

MURDER AT RAVEN HALL (*working title*)

PROLOGUE: PRE DINNER DRINKS

SLIDE: RAVEN HALL: THE LIBRARY - SATURDAY, 7.30 pm

*Rosie and Pemberton are on stage with food, Francois with wine. Gerry on duty, watching. The other characters, except for the police, enter: Ambassador chatting with PM, Volkov, Penelope with a plant, Lucy on her phone, mime eating, drinking, serving and chatting. Maggie enters with cheese soufflé. They are **in character** so the audience can identify them.*

PEMBERTON: (*rings a bell*) Dinner is served.

Blackout, they exit chatting.

ACT ONE

SCENE 1: THE DISCOVERY

SLIDE: RAVEN HALL: THE LIBRARY - SUNDAY, 6:47 am

[Lights up. ROSIE sings cheerfully (*You are my Sunshine*), dancing, dusting. She approaches a large chair, visible from behind.]

ROSIE: Good morning, Senator Stone! Early riser today? Usually you sleep until ...

[She walks around the chair. Freezes. Drops her duster.]

ROSIE: (deadpan) Oh. You're dead. [*She pulls out her phone, takes a selfie with the corpse in the background, then dials.*] Pemberton? Rosie. (pause) We have a problem in the library. (pause) The Senator won't have his usual breakfast ... on account of being murdered. (pause) Yes, I'm sure. There's a letter opener right in his heart. (pause) Antique bronze, yes. (pause) No, I didn't touch it! I watch CSI. Okay, I'll wait here.

[She hangs up, considers the corpse, resumes dusting. PEMBERTON enters]

PEMBERTON: My God! What a mess the Senator made. Red wine all over the place. (*smells it*) The best Bordeaux!

ROSIE: Look! Blood all over the antique Persian rug. That's worth thousands!

PEMBERTON: Tens of thousands! Ambassador Wellington will be furious. I dread to think. *[Music, Blackout]*

SCENE 2: THE MORNING AFTER

[SLIDE: THE GRAND HALL - 7:15 am]

[WELLINGTON paces frantically. PEMBERTON stands rigid. LUCY types furiously on her phone. GERRY THORNTON looks bewildered. ROSIE appears frequently, pretending to clean, but eavesdropping]

WELLINGTON: A murder. A MURDER! In MY residence! During a state visit! Do you understand what this means?

LUCY: (not looking up) International incident. career-ending scandal ... possible imprisonment!

WELLINGTON: (pointing at her) This is YOUR fault! You arranged the dinner party!

LUCY: You approved the guest list!

PEMBERTON: If I may, Ambassador, assigning blame won't resurrect the Senator.

GERRY: Should I lock down the building? I saw that in a movie once.

WELLINGTON: You should have LOCKED IT DOWN LAST NIGHT! You are head of security. How did a murderer get in?

GERRY: Well, all the windows were locked. And the doors. I was monitoring the cameras... during commercial breaks.

PEMBERTON: You were watching television. What program were you watching?

GERRY: (*enthusiastically*) X Factor! The Final. You know, I'm entering X Factor next year. They accepted me for an audition.

WELLINGTON: (*to the ceiling*) Give me strength.

GERRY: What do you suggest I sing? Sondheim? Lloyd Webber? This one from Phantom? (*these are just examples ... Gerry chooses a song and sings a bar*)

PEMBERTON: Gerry, stop that noise! We're not interested. **And ...** The police are here.

[*FINCH enters, carrying binoculars. HARRIS and CRADDOCK follow with notepads.*]

FINCH: (*peering into the audience*) What interesting bird life here. Is that a parakeet I see over there? Oh, and a budgerigar! How unusual.

HARRIS: (*interrupting as if this often happens, to the others*) Excuse us, I'm Deputy Harriet Harris, and this is ... (*indicating Finch*)

FINCH: Oh! Good morning! Detective Fringuello Finch —yes, like the bird. My parents were bird lovers too.

CRADDOCK: And I'm Constable Chris Craddock. (*proudly*) On my first job out.

WELLINGTON: (*impatient*) Let's get on. We need this resolved quietly and quickly.

FINCH: (*peering through binoculars at the theatre lights*) Hmm. No swallows nesting. Unusual for this time of year.

HARRIS: (*wearily*) Detective, the body?

FINCH: (*still peering through binoculars*) What?

CRADDOCK: The deceased human.

HARRIS: (*touching Finch's arm gently*) Detective Finch? The *murder* investigation?

FINCH: (*lowering binoculars*) Right, yes. The body.

CRADDOCK: (*to Harris, quietly*) Typical. Show a man something with feathers and he forgets why he's here.

HARRIS: (*defensive*) He's brilliant once he focuses.

CRADDOCK: If you say so.... (*Craddock concentrates on taking notes while Harris speaks to the others*)

HARRIS: We'll need to interview everyone who was here last night.

WELLINGTON: Everyone?

HARRIS: All staff, all guests. No one leaves the grounds.

GERRY: That's what I said! The lockdown thing!

CRADDOCK: And we'll need a complete guest list, staff roster, and...

FINCH: (*interrupts, sniffing*) Is someone baking?

LUCY: That's Chef Maggie. She starts breakfast at six.

FINCH: Early riser. Like the American Robin. *Turdus migratorius*. Active at dawn. Highly territorial...

WELLINGTON: Are you comparing my chef to a bird?

FINCH: I compare everyone to birds, Ambassador. It's very illuminating.

PEMBERTON: Shall I assemble the household, Detective?

FINCH: Yes, please. And you—you're clearly a Great Blue Heron. Patient. Observant. Sees everything.

PEMBERTON: (*slight smile*) How perceptive. And how true. I see ... and I hear **everything**
[*observing the audience too. Blackout*]

SCENE 3: THE KITCHEN INTERROGATION

[SLIDE: "THE KITCHEN - 8:30 am"]

[CHEF MAGGIE works furiously at a table, back to the audience. She's singing an Irish folk song. ROSIE is cleaning, PEMBERTON is working. FINCH, CRADDOCK and HARRIS enter. They surround Maggie. The two officers take notes]

CRADDOCK: Chef O'Donnell?

MAGGIE: (not turning) If you're here about the breakfast, tell the Ambassador to shove it up her ...
(gesture) whatever. The eggs will be ready when they're ready.

HARRIS: We are here about the murder, actually.

MAGGIE: (whirling around, brandishing a wooden spoon, accidentally hitting Finch, hard) Well, I didn't do it! I was in my room all night. Alone. Completely alone.

HARRIS: Who can verify that?

MAGGIE: I'm a chef, not a social butterfly. After service, I was exhausted. I went to bed at eleven, slept like the dead.

CRADDOCK: Slept like the dead?

MAGGIE: Sorry, poor choice of words—I didn't wake until six.

FINCH: (studying her) More like a Hawk. Fierce. Efficient predator. But also surprisingly social.

MAGGIE: (suspiciously) Is that good or bad?

FINCH: Depends on whether you're the hawk or the rabbit. *Laughs. He examines the kitchen.*

CRADDOCK: (to Harris) Does he really compare everyone to birds?

HARRIS: Everyone. Last week he called the mayor a "pompous peacock."

CRADDOCK: Was he wrong?

HARRIS: (slight smile) Not even slightly.

FINCH: (overhearing) Harris, you're more of a Dove, actually. Patient, gentle, loyal...

HARRIS: (flustered, pleased) Oh. That's... thank you, Detective.

CRADDOCK: (rolling eyes) And what am I? A pigeon?

FINCH: Crow. Highly intelligent, problem-solver, a bit cheeky.

CRADDOCK: Okay, I'll take that.

HARRIS: (to Maggie) Tell us about dinner last night. What was served?

MAGGIE: Seven courses. Started with oysters, ended with a soufflé that was PERFECTION.

PEMBERTON: I served Beef Wellington for the main course.

ROSIE: Senator Stone had three helpings of dessert.

PEMBERTON: He complained about portion sizes being "European."

FINCH: How did he seem? Upset? Like a Nervous Bird?

PEMBERTON: Extraordinarily rude, the same as always.

ROSIE: He snapped his fingers at me for more wine. (*demonstrating*)

PEMBERTON: Argued politics with that Russian. Oh, and he talked to Lucy after dessert, in the hallway. She didn't look happy.

CRADDOCK: What time did guests go to their rooms?

MAGGIE: Around ten-thirty. The Australian Prime Minister stayed up with some whisky.

PEMBERTON: The Ambassador left straight away, complaining of indigestion.

MAGGIE: Indigestion! from my food! Preposterous.

PEMBERTON: Then the Senator went to the library. He was never seen alive again.

[PRIME MINISTER BLAKE HUTCHINSON enters, dishevelled, wearing yesterday's formal shirt and tie.]

BLAKE: Maggie, love, any chance of coffee? Absolute killer hangover—oh. (*noticing the detectives*) killer (*Laughs*)... sorry mate.

HARRIS: Prime Minister Hutchinson. How convenient. We need to speak with you.

BLAKE: (*running hand through hair*) Can it wait? I'm not at my best before coffee.

MAGGIE: (*already pouring*) Here. Black. Strong.

BLAKE: (*taking cup, smiling rakishly*) You're an angel, Maggie.

MAGGIE: (*flirting*) Go on with you. (*Rosie and Pemberton see this and exchange meaningful looks*)

PEMBERTON: Rosie, we should be cleaning the dining room. (*they exit, talking silently*)

HARRIS: (*observing their interaction*) Prime Minister, where were you between eleven pm and six am?

BLAKE: In my guest room. Sleeping off that excellent scotch.

CRADDOCK: Alone?

BLAKE: (*hesitating*) Yes. Alone.

MAGGIE: (*too quickly*) He was definitely alone.

CRADDOCK: (*eyes narrowing*) How would you know that, Chef?

[Awkward pause. MAGGIE and BLAKE make eye contact then avoid it.]

HARRIS: Chef O'Donnell, were you in your room alone or not?

MAGGIE: (*defeated*) Fine. FINE. I ... visited the Prime Minister's rooms. Around midnight. For... diplomatic relations.

BLAKE: (*charmingly*) Very diplomatic relations.

CRADDOCK: So you're each other's alibi.

MAGGIE: We didn't kill anyone! We were... occupied.

CRADDOCK: How long were you "occupied"?

BLAKE: (*grinning*) Hours. I'm very committed to international cooperation.

MAGGIE: (*mortified*) Do we really have to discuss this?

CRADDOCK: Yes. We need exact details.

HARRIS: Perhaps you could... describe your evening?

BLAKE: You want the play-by-play?

CRADDOCK: Yes. For verification.

MAGGIE: (*burying face in hands*) This is hell. This is my personal hell. [Blackout]

SCENE 4: FLASHBACK: THE DIPLOMATIC ALIBI

[SLIDE: "PRIME MINISTER'S ROOM - MIDNIGHT (FLASHBACK)"]

[This scene should be played for maximum comedy. A knock. MAGGIE enters with a dish.]

MAGGIE: (*nervously*) You said you wanted a snack.

BLAKE: Maggie. I didn't actually want a snack.

MAGGIE: Oh. Then why did you—

BLAKE: Because I wanted to see you. Alone.

MAGGIE: (*setting down dish*) That's... very sudden.

BLAKE: I'm Australian. We're direct. And you're magnificent, passionate, strong. (*stepping closer*)

MAGGIE: I'm a working girl. You're a dignitary. This is inappropriate.

BLAKE: You're right. Completely inappropriate. (*gets closer...*) But you're still here.

MAGGIE: The food—

BLAKE: Bugger the food.

[*He kisses her. She responds. They break apart.*]

MAGGIE: This is insane. I could lose my job.

BLAKE: I could cause an international incident.

MAGGIE: We should stop.

BLAKE: Absolutely.

[*They kiss again, more passionately.*]

MAGGIE: Wait, wait. If we're doing this, we're doing it properly.

BLAKE: (*grinning*) God, I love your confidence.

MAGGIE: And no one can know. The Ambassador would have my head.

BLAKE: Our secret.

[*They embrace. Lights begin to dim.*]

MAGGIE: One more thing—

BLAKE: Yes?

MAGGIE: You'd better be good at this.

BLAKE: Challenge accepted.

[*SLIDE appears: "AND THEN... DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS ENSUED"*]

[*Screen enters, held up behind by Rosie and Pemberton, illuminated behind by red lights, all done in shadow play. Blake and Maggie go behind. Red lights. Comic "steamy" music plays. Clothes fly off. The actors mime increasingly absurd positions. Exaggerated enthusiasm, athletic contortions, someone falling, etc.*]

[*SLIDES*]

- "12:47 am - NEGOTIATIONS PROCEEDING SMOOTHLY"
- "1:23 am - BRIEF REFRESHMENT BREAK (THE SNACK!)"
- "1:35 am - NEGOTIATIONS RESUME WITH RENEWED VIGOR"
- "2:10 am - NOISE COMPLAINT FROM ROOM BELOW (PEMBERTON'S ROOM)"
- "2:45 am - SECOND NOISE COMPLAINT"
- "3:30 am - CHANDELIER SHAKING IN ROOM BELOW"

The physical comedy should be increasingly ridiculous. Finally, they collapse in exhaustion.

BLAKE: (*breathless*) That was...

MAGGIE: (*equally breathless*) Yeah.

BLAKE: We should probably...

MAGGIE: Do that again?

[*They reach for each other again. Lights fade completely. Screen exits*]

[*SLIDE: "4:30 am - DIPLOMATIC MISSION ACCOMPLISHED"*]

SCENE 5: BACK TO REALITY

[*SLIDE: "THE KITCHEN - 8:45 am (PRESENT)"*]

[*Lights up. FINCH, CRADDOCK, HARRIS with MAGGIE and BLAKE who are absurdly fixing their clothes*]

CRADDOCK: (*after taking notes*) So you were... "occupied" for nearly four hours?

BLAKE: (grinning) I'm very thorough.

CРАDDOCK: Men always say that.

HARRIS: Craddock!

CРАDDOCK: What? I'm just saying, in my experience—

HARRIS: (cutting her off) Don't get personal.

FINCH: (examining Maggie and Blake) Excellent stamina. Like Wood Ducks during mating season. They can go on for hours. *They all react.*

HARRIS: (coughs) yes, well... That gives you both alibis for the critical window.

BLAKE: So we're cleared?

HARRIS: Unless you're lying. Or coordinated the murder before your... encounter.

MAGGIE: We didn't! We barely knew each other!

BLAKE: Well, we know each other quite well now.

MAGGIE: (elbowing him) Not helping!

FINCH: The Wood Ducks will be at it again very soon. (*laughing meaningfully*)

HARRIS: Detective, let's interview the others. Chef, no one leaves this kitchen.

MAGGIE: This is my domain. I give the orders.

[*FINCH, CРАDDOCK and HARRIS exit. BLAKE and MAGGIE look at each other.*]

MAGGIE: Now everyone will know about our... diplomatic relations.

BLAKE: At least we have an alibi.

MAGGIE: The Ambassador will fire me when she finds out.

BLAKE: (moving closer) Was it worth it?

MAGGIE: (trying not to smile) Diplomatically speaking?

BLAKE: Personally speaking.

[*He kisses her cheek. She swats him with a dish towel.*]

MAGGIE: Out! I have breakfast to finish!

BLAKE: (exiting) To be continued, Maggie O'Donnell!

MAGGIE: (to herself, smiling despite everything) Bloody Australian. [Blackout]

SCENE 6: THE RUSSIAN RIDDLE

[SLIDE: "THE CONSERVATORY - 9:15 am"] Props: some plants and roses.

[*SERGEI VOLKOV sits among potted plants, drinking tea. PENELOPE ASHWORTH tends to a rose bush nearby, talking softly to it. FINCH, CРАDDOCK and HARRIS enter. FINCH searches for birds*]

HARRIS: Mr. Volkov. We need to speak with you.

SERGEI: (in thick Russian accent) Of course, Officer. I have nothing to hide. Everything is transparent, like window. Glasnost, you know, from our most honourable Mr Gorbachev.

PENELOPE: (to her roses) One of those communists!

CРАDDOCK: Where were you last night?

SERGEI: I was in my quarters. Reading Tolstoy. Very long book. War AND Peace. Such rich content.

CРАDDOCK: Did anyone see you?

SERGEI: Loneliness is condition of intellectual pursuit, no? One does not read Tolstoy in crowd.

PENELOPE: (to her roses, loudly) He's lying. He was wandering the halls at one o'clock.

SERGEI: (*startled*) Excuse me? What you say?

PENELOPE: (*still to the roses*) I was bringing in my night jasmine from the terrace. I saw him near the library. Creepy.

SERGEI: (*smoothly*) Ah. Yes. I remember now. I was... sleepwalking.

CRADDOCK: Sleepwalking?

SERGEI: Old Russian condition. Very common. We wander in our sleep, dreaming of vodka. Da.

CRADDOCK: You were sleepwalking near the library where the Senator was murdered?

SERGEI: Coincidence! Very unfortunate coincidence.

PENELOPE: (*to roses*) It was no coincidence, was it roses? He was carrying a folder.

SERGEI: (*glaring at her*) Zat crazy gardener should focus on gardening!

PENELOPE: (*turning to them*) The roses show their gratitude and admiration for me by telling me things. And they say you're full of shit ... I mean ... fertilizer.

SERGEI: Impudent woman.

CRADDOCK: What was in the folder, Mr. Volkov?

SERGEI: Cultural exchange documents. Information about ballet performances. Stravinsky ...

FINCH: (*suddenly interested*) The Firebird? Magnificent. That ballet captures the essence of the bird.

(*he moves his "wings"*)

CRADDOCK: (*muttering*) He even knows about birds in ballet.

HARRIS: He knows about birds in everything, and it's amazing how useful it is. ... Mr Volkov, you were discussing ballet at 1 am?

SERGEI: Night is best time to review dance arrangements. Very quiet. Good concentration.

HARRIS: Did you see the Senator?

SERGEI: (*pause*) Yes. He was in library. We... spoke briefly about politics. He was... how do you say... belligerent.

CRADDOCK: Was he threatening you?

SERGEI: Senator Stone threatened everyone. It was his hobby.

PENELOPE: (*to plants*) He collected enemies.

CRADDOCK: Did he threaten both of you last night?

PENELOPE: It went like this ... I was tending my ficus ...

FLASHBACK – MUSIC, SLIDE: LIBRARY, PENELOPE IN THE BACKGROUND WITH A LARGE FICUS PLANT, SERGEI AND SENATOR STONE ARGUING

SERGEI: What do you mean... cultural attaché crimes? What evidence?

STONE: Espionage and more. I shall expose it at breakfast with the Ambassador.

SERGEI: You accuse me of espionage. Ridiculous! I am cultural attaché! I attach culture! Lies! All lies!

STONE: And what's more I have evidence of misappropriation of funds.

SERGEI: What funds?

STONE: Our government funded the new production of The Firebird at the Bolshoi.

SERGEI: Er ... yes ... very generous.

STONE: That production never happened. Where is the money?

SERGEI: It will be produced next year. We had technical troubles.

STONE: Technical troubles my ass. That money is in your pocket!

SERGEI: Vat are you saying? Zat is preposterous. You have not heard the end of this.

STONE: Get out of my library!

SERGEI: I go. I return to my Tolstoy. I need true cultural stimulation, not your American bullshit.

He exits. Stone turns to Penelope.

STONE: And you! Worthless gardener.

PENELOPE: How dare you? Flowers offer a wide range of benefits that impact physical health, emotional well-being, and the environment! I am held in very high esteem for my rose garden at the White House.

STONE: Humbug! I am cutting your budget. Totally. Get rid of that green mess!

PENELOPE: Green mess! You have not heard the end of this Senator!

STONE: Rubbish!

PENELOPE: I will reach out to higher authorities. To the vice president!

STONE: That fool!

PENELOPE: He at least is a nature lover. I will protect my garden with all my strength. You will get to my roses over my dead body!

STONE: Out!

Penelope storms out, talking angrily to her Ficus plant.

BACK TO REALITY

PENELOPE: That was one-forty-five. He was very much alive.

SERGEI: Very loudly alive, shouting about rubbish. I returned to Tolstoy: true culture. Ze Russian culture, so much more genuine than your American artificial intelligence!

PENELOPE: I agree. Tolstoy was a true lover of nature. He saw nature as a realm of both ceaseless struggle and supreme harmony: War and Peace.

(Sergei looks at her with admiration, nodding to himself)

CRADDOCK: And where did you go, Ms Ashworth?

PENELOPE: I returned to the terrace. By the way, the roses said someone else visited the Senator after we left.

EVERYONE: *(turning to her)* What?

PENELOPE: Around two. I was still on the terrace. I heard voices in the library. Angry voices.

CRADDOCK: Could you identify them?

PENELOPE: *(shaking head)* The jasmine was blooming loudly. Very distracting. But one was the Senator. The other was... a woman.

HARRIS: You're sure?

PENELOPE: The plants are sure. I merely translate.

FINCH: Fascinating. Ms. Ashworth, you're like a Hermit Thrush. Solitary, observant, with exceptional hearing.

PENELOPE: *(pleased)* Thrushes are good for gardens. They eat many pests.

SERGEI: Detective, I must insist—I did not kill Senator. Yes, he threatened me. But I am diplomat! We use words as weapons, not violence!

FINCH: You had motive and opportunity. You'll need to surrender your passport.

SERGEI: *(dramatically)* This is international scandal! Ambassador will hear of this!

FINCH: The Ambassador already knows. No one leaves until we solve this murder.

[Penelope returns to her plants, talking. Blackout]

SCENE SEVEN – THE SOMMELIER AND THE BUTLER

THE WINE CELLAR – 10.30 am. Pemberton and Francois are checking the wine. The 3 Police officers enter.

FINCH: (*looks around disappointed through binoculars*) No birds here, only a few bats.... although their habits are very interesting too.

HARRIS: So Mr Pemberton, what about last night?

FRANÇOIS: (*interrupting*) The Senator, he was drinking the '82 Bordeaux last night. Magnifique vintage. Wasted on his unrefined palate!

HARRIS: We'll get to you in a moment, Mr. Beaumont.

FRANÇOIS: (*offended*) I am sommelier! Not mister! (*theatrically*) I am artist of the vine!

CRADDOCK: Your movements last night, please, Mr Pemberton.

PEMBERTON: I had many duties to perform. The Senator called me. (*dislike in his voice.*)

HARRIS: Perhaps you had good reason to dislike Senator Stone.

PEMBERTON: So did many ...

FLASHBACK: THE LIBRARY: Francois is serving wine to Senator Stone.

FRANÇOIS: This is a superb wine. '82 Bordeaux – so suitable for a man of your culture and standing.

STONE: Cut out the bla bla bla Francois, just slosh it in.

FRANÇOIS: Senator! You insult our glorious French tradition!

There is a knock at the door.

STONE: Who is it?

PEMBERTON: (*off*) You sent for me, Sir.

STONE: Come in.

(*gestures for Francois to leave, Francois hides behind a curtain and sometimes we see his astonished face. Pemberton enters*)

PEMBERTON: You called?

STONE: What an honour. The Indian Prince. The Maharaja Prince Ajubi.

PEMBERTON: What! I'm an Englishman.

STONE: Years of whitening cream, best private schools in England. Then a disgusting, dissolute life. Disgraced and kicked out by your family.

PEMBERTON: (*shouting*) It's not true!

STONE: I have the evidence. (*he shows his red folder, then he clicks with a remote control. On the screen we see our Actor as a Maharaja in company with pretty girls*)

PEMBERTON: We all have a past – so do you, Senator.

STONE: What?

PEMBERTON: (*shouting*) You are a goddamn racist. And I can prove it.

STONE: (*shouting*) Out! And don't show your face in my circles again. (*Pemberton leaves angrily*)

BACK TO REALITY (the wine cellar)

FRANÇOIS: I was here and I heard angry voices. There was the Senator, certainement. His voice, very loud. Like cheap champagne. ... The other was Pemberton. They were shouting ... fighting.

PEMBERTON: (*angrily*) There was no fight! The Frenchman is lying!

FRANÇOIS: (*offended*) I never lie! Except about vintage years, but that is ... professional courtesy!

HARRIS: Mr Pemberton, the truth.

PEMBERTON: (*reluctantly*) The Senator called for me at 12.45. And he was ALIVE when I left! Drunk but alive!

HARRIS: Mr. Beaumont, why were you here at that time?

FRANÇOIS: The Bordeaux, she was not at proper temperature. I stayed until three, adjusting the wine, she is delicate! Like beautiful woman! She needs attention! (*caressing a bottle*)

HARRIS: Can anyone verify this?

FRANÇOIS: The wine bottles! They are witnesses!

CRADDOCK: I'll check the cellar logs.

HARRIS: Good thinking Craddock! Check the temperature controls.

FRANÇOIS: (*proudly*) You will see! François never abandons his wine!

FINCH: We'll check this later. Time for that twittering Secretary Bird.

(*The Police exit.*]

PEMBERTON: (*angrily*) You filthy liar!

FRANÇOIS: It is you mon ami, the liar. I was not here, but in the library, behind the curtain. I know who you really are.

PEMBERTON: (*shocked*) What?

FRANÇOIS: (*mimicking the Senator*) The Maharaja Prince Ajubi. Whitening cream, best private schools in England. Then ... pretty girls, illicit sex ... disgraced and kicked out by your family – look at you – a humble butler.

PEMBERTON: You keep your dirty mouth shut!

FRANÇOIS: Bien sure ... with a little donation from you.

PEMBERTON: (*horrified*) Blackmail!

FRANÇOIS: Let's call it white mail ... (*he reaches out his hand, smiling evilly – blackout*)

SCENE 8: THE AMBITIOUS ASSISTANT

[SLIDE: "THE STUDY - 11:00 am"]

[LUCY VALENTINE sits, typing on her laptop. ROSIE CHEEK dusts nearby, clearly eavesdropping. FINCH, CRADDOCK and HARRIS enter. There is no Flashback in this scene: there is a lot of movement and interaction.]

FINCH: Ms. Valentine.

LUCY: (*not looking up*) Can we make this quick? I'm managing a crisis. Dead senators are trending on Twitter.

FINCH: You found that out fast. Like a good Secretary Bird.

LUCY: (*finally looking up*) I'm not a secretary. I'm the Ambassador's assistant. Information is my job.

ROSIE: She's always on her phone. I've heard her taking calls, even secretly, in the bathroom.

LUCY: (*irritated*) The maid. How helpful.

ROSIE: (*sweetly*) I aim to please.

CRADDOCK: Ms. Valentine, what did the Senator want last night?

LUCY: (*sighing*) What he always wanted. Information. He was investigating the Ambassador.

HARRIS: For what?

LUCY: well ... let's say budget irregularities.

CRADDOCK: Did he expect you to provide evidence?

LUCY: (coolly) I'm loyal to Ambassador Wellington. She gave me this position.

ROSIE: (dusting) She also threatened to fire you last week.

LUCY: (whipping around) You were listening at the door!

ROSIE: (innocently) These rooms have excellent acoustics.

LUCY: (uncomfortable) It was a minor disagreement...

ROSIE: She accused her of leaking information to the press. Nepotism. The Ambassador gave her nephew the new security contract which Gerry can't manage.

GERRY: (entering, offended) I heard my name! I manage security just fine!

HARRIS: Ms Thornton, we'll speak with you later.

GERRY: Who cares! I'm preparing for my X Factor auditions! Very soon, sooner than you think, I'll leave this crappy job and find fame! Hah!

CRADDOCK. (Sarcastic). Can't wait to see you in action.

GERRY: Really? Here's a taste [*GERRY sings a line*]

CRADDOCK: I wasn't serious, leave us please. [*GERRY exits, deflated*]

FINCH: Ms. Valentine, did you leak that information?

LUCY: (pause) The Senator promised me a top position on his staff! And then he died and ruined everything!

CRADDOCK: When did you last see him?

LUCY: After dinner. He said he had new information. He wanted to meet later to discuss it.

But I didn't go: I was done being his informant!

ROSIE: (casually) I saw her leave her room at one-thirty.

LUCY: (furious) Do you watch EVERYONE?

ROSIE: (shrugging) It's my little hobby.

LUCY: (trapped) I was going to the... kitchen. I wanted tea.

ROSIE: The kitchen is in the west wing. You were going east... to the library.

LUCY: (furious, quietly) Shut up, bitch!

HARRIS: (leaning forward) Did you meet Senator Stone at one-thirty?

LUCY: (breaking) Yes! Yes. He texted me. He had information about the Ambassador.

HARRIS: What information?

LUCY: I don't know! We argued. He wanted me to steal documents from the Ambassador. I refused.

I left at two-fifteen. And he was ALIVE. Drunk and angry, but alive.

ROSIE: (to Harris) That's true. I saw her return to her room at two-twenty.

LUCY: (to Rosie) You're creepy. You know that, right?

ROSIE: I prefer "observant."

CRADDOCK: (making notes) So Pemberton at 12.45, Volkov at one and probably Lucy around two ...

FINCH: (to Lucy) You remind me of a Starling. Intelligent. Adaptable. And thieving.

LUCY: I'm not a thief!

FINCH: Yet you were stealing information for the Senator.

LUCY: That's different! That's politics! (*Finch goes off towards the audience with his binoculars*)

CRADDOCK: Is he aware that calling women "thieves" isn't exactly cool?

HARRIS: He genuinely thinks it's a compliment. Starlings are his third favourite bird.

CRADDOCK: and the first two?

HARRIS: Finches of course, and then swallows.

CRADDOCK: How did you know that?

HARRIS: er ...It came up in conversation ...

CRADDOCK: Sure ... and do you know his favourite colour? His birthday? His ...

HARRIS: (*sharply*) We're working Constable!

ROSIE: By the way, I saw the Ambassador leaving her rooms around two-thirty.

ALL POLICE: (*turning sharply*) What?

ROSIE: The Ambassador. She went downstairs looking very agitated.

FINCH: Why didn't you mention this earlier?

ROSIE: (*simply*) You didn't ask. Also, I wanted to save it for dramatic effect.

FINCH: Ms. Cheek, you're like a Magpie. Clever. Mischievous. And hoarding information like shiny objects.

ROSIE: (*pleased*) Magpies are very intelligent! Thank you!

FINCH: It wasn't a compliment. We need to speak with the Ambassador immediately.

[Blackout, Police hurry out, Lucy and Rosie remain a moment glaring at each other]

SCENE 9: THE AMBASSADOR'S SECRET

[SLIDE: THE AMBASSADOR'S PRIVATE OFFICE - 11:45 am. Bird outside a window on a tree]

[WELLINGTON paces. PEMBERTON stands by the door. FINCH, CRADDOCK and HARRIS enter. FINCH gazes through binoculars.]

WELLINGTON: Detective, detective Finch!

FINCH: Just a moment, quiet! It's a superb lark, wonderful song, shhh!

WELLINGTON: Have you made progress? The Australian Prime Minister has to return to Canberra. The Russian attaché is making complaints. And TV crews are outside!

FINCH: Damn them, they'll disturb the birds. Go ahead Henriette. *[Finch moves around with binoculars]*

HARRIS: My name is Harriet. Ambassador, you were seen leaving your rooms at two-thirty.

WELLINGTON: (*sitting heavily*) I couldn't sleep. I had indigestion and Senator Stone was... difficult. I went to the library to talk to the Senator.

FLASHBACK: Wellington confronts the Senator

WELLINGTON: Senator Stone, you've been making accusations. Threatening to reveal... things.

STONE: What ... things?

WELLINGTON: (*long pause*) I know I made mistakes years ago. Budget allocation decisions that could be... misinterpreted.

STONE: Ambassador, look at these documents. Evidence of corruption is clear. *(he shows his red folder)*

WELLINGTON: (*sharply*) This could end my career!

STONE: Exactly! *Laughing drunkenly*

WELLINGTON: Senator, if these financial records are taken out of context, they are damning!

STONE: I will release them to the press unless you resign.

WELLINGTON: Go to hell. I'll weather whatever scandal you create. I've been in politics years longer than you and I know how to survive.

STONE: *laughing more* You'll be finished by Monday.

WELLINGTON: I'll make sure you keep your mouth shut. *She leaves furiously.*

BACK TO REALITY

PEMBERTON: Ambassador, you should consult a lawyer.

WELLINGTON: Why? I've done nothing!

HARRIS: What time did you leave the Senator?

WELLINGTON: Three o'clock.

PEMBERTON: I can verify that. I heard her return. I was awake due to the... noise from the Prime Minister's rooms.

CRADDOCK: (*making notes*) So the Ambassador returned at three. The Senator was alive, and by 6.47, he was dead.

WELLINGTON: (*desperately*) Alright, I hated him! He was destroying my career! But I didn't murder him!

FINCH: You're like a Red-tailed Hawk. Powerful. Territorial. And deadly when threatened.

WELLINGTON: (*coldly*) If you plan to arrest me, Detective, do it now. Otherwise, I have a crisis to manage.

FINCH: No arrest. Yet. But don't leave the grounds.

Wellington leaves angrily. Carry on, er ... Hazel

HARRIS: My name is Harriet.

Finch ignores that and takes up his binoculars. Pemberton remains in the background.]

CRADDOCK: He doesn't even know your name!

HARRIS: Why should he?

CRADDOCK: Look at him, typical man! A one-track mind, incapable of multi-tasking.

HARRIS: Not true. He's unconventional, and his methods work.

CRADDOCK: You really admire him, don't you?

HARRIS: (*quickly*) Professionally. I admire him professionally.

PEMBERTON: Detective, detective! (*Finch, annoyed, turns*) I have some something to say.

FINCH: Go on.

PEMBERTON: The Senator carried a red folder everywhere. I believe it contained evidence against the other guests. It was his power.

CRADDOCK: Where is the folder now?

PEMBERTON: That's the strange thing. It wasn't in the library.

CRADDOCK: So the killer took it ... or someone else after the murder.

HARRIS: Who else had access to the library?

PEMBERTON: Everyone. It's not locked.

CRADDOCK: Did you hear anything unusual after 3?

PEMBERTON: (*considering*) I heard loud footsteps. Around 4. Heavy boots.

CRADDOCK: Boots at four?

PEMBERTON: The gardener starts then. And the security patrol changes at four.

HARRIS: Gerry said she was on duty all night.

PEMBERTON: (*coldly*) Hah! I know the truth about Gerry ... and about everyone. I am the only one who knows all the secrets!

SECRETS DANCE

Pemberton takes a glass of water, drinks, then chokes. He collapses. The police step forward. Freeze.

WELLINGTON: This is outrageous!

SERGEI: I demand diplomatic immunity!

BLAKE: Me too, for that matter.

LUCY: I'm calling my lawyer!

FRANÇOIS: (*enters suddenly*) My wine! Someone stole my precious Bordeaux! Ten crates of it.

FINCH: (*loudly*) QUIET! (*silence*) Thank you. Now, like a parliament of owls, we must observe and listen.

GERRY: (*raising hand*) Detective, I have information.

ALL: (*turning*) Information?

GERRY: I wasn't exactly... monitoring the cameras all night.

WELLINGTON: We know. You were watching X Factor.

GERRY: Not just that. I was... rehearsing in the security room with headphones on.

WELLINGTON: (*furious*) You abandoned your post completely?

GERRY: Only from midnight to four. I have footage. I set the cameras to record.

[*GERRY clicks a remote. SLIDE: "SECURITY FOOTAGE - HALLWAY CAMERA" several grainy photos with times*]

GERRY: See? Eleven-forty-five. There's the Senator entering the library. Twelve-forty-five, Pemberton goes in, comes out at one-fifteen.

SERGEI: Then me, leaving at one-forty.

LUCY: And me going in at one-fifty five. I left at two-fifteen.

WELLINGTON: And I went in at two-thirty, left at three.

HARRIS: Who's that?

[*They point at the screen. A figure in a hooded coat enters at four-fifteen.*]

CRADDOCK: (*excited*) The murderer! Or the folder thief!

PENELOPE: (*squinting*) Those boots... I've seen those boots before!

GERRY: Wait, there's more. At five-thirty, someone else goes in.

[*Another hooded figure appears.*]

MAGGIE: Two people?

FINCH: Perhaps one killed him, another took the folder. Like crows at carrion – multiple scavengers.

(*they continue to study the photos while Craddock goes aside with Harris*)

CRADDOCK: (*to Harris*) Did he just compare murder to bird feeding behaviour?

HARRIS: That's actually one of his more normal observations.

CRADDOCK: Three years with him. Why do you stay?

HARRIS: (*glancing at Finch*) Someone has to keep him alive. Last month he nearly walked into traffic watching a peregrine falcon.

CRADDOCK: And you rescued him?

HARRIS: (*quietly*) And I always will. (*they turn back to the security photos*)

WELLINGTON: Can we see their faces?

GERRY: The hoods hide the faces ... but wait! (*zooms in*) There! A ring on the first person's hand!

ROSIE: (*gasping*) That's a diplomatic ring! Like Mr. Volkov's!

SERGEI: (*hiding his hand*) Many people have such rings!

CRADDOCK: May we see your hands, everyone?

[*Everyone reluctantly shows their hands. SERGEI, WELLINGTON, and LUCY all wear rings.*]

MAGGIE: (suddenly) The second person! Look at their pocket! Something's sticking out!

GERRY: (zooming) A green cloth. Looks like... a gardening glove?

PENELOPE: (defensive) Half the staff uses gardening gloves!

HARRIS: But you reported yours stolen, along with the insecticide.

PENELOPE: Someone is framing me! The plants would never forgive me for murder!

ROSIE: There's something you don't know... I'm ashamed to tell you about it.

WELLINGTON: Go on Rosie, don't worry. The Police have to know all the details.

For the Flashback the cast take one step back, some sit.

SCENE 3: FLASHBACK - THE SENATOR AND ROSIE

[SLIDE: "THE SENATOR'S QUARTERS - 11:00 pm (PREVIOUS NIGHT - FLASHBACK)"]

[ROSIE enters with fresh towels. SENATOR STONE is at his desk with his red folder.]

ROSIE: Your towels, Senator. (sets them down, turns to leave)

STONE: Wait. You're the maid, aren't you? Rosie?

ROSIE: Yes, sir. Will that be all?

STONE: (standing, moving closer) Pretty thing. Always around, always watching.

ROSIE: (stepping back) I should go, sir.

STONE: (advancing) I bet you see everything in this house. Hear everything.

ROSIE: (stepping back) Senator, please...

STONE: (leering) We could make an arrangement. Tell me what you know... I make it worthwhile. In the meantime, how about a little something for me!

[He chases her around the room, reaches for her. She hits him hard. He staggers back, surprised.]

ROSIE: (furious) How dare you! I may be a maid but I'm not for sale!

STONE: (rubbing his face, angry) You bitch!

ROSIE: Touch me again and I'll report you for harassment! I have witnesses! I'll ruin you!

STONE: (laughing cruelly) Report me? Who'd believe a maid?

ROSIE: Try me. (storms out)

STONE: (shouting after her) You'll regret this!

SCENE 4: BACK TO PRESENT - ROSIE'S REVELATION

[SLIDE: "THE DRAWING ROOM - 1:00 pm (PRESENT)"]

ROSIE: (quietly) I should have told you earlier. The Senator... he tried to assault me.

CRADDOCK: (gently) You were right to tell us what happened. Women should never put up with that.

[ROSIE is fighting tears. MAGGIE puts an arm around her.]

MAGGIE: That bastard.

BLAKE: Geez. That's tough, Rosie.

ROSIE: I was terrified he'd get me fired. Or worse. So I said nothing.

HARRIS: Did you see him again that night?

ROSIE: No! I locked myself in my room after that!

FINCH: You're like a Wren. You appear vulnerable... but you are fierce when defending your territory.

ROSIE: (wiping eyes) Thank you ... I think.

LUCY: Rosie, I'm so sorry. If I'd known... I wouldn't have been so ...um... bitchy with you.

ROSIE: It's all right Lucy. I guess I had a bad attitude with you too.

LUCY: Hey, let's go out for a drink together. A glass of prosecco might clear the air!

ROSIE: Sure!

LUCY: Anyway it explains why you were hanging round such a lot.

ROSIE: Yeah, I was watching everyone. I wanted dirt on the bastard.

LUCY: Did you get it?

ROSIE: Some. I saw François in the cellar, talking on the phone about getting free wine for the Senator.

FRANÇOIS: Qu'est-ce que tu racontes?

WELLINGTON: Procuring wine for the Senator?

ROSIE: The Senator found out he was selling our wine to a restaurant.

FRANÇOIS: (*sputtering*) Zat is... zat is... (*deflates*) Oui. It is true. Zis is what 'appened.

FLASHBACK: THE LIBRARY 12.15

François is serving wine to Senator Stone. Conversation starts as before.

FRANÇOIS: This is a superb wine. '82 Bordeaux – so suitable for a man of your culture and standing.

STONE: Cut out the bla bla bla François, just slosh it in.

FRANÇOIS: Mais oui. Here you are.

STONE: By the way, I was having dinner at the Tower Restaurant ...

FRANÇOIS: ... oh, er ... (*cough*) 3 Michelin stars! Excellent food.

STONE: The food and the wine.

FRANÇOIS: ze vine, yes...

STONE: '82 Bordeaux ... with a small note on the label: produced for Raven Hall.... how do you explain that?

FRANÇOIS: (*very dramatically*) Sacre bleu! I have been discovered! It will be the end for me. Please, please, I beg you, do not tell the Ambassador. I am a dead man.

STONE: We can arrange something. Like a steady supply of superb wine for me.

FRANÇOIS: Je vous remercie beaucoup, beaucoup! Another glass of wine, Senator. (*he fills his glass*)

BACK TO THE PRESENT

FRANÇOIS: It was like that ...

ROSIE: Hmm, I knew it.

HARRIS: Would you care to share some more information, Rosie?

ROSIE: Absolutely! I heard Gerry on the phone with a magazine, selling stories about the Ambassador.

GERRY: (*caught*) I need money for my music career!

WELLINGTON: You're both fired.

HARRIS: Deal with that after the investigation, Ambassador. Now, Rosie, did you see the red folder?

ROSIE: The Senator carried it everywhere. He had it at dinner.... er ... There's something else ...

I did something dishonest, something a maid should never do. I looked inside the folder. I saw notes about everyone. Incriminating notes!

The cast gasps. Blackout

SCENE 5: THE BLACKMAIL DEEPENS

[SLIDE: "THE WINE CELLAR - 2:00 pm"]

[FRANÇOIS and PEMBERTON - now recovered and returned - face each other. FINCH, HARRIS watch from shadows.]

FRANÇOIS: Ah, Pemberton. Or should I say... Prince Ajubi?

PEMBERTON: (*coldly*) What do you want?

FRANÇOIS: Your secret is safe... for a price. Ten thousand dollars.

PEMBERTON: You're a coward, and a criminal, blackmailing me.

FRANÇOIS : Je préfère "financial arrangement." Bien, the Senator had evidence. I heard everything. Now he's dead... but I remember.

PEMBERTON: You're despicable.

FRANÇOIS: (*shrugging*) I am French. We are practical about such things.

PEMBERTON: And if I refuse?

FRANÇOIS: Then everyone learns about the disgraced Prince who became a butler. (*pauses*) And about the reason you were disgraced.

PEMBERTON: (*grabbing him*) You wouldn't dare!

FRANÇOIS: (*smugly*) Try me, mon ami.

[FINCH steps forward from shadows.]

FINCH: Blackmail is illegal, Mr. Beaumont. Blackbirds are clever thieves, but they always get caught.

FRANÇOIS: (*startled*) I... it was a joke! A jest!

HARRIS: We have it recorded. You're under arrest for attempted blackmail.

FRANÇOIS: Non! Non! I was trying to help solve the murder! I thought if I scared him, he would confess!

PEMBERTON: Liar!

FINCH: Take him away, Hannah.

HARRIS: Harriet.

FRANCOIS: Non- je suis innocent! je n'ai rien fait de mal. Non !!!

[HARRIS escorts protesting FRANÇOIS out.]

FINCH: Mr. Pemberton, any idea who might have poisoned you?

PEMBERTON: I saw someone at four-thirty after I left the Ambassador. I went to the kitchen for water. Someone was in the hallway, carrying the red folder.

FINCH: Who?

PEMBERTON: I couldn't see. They wore a hood. But I recognized something... a perfume. Expensive. French.

FINCH: Ambassador Wellington wears French perfume.

PEMBERTON: So does Lucy. And even Rosie, probably pinched from the Ambassador!

FINCH: More thieving magpies!

SCENE 6: THE ROMANTIC INTERLUDE

[SLIDE: "THE CONSERVATORY - 3:00 pm"]

[MAGGIE tends to herbs. BLAKE enters, charming as ever.]

BLAKE: Hiding from the chaos?

MAGGIE: (*not looking up*) Thinking.

BLAKE: About us?

MAGGIE: (turning) There is no us, Prime Minister. Last night was... a mistake.

BLAKE: Didn't feel like a mistake. It felt rather spectacular.

MAGGIE: (smiling despite herself) Stop that.

BLAKE: Stop what?

MAGGIE: Being charming. It's infuriating.

BLAKE: (moving closer) I can't help it. It's the Australian way. (pause) Maggie, I meant what I said last night.

MAGGIE: You were drunk.

BLAKE: I was honest. You're remarkable. Strong, talented, passionate...

MAGGIE: Irish, working-class, completely wrong for a Prime Minister.

BLAKE: (taking her hand) Bugger that. When I'm near you, I feel alive.

MAGGIE: (wavering) Blake...

BLAKE: Give us a chance. After this nightmare ends. Dinner in Sydney? I know a place with the best seafood.

MAGGIE: You're serious?

BLAKE: Serious as a heart attack. (pause) Too soon?

MAGGIE: (laughing) Terrible timing. But... yes. After this is over. Dinner would be lovely. And the rest!

[They kiss, tenderly this time. CRADDOCK appears in the doorway.]

CRADDOCK: Sorry to interrupt, but Detective Finch needs everyone in the drawing room. Now.

SCENE 7: THE GATHERING

[SLIDE: "THE DRAWING ROOM - 4:00 pm"]

[All suspects assembled. Finch is missing. Tension is palpable. Harris and Craddock are looking around, anxiously waiting for Finch]

CRADDOCK: Where the hell is he?

HARRIS: I guess he's found a bird.

CRADDOCK: He knows so much about birds. But it distracts him too much.

HARRIS: Just wait and see how he uses bird behaviour. Last month he used bird symbolism in Shakespeare to solve a crime, a murder in the theatre.

CRADDOCK: You're not kidding!

HARRIS: no, it was brilliant, he linked killer birds to the lead actor in Macbeth ... shhh, here he is.

FINCH: (enters) Sorry I'm late! Just had to catch a Barn Owl. Quite a rare specimen. Thank you all for coming. (pause) I believe I know who killed Senator Stone.

WELLINGTON: Finally!

FINCH: But first, let me explain my method. You see, birds reveal truth through behaviour. Migration patterns, mating rituals, territorial disputes... all mirror human nature.

LUCY: This is insane.

FINCH: Is it? Consider: The Senator was like a Vulture. Aggressive, territorial, using secrets to weapons. He threatened everyone here.

SERGEI: This is true.

FINCH: Sergei Volkov - you're a Raven. Intelligent, opportunistic. The Senator accused you of embezzling the money for the Firebird ballet. You had motive.

SERGEI: I did not kill him!

FINCH: No. Because Ravens are patient. You would have defeated him politically, not murdered him.

SERGEI: And I would have done so!

FINCH: Ambassador Wellington - a Red-tailed Hawk. Powerful, protective of territory. He threatened your career.

WELLINGTON: I already told you—

FINCH: You visited him at two-thirty. Argued. Left at three. But here's what's interesting: Hawks are diurnal. They don't hunt at dawn.

WELLINGTON: What does that mean?

FINCH: You're not a morning person, Ambassador. You never wake before eight. Yet the murder occurred between four and six am.

LUCY: (*nervous*) What about me?

FINCH: Lucy Valentine - a Starling. Adaptable, clever, thriving in chaos. You were feeding him information. He betrayed you.

LUCY: I didn't kill him!

FINCH: No. Because Starlings are survivors. You'd simply find a new patron.

HARRIS: Which you did - you're already negotiating with a rival senator.

LUCY: (*shocked*) How did you—

HARRIS: Your phone records. Simple.

FINCH: Now, Penelope Ashworth - a Hermit Thrush. Solitary, observant. You heard arguing. Reported seeing someone at two am.

PENELOPE: The plants never lie!

FINCH: No, but humans do. You said you were on the terrace until two. But the security footage shows the terrace was empty after midnight.

PENELOPE: (*flustered*) I... the jasmine... I was confused about timing!

FINCH: Or you were in the library. You argued with the Senator about budget cuts. He was destroying your garden - your life's work.

PENELOPE: (*crying*) He called it a "green mess"! Thirty years of cultivation!

FINCH: But you didn't kill him either. Because you're not a killer - you're a nurturer.

WELLINGTON: Then who, Detective?

FINCH: We can set aside the Prime Minister. He has a pretty firm alibi, so to speak, our Peacock.

BLAKE: Bloody hell, I'm glad of that night's negotiations with Maggie ... for more reasons than one!

MAGGIE: Ambassador, you won't fire me for that little indiscretion, will you?

WELLINGTON: when I was your age my dear, I did much worse! Or better! (*they laugh a little*)

FINCH: Let me tell you about one more bird. The Cuckoo. It lays eggs in other birds' nests. A parasite. A deceiver.

[*FINCH walks slowly around the room.*]

FINCH: Someone here has been playing multiple roles. Deceiving everyone. Like a Cuckoo.

PENELOPE: Like the swallows' nest I found in my geraniums. The cuckoo had taken possession of it.

FINCH: Gerry Thornton. You claim you were rehearsing during the critical hours. But you're lying.

GERRY: (*standing*) What? No! I showed you the footage!

HARRIS: Footage you could have edited. You're the security chief. You control the cameras.

GERRY: That's ridiculous!

HARRIS: Is it? You needed money desperately for your music career. The Senator was wealthy. You asked him for money, with threats, or possibly promises ...of sexual favours?

GERRY: (*Backing away*) I would never—

CRADDOCK: But he laughed at you. Called your singing "caterwauling." It's in his diary, which we found in the folder.

HARRIS: The folder that disappeared.

CRADDOCK: The folder you took, Gerry. After you killed him. You wore Penelope's stolen coat and gloves.

PENELOPE: So, you were framing me! What have I ever done to harm you? You, you repel me like ... like a bunch of supermarket flowers!

CRADDOCK: (*Interrupting*) Shall we leave that till later, Penelope?

HARRIS: You knew about the cameras, so you hid your face. But you forgot one thing.

GERRY: What?

CRADDOCK: Your boots. The same boots visible in the footage. We checked.

[*CRADDOCK produces the boots in an evidence bag.*]

GERRY: (*desperate*) You can't prove anything!

HARRIS: We found your finger prints on the letter opener. (*showing it to her*)

GERRY: (*breaking down*) He ruined everything. I begged him for a loan, just five thousand dollars! He laughed. Said I'd never make it ... said I was talentless! And then ... it's true, I offered to sleep with him ... and he said he'd rather sleep with a cow.

ROSIE: Oh, poor Gerry.

GERRY: I didn't plan to kill him! I went to take the folder, to find dirt on him for revenge! But he woke up, called me pathetic! Said I was wasting my life! So I... I grabbed the letter opener and...

[*She collapses, sobbing. CRADDOCK moves to arrest her.*]

CRADDOCK: Geraldine Thornton, you're under arrest for the murder of Senator Harvey Stone.

GERRY: I could have been famous! He destroyed my dream!

FINCH: No, Ms. Thornton. You destroyed it yourself. Like a Cuckoo that kills its nest-mates. True talent doesn't need murder. It needs patience.

CRADDOCK: You have the right to remain silent, but whatever you say may be used against you in a court of law.

FINCH: By the way, Craddock, well done. You're a Crow, as I said, one of the most intelligent birds.

CRADDOCK: Thanks! I've learnt a lot from you, boss. (*to Harris*) And you too, Harriet. (*Harris looks very happy*)

HARRIS: Great job for your first time out. I hope we can work together again.

CRADDOCK: (*quietly to Harris*) You know, Finch is actually not bad. Weird, but not bad.

HARRIS: (*softly*) No. Not bad at all.

CRADDOCK: You should tell him how you feel.

HARRIS: (*firmly*) There's nothing to tell.

CRADDOCK: (*smirking*) Right. And I'm a pigeon. Come on, Gerry.

Craddock and Gerry exit. The others comment, pour drinks...

SCENE 8: RESOLUTION

[*SLIDE: "THE DRAWING ROOM - SUNSET"*]

[The remaining suspects sit, exhausted, drinking, Pemberton and Rosie pass drink.. Craddock has returned]

WELLINGTON: I still can't believe it. Gerry.

ROSIE: She always seemed so... harmless.

FINCH: That's what made her dangerous. Like a Cuckoo, she appeared innocent while plotting.

BLAKE: What about Pemberton's poisoning?

HARRIS: Gerry again. She heard him say he saw someone at four-thirty. She stole the insecticide, tried to silence him.

PEMBERTON: (*touching his throat*) She almost succeeded.

PENELOPE: My poor insecticide. Used for evil instead of pest control.

HARRIS: She even used the Ambassador's perfume to put us off the scent, so to speak.

SERGEI: And the folder?

HARRIS: Hidden in Gerry's car. We recovered it. All the Senator's "evidence" against everyone.

WELLINGTON: (*nervous*) What will happen to it?

HARRIS: Well, the FBI will handle it.

LUCY: So we're all... exposed?

FINCH: Perhaps. But let's keep it quiet. What happens in Raven Hall stays in Raven Hall, right? (*they sigh with relief*) The Senator was a bully who collected secrets for power. You all had flaws. Who doesn't?

PENELOPE: But only Gerry chose murder.

[Pause. They drink. Rosie comes up with Lucy, both a little tipsy.]

ROSIE: Lucy I've got a little confession – but it's top secret!

LUCY: Trust me!

ROSIE: I didn't tell the whole truth about Senator Stone ... we were having an affair!

LUCY: Oooh Rosie, you naughty girl!

ROSIE: He was kind to me, lovely presents ... I never loved him, but we had fun together.

LUCY: Some time I'll tell you my secrets! (*they clink glasses and drink again*)

BLAKE: Well. I'd better get moving. (*standing*) Maggie, help me pack? I leave tomorrow.

MAGGIE: (*smiling*) About that dinner in Sydney...

BLAKE: (*grinning*) I'll send my private jet.

[They exit together. WELLINGTON watches them go.]

WELLINGTON: A Prime Minister and my chef. Wonderful.

PENELOPE: (*cheerfully*) At least something good came from this mess!

SERGEI: (*bringing Penelope forward while the others continue drinking behind*). Perhaps something else good: a word, Miss Penelope.

PENELOPE: yes, Mr Volkov?

SERGEI: I have been observing you and your love for nature. You know our great writers – Tolstoy, Chekhov, Turgenev – adored nature.

PENELOPE: oh, yes, I devour many of your brilliant writers, especially Tolstoy.

SERGEI: Really? You know Tolstoy had a beautiful Dacha not far from Moscow?

PENELOPE: His country paradise! yes, of course!

SERGEI: I have one too. And it needs a real gardener, the land is – what is it – savage?

PENELOPE: Wild.

SERGEI: yes, wild – Miss Penelope, would you join me there, and tame my wild garden?

PENELOPE: Really? I'd be honoured, Mr Volkov.

SERGEI: Oh, please call me Sergei.

PENELOPE: My best friends call me Penny.

SERGEI: Penny ... in return I'll teach you to dance. The real spirit of my mother country: Kalinka!

Music. He dances a few steps of Kalinka, the others approach and clumsily join in, then collapse laughing.

PENELOPE: Who would believe there'd been a tragedy here! *They laugh again.*

PEMBERTON: Indeed. And Ambassador, about my ... background.

WELLINGTON: Your secret is safe, Pemberton. We all have pasts. You're the best butler I've ever had. That's what matters.

PEMBERTON: *(bowing)* Thank you, ma'am.

FINCH: I should go. Paperwork awaits. But first... *(looking through audience with binoculars)* Ah! A Cardinal! Beautiful red plumage! They mate for life, you know. Loyal until death.

PENELOPE: *(laughing)* We know, Detective! *(they all laugh)*

FINCH: *(lowering binoculars, smiling)* Yes. Well. Remember: we're all birds in a way. Some predatory, some timid, some deceptive. The key is understanding which bird you are... and acting accordingly.

[FINCH exits through the audience. Craddock nudges Harris.]

CRADDOCK: *(to Harris)* He's so observant about birds, yet he's completely blind about people.

HARRIS: *(watching Finch go)* What do you mean?

CRADDOCK: Oh, come on. You look at him like he's the last chocolate in the box.

HARRIS: *(flustered)* I do not!

ROSIE: *(overhearing)* You absolutely do. I noticed.

HARRIS: *(embarrassed)* This is completely inappropriate. We're professionals.

LUCY: Life's short, Harriet. You should tell him.

HARRIS: He doesn't see me that way. He told me I am ... a Dove. Patient. Loyal.

CRADDOCK: Exactly. You know what birds mate for life?

HARRIS: *(suspicious)* What?

CRADDOCK: *(pulling out phone, reading)* Doves. I just googled it. "Doves are symbols of lifelong partnership."

HARRIS: *(torn between hope and scepticism)* He didn't mean it like that.

SERGEI: In Russia, we have saying: "The blind man cannot see the stars, even when they shine for him."

PENELOPE: The roses say you should take a chance.

HARRIS: *(looking at them all)* You're all ridiculous.

SERGEI: Perhaps. But we're not wrong. Take your chance.

HARRIS: *(standing, flustered)* I need to... file paperwork. Excuse me.

(She exits quickly after Finch.)

SERGEI: So. Is strange ending, da?

LUCY: Strange beginning. Strange middle. Strange end.

ROSIE: At least the real villain is caught. And I don't have to clean up any more murder scenes!

WELLINGTON: Until next time.

ALL: *(turning to her in horror)* NEXT TIME?!

WELLINGTON: *(smiling wickedly)* Joking. Mostly.

[They laugh. Lights begin to fade.]

PEMBERTON: *(to audience)* And thus concludes another chaotic evening at Raven Hall. Where secrets lurk, birds watch, and murder... occasionally interrupts dinner.

ALL: *(raising glasses)* To survival! *[SLIDE: "THE END"]*

[Final tableau: all characters frozen in their toast. Then GERRY's voice echoes from offstage, singing badly. Everyone groans. Blackout. Curtains close]

THE AUDIENCE VOTES HAVE BEEN SORTED AND THE CORRECT ONES ARE IN A HAT. FINCH DRAWS OUT ONE AND PRESENTS THE PRIZE.

Curtains open **BIRD DANCE - APPLAUSE**