards of his own free will. There was a court-martial.

CONST He was innocent.
INSPECTOR It seems his superior officers thought he was guilty, on account of the evidence. Whose evidence was it, my dear?
CONST General Bramley.
INSPECTOR General Lord Bramley, I presume.
BRAMLEY Look, I don't see what you have to gain by opening these cans of worms, Witherspoon.
INSPECTOR My Lord, I am merely trying to establish a motive in order to catch your killer.
BRAMLEY But I'm not dead yet.
INSPECTOR You might so easily have been. Murder, my dear Lord Bramley, is a serious business.

SONG 7 Murder is a Deadly Serious Business.

Chorus:

*Murder is a deadly serious business, murder is a deadly serious business,
Murder is a deadly serious business, permit us to explain:
Your life replays before your very eyes as the axe cuts through your brain,
If you don't lock your door and watch your back when you are off to bed;
Before the dawn lights up the sky you'll wake up very dead.*

You know not where they're coming from they creep up from behind,
The evil art of homicide demands a subtle mind;
They often favour poison as it never leaves a mark,
They need not face the victim and it works well in the dark.

Chorus

Some like a vicious stabbing as they see the victim's face,
All twisted and contorted as he writhes in death's embrace;
This doesn't suit the faint of heart, its drawbacks are quite clear,
The blood will stain the carpet and the guts will spoil your beer.

Chorus

Beware the ices of march, my friend, when treachery abounds,
Watch out for every shadow and flinch at every sound;
You never know whom you may trust, be wary as you tread,
For history makes it plain enough - you're sure to end up dead!

Chorus

(After the song - all exit except for the inspector, Lord and Lady Bramley.)

BRAMLEY At least I'm not a suspect. I could hardly murder myself.

INSPECTOR Oh, but you are, my dear Lord Bramley. Clever murderers often employ the double bluff. You may have intended to kill Mike and set up the whole murder-mystery idea as a cover.

BRAMLEY Preposterous!

INSPECTOR After all, he was an ex-employee of yours who was threatening to sue you for un-lawful dismissal.

BRAMLEY He was?

INSPECTOR Come now, Bramley, surely you recognise your employees. Does the name Michael Biggs ring a bell?

BRAMLEY Why, that was years ago; my lawyers are dealing with it.

INSPECTOR You'll save yourself some money on lawyers now, won't you, Bramley; now that the plaintiff is dead.

BRAMLEY Look here, are you sure I don't know you? It's the way you say certain words - I just cannot place the voice. Tell me, Witherspoon, how did you hurt your leg?

INSPECTOR I was run over by a bus in my youth; shattered my leg; never recovered.
(The inspector turns to the audience and re-arranges his false moustache.)

LADY Oh, my, just like our.....

INSPECTOR My Lord, I must leave and make a report to my superiors. They may want to bring you in for questioning.
(Bramley sinks into a chair.)

BRAMLEY Me? In for questioning?

LADY Would you like a quick glass of sherry before you go? All this questioning must be very tiring.

INSPECTOR Why, thank you; you are most thoughtful.
(Lady Bramley rises.)
Don't get up, my lady, I can help myself.
(He crosses to the drinks cabinet, pulls down the flap, and pours himself a sherry.)

BRAMLEY I say, old boy, how did you know where I hide the booze, eh?

INSPECTOR I'm just observant, you know. It's my job.

LADY Yes, but what can you observe through closed wooden doors?
(He pours himself a sherry.)
Not that glass, inspector, that's his lordship's. Brought it back from India. He's very superstitious about it and won't let anyone else drink from it.

INSPECTOR I'm very sorry, my Lord.
(He takes out another glass and begins to pour. He masks what he is doing with his body but he appears to take something from his pocket and sprinkle it into Bramley's glass.)

INSPECTOR *(Downing the drink in one gulp.)* Up and Under!

BRAMLEY Good Lord. What a co-incidence! It's a tradition in our family to say that, instead of cheers or bottoms up, you know. I don't suppose you know any of the Bramleys, old boy?

INSPECTOR *(Blustering)* No, no, absolutely not. The name Bramley meant nothing to me until I received your call tonight. I am new to the area, lately transferred from Norwich. Thank you for the sherry - and good night.
(Exits)

BRAMLEY Strange co-incidence - so reminded me of Archie. Do you think he's forgiven me after all these years? I would like to see him again before I die. You know - make my peace and all that.

LADY Now don't you go getting all melancholy again. Besides, you have plenty of life left in you yet.

BRAMLEY We never know when we shall be called to meet our maker. After all, there's been a death in this very room this evening.
(Enter Colonel, followed by all the others.)

COLONEL I say, where's that inspector fellow. We've had an idea about the murder. You see, we think the culprit must be an insider.

GERARD Isn't it true that he..

ENID Or **she** -

GERARD Or she - knew where the mains electricity switch was.

CONST They also knew where to find the murder weapon - in the dark...

COLONEL And, crucially, they knew how to get in and out through the only window that does not lock.

GERARD Only an insider could know those things.

BRAMLEY *(Ponders)* Yes, you may have a point there. Gerard, telephone the inspector, if you will, and let him know.

GERARD Right away my lord. *(Exits)*

COLONEL He should have discovered that himself had he asked the right questions.

LADY Well, it's out of our hands now. If you will excuse me, I must see that poor girl, Claire. She has lost her husband this evening.

BRAMLEY Yes of course, my dear. In the meantime, Mabel will make up beds for you all in the east wing. Under the circumstances we can't send you packing at this hour of the night.

COLONEL Thank you my lord, that is most generous of you.

BRAMLEY *(He crosses to the drinks cabinet and takes his glass, which was filled by the inspector.)* This whole evening has been quite a shock for all of us. He is about to drink when...
(Enter Gerard)

GERARD My Lord!

BRAMLEY Gerard, what on earth is it? You look as though you've seen a ghost.

GERARD I...I...I phoned the station and Witherspoon was not there.

CONST That's not surprising; he's hardly had time to drive back.

GERARD No, you don't understand. *(He sinks into a chair)* They've never heard of him. *(They all stare in disbelief.)* He doesn't exist! There has **never** been a police inspector of that name at Nether Wallop.

COLONEL Then that Inspector Witherspoon.... he must have been an impostor!

BRAMLEY Good Lord, whatever next?
(Takes a long drink and drops down dead.)

SONG 8 Now His Lordship's Breathed His Last!

Now the show is surely over, as his lordship breaths his last,
And the tickets will be cheaper now with one less in the cast;
He's shuttled off his mortal coil, but what a way to peg it,

Just one small sip of his favourite brew then such a public e-xit.

Now young Archie has succeeded in bumping off his dad,
Oh yes, you might find it funny but we think it's rather sad;
He might have got the money but he'll not get out on bail,
And he must be looking forward now to forty years in jail.

It's a shame for poor old Michael, who must leave now in a hearse,
Though his acting was quite dire, and his singing voice was worse;
Although he went to RADA he never got that far,
'Cos he would spend all his afternoons quite legless in the bar.

So his lordship's dream came true, this murder-mystery caper,
So it must be quite a shock to him to be off to meet his maker;
But though he has on stage tonight his peerage abdicated,
His equity subscription will, alas, not be reba-ted.

The End