**A Perfect Storm**

**By Alex OBT**

**A Perfect Storm**

Runtime: 50 mins

Cast size: 25-40. 11F, 5M, 5 XF, 8XM, 2X, plus 10 or minus 5

*XF/XM: Written as female or male respectively, but possible to change with minimal adjustments to script*

**Introduction**

A Perfect Storm is a mixture of murder mystery, ghost story, and farce. The main story unfolds in a snowed-in mansion in the English countryside, full of bizarre and dastardly characters. The subplot features a band of inept FBI agents and British police officers working to crack a mystery in an eccentric English village. These threads are almost entirely separate, enabling the play to be rehearsed in separate groups. The parts vary in size, but are as evenly spread as possible, with multiple big roles, to ease line learning pressure, and even the smallest roles are written to allow those actors a moment of glory! It will work best with an age range of 6-15.

The play makes lots of references to a beloved camp nonsense song, Oh, I Was Born (see below), which exists in as many different versions as there are summer camps. If you have a slightly different version of the song, make sure to adapt the references! Not knowing the song won’t affect understanding of the play.

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**Synopsis**

*Welcome to Padaraski Manor! You’re a little later than expected…*

Sarah and her boyfriend Sam, a duo of con artists fleeing from the FBI, stumble into what appears to be the perfect con: swindle the fortune from an eccentric old man, Joe Padaraski, who believes Sarah to be his great-niece. But as they arrive at Uncle Joe’s manor, deep in the British countryside, a snowstorm sweeps in, trapping the pair with both Joe’s household and his bizarre guests. Sarah and Sam soon discover that they are not the one with something to hide, and soon they are fighting for survival against an unknown enemy. Meanwhile, in the neighbouring town of Little Sodbury, the combined forces of the FBI and the local police force are racing against time to uncover the mystery of Padaraski Manor before it’s too late…

**Character list**

**PADARASKI MANOR**

Sarah Sponder (Main, F) An antihero who thinks she’s pulling the wool over everyone’s eyes. However, she soon finds herself up against forces far nastier than her.

Sam Aramsam (Main, M) Sarah’s dumb boyfriend tags along and does everything she says. It’s clear to everyone who the brains of this outfit is, though.

Uncle Joe (Big, M) eccentric master of Padaraski Manor.

Liberty Belle (Big, F) Joe’s glamorous fiancée. Has a strong, gushing Southern American accent.

Mr Dithers (Big, M), Joe’s withering butler. Very starchy and immaculately turned out.

Mrs Danvers (Medium, F) Joe’s sinister housekeeper. Sweet with hidden savagery.

Hattie (Medium, XF) Joe’s clueless chef.

Countess Knupf (Medium, XF) a regal foreign guest with a thick but unplaceable foreign accent.

Shark Greenwold (Medium, XM) a suspicious visitor who looks and acts like a sunstruck pirate.

Carla Lovelace (Medium, XF) an irritating social media butterfly.

Rose (Medium, F) haunting presence with a habit of turning up unexpectedly.

Jacob (Small, XM) sinister statue of Joe’s grandfather.

Joan (Small, XF) sinister statue of Joe’s mother.

Lily (Small, F) sinister statue of Joe’s wife.

Stage Manager (Small, X) The tough-talking brains behind the entire show. *The Stage Manager has a vital speaking part at the end, backed up by the stagehands. This role doesn’t have to be played by the actual stage manager, but ideally by someone on the actual stage crew, who has been seen handling transitions and effects before the end.*

**LITTLE SODBURY**

Agent Prance (Big, XM) headstrong FBI agent.

Agent Cleverly (Big, XM) cautious FBI agent.

Bob Constable (Big, M) the ebullient but scarred head policeman.

Rob (Big, XM) the loyal deputy head policeman.

Robbie (Big, XM) a young and easily impressed policeman.

Whateley (Small, X) crabby bartender.

Diamond (Small, XM), cracked groundskeeper.

Murphy (Small, XF) Diamond’s wife.

McGlen (Small, XM) sleepy groundskeeper.

Victor (Small, M) flirtatious yogalates instructor.

Nurse Hennesey (Small, F) sadistic carer.

Nurse Hardacre (Small, F) strict carer.

Greta (Small, F) pranking oldie.

Ethel (Small, F) lovelorn oldie.

Jackie (Small, F) smart oldie.

Harriet (Small, F) straight-laced oldie.

*Additional inn patrons can be added to Scene 7, or old folks to Scene 10, if needed*

**Scene character list**

*This list is provided to help keep track of who is needed in which scene.*

1. WELCOME TO THE MANOR

Dithers, Sarah, Sam, Danvers

1. UNCLE JOE

Sarah, Joe, Sam, Jacob, Joan, Lily

1. TRUE COLOURS

Sarah, Sam, Stagehand

1. MISSION BRIEF

Prance, Cleverly, Bob, Rob, Robbie

1. BREAKFAST
   1. Joe, Knupf, Darby, Carla, Hattie, Belle, Dithers, Sarah, Sam
   2. Joe, Knupf, Darby, Carla, Hattie, Belle, Dithers, Sarah, Sam, Rose
2. A THREAT
   1. Sarah, Dithers, Danvers
   2. Sarah, Dithers, Danvers, Sam
3. THE DEVIL’S HANDS

Prance, Cleverly, Whateley, Pete, Heather, McGlen, Jim

1. SUDDEN DEATH

Joe, Knupf, Darby, Carla, Hattie, Belle, Sam, Rose, Dithers, Sarah, Stagehands

1. THE PLOT THICKENS

Sarah, Sam, Stagehand

1. SUNSET MEADOWS
   1. Victor, Hennesey, Greta, Harriet, Jackie, Ethel
   2. Hardacre, Bob, Rob, Robbie
2. MORNING MOURNING

Belle, Knupf, Darby, Carla, Sam, Sarah, Dithers

1. FACE OFF

Prance, Cleverly, Bob, Rob, Robbie

1. SHOWDOWN
   1. Sam, Rose, Jacob, Joan, Lily
   2. Sarah, Sam, Joe, Dithers, Belle, Jacob, Joan, Lily
   3. Sarah, Sam, Joe, Dithers, Belle, Cleverly, Rob, Robbie, Jacob, Joan, Lily
   4. Sarah, Sam, Joe, Dithers, Belle, Cleverly, Rob, Robbie, Jacob, Joan, Lily, Stage Manager, All

**Oh, I Was Born**

Oh, I was born one night in the morn,   
When the whistles went toot, toot (TOOT, TOOT!)   
You can fry a cake or bake a steak  
When the mud pies are in bloom   
Does 6 and 6 make 9?   
Does ice grow on a vine?   
Is old man Joe an eskimo   
In the good ol' summertime?   
Do a loop-de-loop in your noodle soup   
Just to give your socks a shine,   
I'm guilty judge, I stole the fudge   
3 cheers for auld lang syne!   
I cannot tell a lie, I stole that apple pie,   
It's in a tree, beneath the sea, under a bright blue sky.   
If Easter Eggs don't shave their legs   
Their children will have ducks (QUACK, QUACK!)   
I'd rather buy a lemon pie for 47 bucks   
Way down in Barcelonia,   
They dove into the foamia,   
But this is all baloney-a,   
Padaraski blow your horn, TOOT, TOOT!

**A Perfect Storm**

**Scene 1**

*The entrance hall to Padaraski Manor. DITHERS opens the door and gazes out warily, before his eyes light up with recognition.*

DITHERS There you are! You’re a little later than expected. We were beginning to wonder whether something had happened to you. *(Looking around with distaste)* You arrived in the nick of time. There’s a snowstorm expected tomorrow.

*Pause. SARAH enters with suitcases.*

SARAH Uncle Joe! Oh, you look just like I remember you! You haven’t changed a bit!

*SARAH drops suitcases and hugs DITHERS, sobbing. DITHERS accepts this stiffly.*

DITHERS As charming as your salutation has been, I must inform you that I’m not your Uncle Joe, merely his humble butler, Dithers. Your much-loved great uncle will be joining us shortly. In the meantime, may I show you to your quarters?

*SAM enters, with suitcases. DITHERS looks distressed.*

SAM OK, I think I’ve got everything.

DITHERS Miss Sponder –

SARAH Please call me Sarah.

DITHERS As you will. Sarah, your uncle gave me the impression that it would just be you staying with us. Delighted as I am with this unexpected company, may I enquire who you have brought with you?

SARAH Oh, how silly of me. This is my boyfriend, Sam. Did I forget to tell you he was coming with me? I’m dreadfully sorry.

SAM It’s probably my fault more than Sarah’s. When Sarah got invited here by Joe, I couldn’t help mentioning how I’ve always wanted to visit England, so she insisted I come too. I told her it was a crazy idea, but –

SARAH I insisted he come along. After all, Sam’s practically family, and Uncle Joe is family, so really, we’re all one big happy family!

SAM I hope it’s not too much of a bother for you, Mr Dithers.

DITHERS Bother? No bother at all. I’m sure Mr Padaraski will be delighted to meet your, ah, manfriend. I shall just have to make some additional preparations. *(Clapping)* Mrs Danvers!

*DANVERS enters and curtseys.*

DANVERS Yes, Mr Dithers?

DITHERS We have one additional guest from those anticipated. Would you be good enough to prepare the double room in the North Wing?

DANVERS Of course, Mr Dithers.

DITHERS *(to SARAH and SAM)* In the meantime, is there anything I can do for you? Shine your socks, perhaps?

SARAH We’ve been travelling a long time. I think we’d like to hit the hay.

DITHERS As you will.

DANVERS Each of your rooms is equipped with a whistle. Please don’t hesitate to toot it if you need anything, and I or Mr Dithers will be with you as soon as possible.

*DITHERS and DANVERS pick up suitcases and exit. SARAH and SAM follow.*

*Blackout.*

**Scene 2**

*The graveyard. The STATUES, JACOB, JOAN, and LILY, are onstage. JOE is amongst them, looking like a statue himself. He’s sleeping on his feet, wearing his dressing gown and holding a shovel. SARAH enters, and looks around all the statues wonderingly.*

JOE Lily! Is that – oh, hello there.

*SARAH gasps and jumps away.*

JOE Sorry if I startled you. I was beginning to fall asleep out here. You must be my great-niece, Sarah Sponder.

SARAH That’s me.

JOE I’m Joe Padaraski. I’m sorry I wasn’t there to greet you at the door. I was just getting a little gardening done, though with this storm moving in it probably won’t do much good. *(To himself; moving around)* That reminds me, how are the mud pies doing today? Looks like they haven’t been pruned in a while. Perhaps they’d do better if they were moved into the shade, with the ice vines. *(to SARAH)* I hope you don’t find this place morbid. It’s the family mausoleum. It won’t be long now before I’m spending all my time here, so I think it can’t hurt to get to know the place a little first.

*SAM enters.*

SAM Hello, Mr Padaraski. The name’s Aramsam. Sam Aramsam.

JOE Aramsam Sam Aramsam Sam? What kind of a name is that?

SAM No, *Sam* Aramsam. As in, first name Sam, last name Aramsam. You know what? Just call me Sam.

JOE Well, you can both call me Uncle Joe. Any member of Sarah’s family is a member of my family!

SARAH Aren’t you cold, Uncle Joe?

JOE Oh, the cold doesn’t affect me. I’m part Eskimo.

SAM Who are all these statues?

JOE This is all that’s left of my family line. *(Indicating each STATUE)* My grandmother, Joan Padaraski. My father, Jacob Padaraski. And my dear wife. Lily.

SARAH You were married?

JOE It was a long time ago now. Lily meant the world to me. But our marriage was a sham. She was not the person I thought she was. (*Pause.)* I’ve never been able to understand why, but she slowly lost her head, until she could barely remember her own name. My groundskeeper found her one morning, drowned in the lake below this very graveyard.

*Pause.*

SARAH I’m sorry, Uncle Joe. I had no idea.

JOE I’m glad that you were able to come and visit me. I’ve been alone here for so long that I find myself talking to the statues.

SAM I can see why you’d talk to them. They’re so lifelike! Look at the way their eyes seem to follow you around the room.

*SAM moves from one side to the other. The STATUES move their eyes with him.*

SARAH I thought it was paintings that were supposed to do that. Not statues.

*The STATUES stop moving their eyes.*

JOE You can’t find craftsmanship like that anymore.

*There’s a crack of thunder. The lights flicker off, then on. All STATUES change positions. SARAH and SAM gasp.*

JOE Looks like that storm’s getting closer. We should get back inside before it hits.

*ALL move away.*

*Blackout.*

**Scene 3**

*A bedroom. SARAH and SAM stumble in.*

SARAH Thank God that night’s over. I thought it would never end.

SAM That old man’s simply off his rocker.

SARAH Hey! How dare you speak that way about my beloved Uncle Joe?

*SARAH glowers at SAM. Pause. They both start laughing.*

SAM So you still have no idea how he found you?

SARAH None at all. He must be crazy. I’ve never met the old man in his life.

SAM But he thought he recognized you!

SARAH Yes, from twenty years ago, when I was a little kid. I’m sure I could have easily passed for his real great niece back then, whoever she is.

SAM Do you still have the letter?

SARAH Of course. *(Takes out letter; impersonating JOE)* My dear great niece Sarah Sponder, I know it has been many long years since we last met, but I hope you haven’t forgotten your great uncle Joe. I certainly haven’t forgotten you. As you know, I never had any children myself, and so the question of who I should bequeath my estate and fortune to has come to vex me in my winter years…

SAM I still can’t believe it. Sarah, you must be the luckiest woman alive. Some doddery English fool mistaking you for his only living heir – what are the chances?

SARAH Correction: some doddery *rich* English fool. Look at this place! It’s practically a castle!

SAM So we spend a week buttering up the old man, and whenever he finally does pop his clogs, we’ll be rich!

SARAH Excuse me?

SAM Sorry. *You’ll* be rich.

SARAH That’s right. I’m the beloved great-niece, remember? You’re just the great-niece’s boyfriend.

SAM I could be more than your boyfriend, if you wanted.

SARAH I told you, Sammie. I’m not ready to put a ring on it yet. Besides, we’ve got more important things to worry about right now. We had a very narrow escape, remember?

SAM How could I forget? I thought we’d never get through airport security. I was sure they’d have a warrant out for our arrest already.

SARAH Well, they didn’t. But they probably do by now. Let’s face it, Sam, neither of us can set foot in the States for a long time. Perhaps forever.

SAM I know, Sarah. I’m starting to miss it already. But you’re right. It’s not safe for us there anymore. Not after what we did.

*There is a sharp knock on the door.*

SARAH *(scared)* What was that?

SAM *(nervous)* What was what?

SARAH That knock on the door. Didn’t you hear it?

SAM No.

*There is another, louder knock on the door.*

SARAH There it is again! Sammie, you heard that, right?

SAM Yes.

SARAH *(very nervous)* Come in!

*Pause.*

SARAH I said, come in!

*Pause.*

SARAH Sammie, just answer the door.

SAM Why can’t you answer it?

SARAH Because! Just answer it.

SAM Fine.

*SAM opens the door.*

SAM There’s nobody there.

SARAH But there was.

*Blackout.*

**Scene 4**

*The Little Sodbury police station. BOB is sleeping at his desk. PRANCE and CLEVERLY enter and wait for BOB to respond. After a while, PRANCE coughs quietly. Nothing happens. CLEVERLY coughs more loudly. They keep doing this until BOB wakes up.*

PRANCE You there. Are you the local peacekeeping authority?

BOB Things were a lot more peaceful before you showed up.

PRANCE Let me see your badge. And your gun.

BOB *(shows them badge)* I’m afraid we don’t carry guns. Not here in the Little Sodbury police station.

CLEVERLY You don’t carry guns? What kind of a policeman are you?

BOB Police Constable Robert Constable, at your service. But you can call me Bob the Bobby.

CLEVERLY Well, Constable Constable, if you don’t carry guns, what do you shoot people with?”

BOB *(Takes out truncheon)* We’ve got these. They’re pretty painful if you know how to use one.

PRANCE Enough of this. My name’s Agent Prance, and this is my associate, Agent Cleverly. FBI.

*PRANCE and CLEVERLY show their badges to BOB.*

PRANCE We have reason to believe that this town is currently harbouring a gang of dangerous criminals.

BOB Really? Little Sodbury?

PRANCE Our intelligence is unmistaken.

BOB Well, I’m sure a man who wears sunglasses indoors knows what he’s talking about. But between you and me, *nobody’s* in Little Sodbury. We haven’t had a single crime since the station apple pie went missing. I had no choice but to interrogate every police officer in the station. But neither of them confessed. The case was never solved. And to this day, I’m haunted by what might have been. *(Stares hauntedly into the distance)*

*ROBBIE and ROB enter hurriedly.*

ROB Crumbs! It’s happening again!

ROBBIE *(kneeling by BOB)* Boss, come back to us. Don’t let that case suck you back into the past again.

*ROBBIE slaps BOB repeatedly. BOB gradually comes to.*

ROB All right, which one of you two was it?

CLEVERLY What? We didn’t do anything.

ROB Police Constable Robert Constable has suffered from flashbacks ever since the unsolved apple pie case. You can’t go talking about apple pies, eating apple pies, or even saying the phrase ‘apple pie’ in his presence without triggering some very painful traumas.

*At each mention of ‘apple pie’, BOB suffers from another attack and ROBBIE shakes him out of it.*

ROBBIE It’s OK, Bob. You’re safe now. You’re with us.

CLEVERLY This isn’t like the – you know – that case you were talking about. This is a case of international security.

PRANCE Ever heard of the Primrose Players?

BOB No.

PRANCE Exactly. And why would you? Nobody’s heard of the Primrose Players. That’s precisely what makes them so dangerous.

CLEVERLY They’re a pair of con artists, Constable Constable. The most successful and dangerous con artists the world has ever seen.

PRANCE By some accounts, they’ve swindled over six million dollars from their innocent victims. But every time they strike, they never leave a trace. Until now.

CLEVERLY Our intelligence points to the two of them being holed up somewhere near here.

BOB Here?

CLEVERLY That’s right. Here.

BOB *(looking nervously under desk)* Are you sure?

PRANCE Sure enough that the FBI’s two finest agents were immediately dispatched here to investigate personally. *(Pause.)* But it turned out they were both on vacation, so they sent us instead.

CLEVERLY Have you seen any suspicious characters in this neighbourhood recently? People out at odd hours, maybe?

BOB I’m telling you, nothing of that sort happens here in Little Sodbury.

ROB The only suspicious character around here is that Joe Padaraski.

BOB Rob! These men don’t want to hear about Joe Padaraski. *(to PRANCE and CLEVERLY)* Mr Padaraski’s nothing but an old eccentric who lives by himself on the outskirts of town. He can’t possibly have anything to do with this case.

ROBBIE *(hastily)* If you’re looking for other leads, a taxi did come into town just yesterday, with two Americans inside.

ROB So it did! I remember now, they stopped off at the village shop to pick up some supplies.

ROBBIE Yes, and one of ‘em said, *(in American accent)* “We’d better buy as much as we can carry. It’s too risky for us to show our faces in this village often.”

ROB Then the other replied, *(in American accent)* “Even in this sleepy village? There’s no way the FBI will track us all the way here.”

ROBBIE Yeah, that’s right. Then the first one said, *(in American accent)* “Could you shut your pieholes while we’re outside? Anyone could be listening to this conversation. Look, there’s a pair of coppers standing right there!”

ROB And after that, they both looked embarrassed and hurried away to buy their things.

BOB I see. And when exactly were the two of you planning to report this interesting conversation to me?

ROBBIE Oh, we didn’t want to disturb you, sir. You looked so peaceful, sleeping there.

ROB You looked like an angel.

PRANCE That’s not important right now. What matters is that we were right! The Primrose Players really are here. Constable Constable, you’re a credit to the police force and your plucky little nation.

*Blackout*.

**Scene 5a**

*The breakfast table. JOE is sitting at one end. KNUPF, SHARK and CARLA are sitting down the side. HATTIE and DITHERS are standing behind it. SARAH and SAM enter blearily.*

DITHERS *(very slightly sarcastically)* Oh, good morning! Or should that be good evening?

SAM Sorry, guys. We’re just a little jetlagged.

DITHERS The master of the house has not yet broken his fast. He insisted on waiting for his guests.

CARLA And that meant none of us could eat too! #Starving.

SARAH *(noticing KNUPF, SHARK and CARLA; to JOE)* I’m sorry. I didn’t realize you had other guests.

JOE Other guests! *(gesturing at KNUPF, SHARK and CARLA)* You mean this bunch? Yes, they managed to get here on time. In fact, you’re the last to arrive. But let’s not wait a moment longer. Tuck in, everyone.

HATTIE The first course is baked snake.

KNUPF Baked snake?

HATTIE It’s a local specialty.

*KNUPF looks sceptical.*

HATTIE I can reheat last night’s noodle soup if you’d prefer.

KNUPF No, I’m sure this’ll be delicious.

*DITHERS claps his hands. HATTIE serves breakfast. SARAH sits down at the other end of the table.* *CARLA takes a photograph of her plate with her phone. ALL look at her quizzically.*

CARLA Sorry. It’s just whenever I go travelling, I like to take a picture of my food. Does anyone here have Instagram? *(Looks around)* No? #GetWithIt.

DITHERS *(spotting SARAH)* I do apologize, Miss Sponder. That seat is reserved for the lady of the house.

SARAH The lady of the house? Who –

*LIBERTY BELLE enters and hugs JOE.*

BELLE Good morning, snugglemunchkin! How’s my favourite googlybear doing today?

JOE Morning, Belle.

BELLE But goodness! Isn’t the table full today! Who are all these charming guests?

DITHERS Miss Liberty Belle, may I present Joe’s great-niece Sarah Sponder and her partner Sam Aramsam. They arrived late last night. Also newly arrived are Countess Knupf, Shark Greenwold, and Carla Lovelace.

BELLE Enchantée, y’all! Countess, how was your flight from…where was it you flew from?

KNUPF Barcelonia. The flight was satisfactory.

BELLE How about you, Darby?

SHARK I didn’t fly. I came by boat. The salty sea air does wonders for my health.

BELLE As for you, Sarah, your uncle has told me so much about you. I feel like I know you already! *(Hugs SARAH)* I know your Uncle Joe and I haven’t tied the knot yet, but to tell you the truth, I already think of you as the great-niece I never had. *(Pauses to wipe away a tear)*

JOE Everyone, this is my fiancée, Liberty Belle.

SARAH, SAM Fiancée?

*SARAH and SAM start to exchange worried looks.*

JOE We met two months ago at an art exhibition in London. What can I say? I couldn’t help but notice her.

BELLE It was love at first sight. Wasn’t it, dingleberry?

JOE It certainly was. It just goes to show.

*Pause.*

KNUPF Goes to show what, Uncle Joe?

BELLE That even when you give up on love, love doesn’t give up on you!

JOE When my darling Lily was taken from me, I never thought I’d be able to love again. I thought I’d die alone, with nothing to comfort me but my vast fortune. And now look at me! In love for the second time, at the age of seventy eight.

SARAH *(disingenuously)* What an unexpected delight, Uncle Joe. You’re always full of surprises. You’re getting married! To an American woman who looks younger than me!

BELLE *(giggling)* Oh Sarah, you’re such a charmer.

SARAH Who you’ve known for only two months!

JOE When you know, you know.

BELLE This little sweetheart proposed to me at the top of the London Eye! He even got down on one knee.

JOE Of course, I had Dithers to help me up again. My knees aren’t what they used to be.

BELLE *(showing ring)* It was the largest diamond I’d ever seen! What could a lady do but say yes? We had dinner to celebrate that evening, overlooking the Thames. It was the most romantic evening of my life. I’d always hoped I’d find an English prince to sweep me off my feet. I can’t wait to be Mrs Padaraski. *(Giggles)*

**Scene 5b**

*A clap of thunder. The light flicker off, then on. In the darkness, ROSE enters suddenly, and stands glaring at JOE. SARAH and SAM react fearfully to ROSE. The others appear not to notice her, and only react to the sound of thunder. ROSE advances on JOE with arms outstretched. Another clap of thunder. The lights flicker off, then on again. ROSE disappears.*

SHARK Storm’s moving in quickly.

JOE It’s just as well that you’re all here. Now that all my guests are finally assembled, I may as well explain the reason that I invited all of you here. Although I’m aware none of us are close, the four of you are the closest thing I have to family. It’s therefore you that I wanted to be present when I introduced Liberty Belle to the family.

SARAH *(Unhappily)* I see. When are the…nuptials planned?

JOE This weekend! At my age, I have little interest in delaying any longer than I need to. If you hadn’t paid me this visit, I very much doubt we would have seen each other again. So that’s all the more reason I’m grateful to Liberty Belle, for giving me the reason to organize this little reunion. Without it, the next time you would have heard from me would probably have been via my solicitor, telling you you’d inherited my entire estate and fortune! *(Starts laughing, which gives way to a deathly-sounding cough)* Oh dear. My doctor’s told me that too much laughing is bad for my health. And I want to make sure I get as many years as possible with Belle.

BELLE Oh, you will, toodlekins. Just as long as you stay on that diet that my nutritionist recommended.

SARAH *(standing up abruptly)* Could you excuse me, Uncle Frank? I’m starting to feel a little sick.

*SARAH exits.*

*Blackout.*

**Scene 6a**

*A small bathroom. SARAH is muttering to herself, trying to pull herself together. DITHERS knocks at the door, with DANVERS.*

DITHERS Is everything all right in there, Miss Sponder? Are you sure you wouldn’t like any tea?

SARAH I’m all right, thanks, Dithers.

DITHERS Let me assure you that this incident will not be repeated.

SARAH Oh, it’s not their fault. I just get a little nauseous from time to time, is all. I’ll be fine in a moment.

*DITHERS exits.*

DANVERS Would you mind terribly if I came in?

SARAH I’d really rather you didn’t –

*DANVERS enters sharply. She behaves more sinisterly than usual, fixing SARAH with knowing glares.*

SARAH Didn’t you hear me, Mrs Danvers? I said, I’d really rather –

DANVERS I’m wise to your little game, Miss Sponder.

SARAH Wha – what do you mean?

DANVERS Oh, you’re acting your part very well. But I know who you really are.

SARAH See here, Mrs Danvers…

DANVERS That’s Mrs Danvers to you!

SARAH See here, Mrs Danvers to you, I only came here to see my beloved Uncle Frank.

DANVERS Of course. Your beloved Uncle Frank, who you love so much. But tell me this, if you care so deeply about him, then where have you been for the last ten years?

SARAH In America! It’s hardly easy to come and visit as often as I’d have liked.

DANVERS *(grabs SARAH; building to a scream)* Oh? Well let me tell you where I’ve been all that time. I’ve been by your beloved uncle’s side, serving him faithfully as his housekeeper. This manor and I belong to each other. So don’t think for a moment that I will let it fall into the hands of a scrounging gold digger!

SARAH What do you mean by that?

DANVERS You may be Mr Padaraski’s great niece in name, but you certainly don’t act like it.

**Scene 6b**

*SAM knocks at the door.*

SAM Are you OK in there, sweetie?

DANVERS *(behaving as usual again)* Yes we’re quite all right –

*SAM enters, struggling to fit inside the tiny room.*

SAM Now see here, Mrs Danvers, we don’t mean any harm.

DANVERS *(lapsing into anger again)* What are you even doing here?

SAM I heard shouting, so we came –

DANVERS Not in this washdown closet, in this country! In this house! Mr Padaraski was very particular in his instructions. Miss Sponder’s invitation was for her only, not for her half-brained manfriend.

SAM Man, when you welcomed us here, I thought you meant it. I guess it was nothing but a pack of lies.

DANVERS Believe me, there’s more to me than meets the eye. You don’t want to make an enemy of me.

SARAH What’s that supposed to mean?

DANVERS I mean, I have served this estate for too long to lose it to a bunch of classless Yanks. If you dare try to worm any further into your uncle’s affections, I will have no choice but to do something I regret.

*DANVERS points ominously at SARAH, then backs slowly away.*

SARAH *(nursing her wounds)* Everything about this place is giving me the creeps. I just want to go home.

SAM Not much longer now. Then we’ll have everything we came here for.

*Blackout.*

**Scene 7**

*The Devil’s Hands Inn. WHATELEY is behind the bar. PETE, HEATHER and MCGLEN are huddled around a table. JIM is running back and forth between the bar and table.*

PRANCE The Devil’s Hands Inn. This must be the place. *(to WHATELEY)* You! Bartender!

WHATELEY What?

PRANCE We’re here on top secret official duty. Have there been any unusual characters in this bar recently?

WHATELEY Unusual characters? *(Indicating sitting group)* Yes, all the time. I keep telling them to shove off, but they won’t listen.

PETE Excuse me. Did you say you were on top secret official duty?

PRANCE Er…no. You must have misheard me, civilian. We’re just tourists. Isn’t that right, Agent – I mean, er, Normal Person Cleverly?

CLEVERLY That’s right, Normal Person Prance. *(Insincerely)* Say, Prance, isn’t this a quaint English village? We should take some pictures of it.

PRANCE Indeed we should.

PETE Oh. Never mind, then. But if you were looking for local stories, I might have one or two for you. I’ve been working as the groundskeeper up at the old Padaraski place for years, and I’ve seen many things. Strange things. Terrible things. Things you wouldn’t believe!

HEATHER Please don’t start this again. We’ve all heard your stories too many times. *(Acts bored and impatient throughout the below.)*

CLEVERLY How interesting. Tell us more. *(Starts taking notes)*

PETE Mysterious noises, in the dead of night. Comings and goings. I tell you, that place hasn’t been the same since Mrs Padaraski died.

PRANCE Mrs Padaraski? Constable Constable told us Mr Padaraski lived alone.

PETE Aye, it’s been many years since Mrs Padaraski died. Drowned, they say, in the lake at the back of the old Padaraski place. But you see ol’ McGlen here? He knows the truth. Joe Padaraski killed her. And the manor has been haunted by her ever since!

*MCGLEN wakes up with a start.*

MCGLEN Is someone talking about the old Padaraski place?

CLEVERLY Yes we were, as a matter of fact, civilian.

MCGLEN Why would you do such a thing? Don’t talk about it! Don’t even think about it! It’s evil! Evil, I tell you!

HEATHER That’s enough out of you, McGlen! *(to PRANCE and CLEVERLY)* McGlen here was the groundskeeper at Padaraski Manor before my husband took over. But he stopped after Mrs Padaraski drowned. He hasn’t been the same since.

MCGLEN Whatever you do, don’t go to the old Padaraski place.

CLEVERLY Thank you very much for your intelligence, civilians…I mean, fellow normal people.

WHATELEY Last orders! Last orders!

MCGLEN Will someone buy an old man a nice stiff espresso?

HEATHER McGlen, that’s your sixth espresso this evening. You’ll be up all night!

CLEVERLY *(giving money to WHATELEY)* Bartender, please give these people one more round of beverages on us.

PETE Thank you. But take our advice: if you know what’s good for you, don’t go to the old Padaraski place!

*PRANCE and CLEVERLY leave group. JIM takes drinks from bar to group. PETE and HEATHER mime consoling MCGLEN.*

PRANCE Sounds to me like we should go to the old Padaraski place.

CLEVERLY What? Are you kidding? Those guys told us not to go to the old Padaraski place about five times.

PRANCE Which is exactly why the old Padaraski place should be our next stop. There’s clearly a good reason they told us not to go…

CLEVERLY Which is exactly why we shouldn’t go. Seriously, Agent Prance, think about this.

PRANCE It’s getting late. Besides, the snow’s too heavy to venture outside the town. By tomorrow afternoon, we should be able to make our way there. Cleverly, this is going to be the arrest of our careers!

*PRANCE and CLEVERLY exit.*

*Blackout.*

**Scene 8**

*The entrance hall. Darkness. JOE’s voice is heard.*

JOE Where’s the blasted light switch? I thought I told Dithers to leave the bathroom light on. Oh! It’s you! What are you doing up so late? Could you help me find the – Wait! What are you doing? Let go of me! I – aaaaaaaaaaah!

*There is a loud series of thumps and crashes. Silence. BELLE enters with a flashlight.*

BELLE Fluffydumpling, is that you? I heard a terrible rumpus and I – *(Shines flashlight where JOE is lying and screams)*

*CARLA and SHARK enter with flashlights.*

SHARK Liberty Belle! What in blazes is happening out here?

CARLA Joe’s had an accident!

*CARLA starts taking photos of JOE. SAM, HATTIE, and KNUPF enter with flashlights.*

SAM What’s the big idea, making all this noise in the middle of the night? Can’t you Brits find your own way to the bathroom? *(Sees JOE)* Whoa! We gots ourselves a stiff!

*SARAH and DITHERS enter from separate directions with flashlights*. *ROSE enters and moves silently to centre stage.*

SARAH Oh, Lord, what’s happened here? Uncle Joe? What’s the matter?

HATTIE *(same time)* I don’t believe it. I must be dreaming again.

*ALL point their flashlights at ROSE, who is standing over JOE, grinning. ALL scream and mill around helplessly. There is a clap of thunder. ALL turn out their flashlights. Their screaming degenerates into frightened shouts and calls. ROSE exits. DITHERS moves to the lightswitch. Lights up. The frightened noises die down. ALL stop moving and catch their breath, looking at each other warily.*

DITHERS There’s the lightswitch.

SAM Who was that?  
SHARK That’s not important right now. Can Joe really be dead?

*DITHERS kneels over JOE and feels for a pulse.*

DITHERS I’m afraid it’s true. He must have taken a fall down the stairs in the dark. Broken his neck.

BELLE Oh, my poor grunchlimpet! *(Bursts into hysterical tears)*

DITHERS I can’t make sense of it. Joe has lived here his entire life. He often went for nocturnal strolls in his advanced years. How could this have happened?

SHARK All it takes is one false step, I suppose.

SAM Has someone called the cops?

CARLA You’ll have to try the landline. There’s no signal. My Mysterious Death album isn’t uploading.

HATTIE The landlines went down earlier today. It must be the storm that’s done it.

SARAH Well, I’m not hanging around here. I’m heading into town straight away.

*SARAH opens the front door. A huge gust of wind blows her back across the room, and snow piles through the doorway.*

DITHERS The snow appears too heavy for us to venture into. We shall have to wait until morning.

SARAH Until morning? Are you mad? Uncle Joe is dead! Dead!

DITHERS Fleeing into the snowstorm in the middle of the night won’t help him now, and it may well kill you.

KNUPF It would be respectful to the deceased to move the body somewhere more…dignified.

DITHERS I will convey Mr Padaraski to the mausoleum. It’s what he would have wanted. It’s close enough to the house that I should be able to manage.

SHARK What if the police want to investigate the scene?

DITHERS I hardly imagine that will be necessary.

SHARK But what if this wasn’t an accident? What if Joe was pushed?

*ALL gasp.*

CARLA #Betrayal!

*Blackout.*

**Scene 9**

*The bedroom. SARAH is pacing up and down. SAM is sitting on the bed.*

SARAH Lock the door.

*SAM locks the door.*

SARAH I don’t want Dithers or Liberty Belle or any of those other creepy guests listening in tonight. I don’t know what we’ve got ourselves into but we need to get out. We should never have come here. I’d rather deal with a thousand FBI agents than this mess.

SAM Try to stay calm, Sarah. Don’t lose your head over this.

SARAH My head? I’m the only one in this partnership who’s got one! Without me, you’d be rotting in jail back home. Don’t you forget that.

SAM Joe’s death could have been an unfortunate accident, for all we know. There’s no reason to suspect foul play.

SARAH No reason, except the small matter of his vast fortune, and those other distant relatives of his that he managed to dig up from somewhere. It looks like I’m not the only one who was hoping to win that fortune. Any one of them could have thought the same thing I did – that if Joe had had a chance to marry Liberty Belle, they’d have a lost their chance to inherit the fortune. What if one of them murdered Uncle Joe?

SAM There’s no point in staying here any longer than we need to. We’ll leave tomorrow morning, as soon as the snow’s cleared.

SARAH Tomorrow might be too late. If someone in this house is capable of murder, they could come for us next.

SAM *(tenderly)* Sarah?

SARAH Yes?

SAM Are you *sure* it wasn’t you?

SARAH How could you think for a moment that I’d stoop to murdering an innocent old man? I know we’ve done some bad things in the past, Sam, but nothing like that ever crossed my mind.

SAM You didn’t exactly hide how you felt when Joe told you he had a fiancée.

SARAH What do you mean?

SAM I mean, you looked like someone had just puked into your cornflakes.

SARAH And for a good reason! How dare that good-for-nothing gold digging Yank show up and try to steal my rightful inheritance?

SAM Don’t you mean, your wrongful inheritance?

SARAH Whose side are you on, wiseguy?

SAM Maybe we should count our blessings. Don’t forget how close we came to being arrested, back in the States. If it hadn’t been for your fake Uncle Joe, we’d have had nowhere to run to. We’d all be doing time. Let’s be grateful that we still have our freedom.

SARAH You call this freedom? Being stuck in exile in this poxy snowy country? At least there’s wifi in prison.

SAM Sarah, don’t start this again. Let’s leave the past behind us.

SARAH How can I, when I’m spending my life in hiding? We had it all worked out. It would have been the perfect con. That gourmet cake store had no idea that we were lifting their best produce. And then you got hungry.

SAM Gee, I told you I was sorry. I just can’t resist a good piece of fudge.

SARAH It started with the fudge. Then you moved onto the lemon pie.

SAM What else was I supposed to do, buy one of them? You know how much that place was charging.

SARAH And then you confessed everything to the FBI.

SAM I could hardly lie about it. They had me hooked in to a lie detector!

SARAH And now, we’re probably on the FBI’s Most Wanted List. We were lucky to escape the country in time. We have to live in exile for the rest of our lives, all because you got a rumbly tummy.

*There is a knock on the door. SARAH and SAM jump in fright.*

SARAH Not again. I can’t deal with this right now. *(to door)* Just go away, whoever you are! Leave us alone!

*There is another knock, followed by scraping and scratching at the door. The lights flicker.*

SARAH Get the flashlight!

*SAM gets a flashlight and points it at the door handle. The lights stay off. The handle starts turning back and forth. The door opens quickly. SARAH and SAM scream.*

SARAH *(screaming)* I told you to lock the door, you dingus!

SAM I did!

*The door slams shut.*

*Blackout.*

**Scene 10a**

*The Sunset Meadows clubroom. Latin music is playing. VICTOR is in front, leading GRETA, ETHEL, JACKIE, and HARRIET (the OLDIES) through a series of difficult moves.*

VICTOR Now reach through with both arms, and hold it! Hold it…hold it…remember, you are fire! You are burning fire! You are the sun! Now, drop into your spirit animal poses!

*OLDIES are copying each of VICTOR’s moves, some collapsing or falling behind.*

*At the end, Nurse HENNESEY enters and turns the music off.*

HENNESEY OK, girls, I’m afraid that’s the end of this week’s Zumbalates session. Let’s all show Victor our appreciation.

*OLDIES clap and murmur. VICTOR wipes his forehead with a towel and moves away.*

VICTOR You girls were in fine form this week! Fine form! I hope to see you all again next week.

ETHEL Oh, Victor, if I were 50 years younger…

HENNESEY That’s quite enough of that. The schedule’s running late enough as it is. Girls, it’s time to take your medication!

VICTOR (*Hurriedly)* Do not fret, my wilting flowers. I will return soon.

*VICTOR kisses ETHEL on the hand and exits. HENNESEY hands out small cups to all OLDIES in turn. GRETA hands her cup to HARRIET.*

GRETA Harriet, you want some candy? They’re pear drops, your favourite…

HARRIET Nurse Hennesey, Greta’s trying to give me her pills again!

*HENNESEY snatches GRETA’s pills from HARRIET and pushes them back into GRETA’s hand.*

HENNESEY Now then, Greta, you know full well how important it is that you take your meds. All of them! I’m not rescuing you from the roof again.

JACKIE When’s that charming young man coming to pay us another visit?

HENNESEY Not until next week, Jackie. Now, have you all taken your meds? Good, because it’s rest hour.

*All OLDIES immediately slump into nearby chairs and fall asleep. Nurse HENNESEY exits, straightening a few things out as she goes.*

**Scene 10b**

*BOB, ROB, and ROBBIE enter. Throughout, they pace around the room, inspecting the furniture, prodding the OLDIES, and making notes in their notebooks.*

BOB So this is it. The Sunset Meadows Care Home.

ROB On the surface, a pleasant and charming rural community for the elderly. But dig a little deeper, and who knows what we’ll find?

ROBBIE Remind me what we’re doing here?

BOB We’re here to catch the Primrose Players. Those FBI agents think they’re so smart, with their fancy jackets and sunglasses. But this is our turf, and if there’s something going on, we’ll be the ones to find out what. Damned if I’m getting pipped to the post by some Yank over this one.

*Nurse HARDACRE enters and looks confusedly at BOB.*

HARDACRE Hello there, officers. Is there anything I can help you with today?

BOB Yes there is, Nurse Hardacre. Have there been any recent unusual goings-on in this care home?

HARDACRE *(thinking)* Not that I can think of. *(Pause.)* Except for that mysterious disappearance. But that was a few years ago now.

BOB Mysterious disappearance? Why haven’t we heard about this?

ROBBIE We did, sir. I remember it now. We had a call from one of the nurses to say one of their residents had disappeared overnight.

BOB Disappear?

HARDACRE She was there in the evening. The next morning, just an empty bed.

BOB That could have been significant! Why have I never heard about this?

ROB You were still away on compassionate leave, following the apple pie incident.

*BOB starts to hyperventilate.*

ROB Oh. Sorry, Boss.

HARDACRE It amounted to nothing in the end. The very next day we got a call saying there was nothing to worry about, Rose’s brother had simply come to take her home.

BOB Home, eh? And where was home for Rose?

HARDACRE Rose Padaraski was her name. She was Joe Padaraski’s sister. Isn’t the old Padaraski place just out of town?

BOB, ROBBIE, ROB The old Padaraski place!

BOB *(placing notebook on table)* This is a coincidence we simply can’t ignore. Are you thinking what I’m thinking, Rob?

ROB I was thinking “Are you thinking what I’m thinking?”, so if that’s what you were thinking, then I *am* thinking what you’re thinking.

BOB Perfect. I was thinking the exact same thing. I think. How did this old woman check herself out in the middle of the night without attracting attention? Which can only mean one thing. Either Rose had outside help, or… *(dramatic pause)* she didn’t.

ROBBIE Bobby Bob, you’re a genius!

BOB But to narrow down the list of possibilities, a little further investigation will be required. *(picking up notebook from table)* Recognize this notebook, Robbie?

ROBBIE No, Bobby Bob. Should I?

BOB Let me make this simple for you. This looks, to all intents and purposes, like a pretty unremarkable notebook, does it not?

ROB Yes, Bobby Bob.

BOB But what if I were to tell you that this notebook was placed on this table after Rose’s disappearance?

ROBBIE I’d say you were a genius.

BOB And you’d be right. You see, the four of us only set foot in this room for the first time eight minutes and thirteen seconds ago, which, given that Rose is known to have disappeared from this very spot some years before, means that we can’t possibly have entered before the unfortunate disappearance. Agreed?

ROB Agreed.

BOB Therefore, given that I myself placed this notebook here just two minutes and fourteen seconds ago, one can only conclude that the notebook was placed here after Rose’s disappearance.

ROB, ROBBIE That’s amazing!

BOB What I’m doing isn’t amazing. I’m simply applying the power of logical deduction, to derive from sufficient premises a necessary conclusion.

HARDACRE You policemen are too quick for me.

BOB Now that you know that I myself placed this notebook here, what other conclusions can we draw?

ROBBIE That…Rose was kidnapped?

BOB No, no, no. Think rationally. The fact that I placed the notebook here leads me to the inexorable conclusion that you should recognize this notebook. For, you see...this is my notebook.

*ROB, ROBBIE, and HARDACRE gasp.*

BOB Given that this is my notebook, where I write all my hunches and theories pertaining to my case, it stands to reason that I’ll have written the most likely explanation for Rose’s disappearance…*in the notebook.* All that remains is to open the notebook…*(Opens notebook)* And what’s this? Here is written, in handwriting I immediately recognize as my own, beneath the date 11/01/14…

ROB That’s today’s date!

BOB “Rose was probably kidnapped.”

*BOB, ROBBIE, and HARDACRE gasp.*

ROB The situation is more serious than any of us could have imagined.

BOB We have no choice but to set out for the old Padaraski place right away.

ROBBIE But Bobby Bob, what about the storm?

BOB We’ll just have to brave the elements. The clock is against us.

*Blackout.*

**Scene 11**

*The dining room. BELLE, KNUPF, SHARK, CARLA, SAM, and SARAH are at the dining table. BELLE is dressed in black, and in hysterical tears. DITHERS is standing behind it.*

BELLE This can’t be happening! My poor little snugglebeetle, dead! Fetch me my smelling salts.

DITHERS Madame, we’ve used up all your smelling salts already. And with the snow falling, we can’t go outside to get any more.

BELLE Fetch me my regular salt, then! I can’t bear this agony for a moment longer.

*DITHERS fetches a salt shaker and shakes it over BELLE.*

DITHERS Joe’s death is weighing heavily on all of our hearts, Madame.

SAM If Shark is right, then someone in this house is capable of murder.

*SAM looks accusingly at everyone in the room in turn. They all look at each other in the same way. CARLA notices and looks up.*

CARLA Sorry, what’s going on? I was busy tagging everyone in my British Adventures album.

BELLE It’s the strangest thing. Last night, as I was tucking my little bumbleclam into bed, he said the strangest thing to me. He looked me in the eye, and said ‘Liberty Belle, I love you with all my heart’. Of course, that wasn’t the strange part. He said that to me all the time. But then he said, ‘I want you to know that if anything is to happen to me before the wedding, you’ll already be taken care of.’ And he reached under his pillow and handed me this! *(Takes out will)* It’s a will! He’d rewritten it to name me as his sole heir! He’d gone on a secret trip to his solicitors to make sure I got his entire fortune if he died. But why would he do this, just days before our wedding? What if he suspected something?

SHARK This is unbelievable.

*BELLE gets up and shows the will to everyone as she talks.*

BELLE But it’s the truth! My cuddlecabbage’s dying wish was that I got everything. So now it’s all mine. Joe’s manor and fortune belong to me. But it’s no consolation for losing the only thing I really wanted. Joe!

*BELLE collapses into tears again.*

CARLA *(talking into phone)* Note to self: Liberty Belle knew that she would be the one to inherit Joe’s fortune! Perhaps she killed her fiancée.

BELLE What did you just say?

CARLA Note to self: only make notes to self in private.

SAM But Joe’s fall couldn’t have been an accident. So? Did any of you do it?

SHARK Perish the thought! I could never do a thing like that.

CARLA #InnocentUntilProvenGuilty.

SHARK Well, there is one person in this house who doesn’t have an alibi. A person who we know must have been awake when your Uncle Joe was killed. A person who nobody would dream of suspecting in a million years.

SAM Who?

SHARK Why, Uncle Joe of course. *(Crosses his arms proudly.)*

*Pause.*

SARAH Shark, you do realize that Uncle Joe’s the one who was murdered, don’t you?

SHARK What? Uncle Joe’s been murdered? *(Suspiciously)* How very…convenient.

SAM Perhaps it’s nobody living in this house. Perhaps it’s something…else. We can’t have been the only ones to notice that there’s something strange about this house. The moving statues. The noises in the middle of the night.

DITHERS Ask any of the townspeople in Little Sodbury, and they’ll tell you this house is haunted. But let me assure you that that’s nothing but foolish superstition.

SAM We’re not going crazy.

SHARK Aye. I’ve seen strange things too. But I thought they were my own personal demons, come back to haunt me. You see, I haven’t been honest with you. Joe made a mistake. I wasn’t related to him at all. I only came here because I needed a place to hide. I’m a software pirate, you see.

CARLA #Twinning! I’m a hacker. My cover had just been blown when Joe’s letter arrived. It was like a miracle. But it wasn’t anything of the kind. We were set up! *(Exits.)*

SAM You mean we’re all criminals? Then why did Joe bring us here?

SHARK To protect us?

SARAH He didn’t want to protect us. And someone in this house is trying to destroy us. Someone or something.

SAM Wait a minute. Where’s the countess?

SHARK She never came to breakfast.  
DITHERS I didn’t want to disturb her after the long night we all went through. I shall fetch her immediately.

*DITHERS exits.*

SARAH I can’t deal with this a second longer. I don’t care how cold it is outside, it can’t possibly be worse than staying in here!

*SARAH runs and opens the door. A gust of wind blows a snowdrift into the room, burying SARAH.*

SAM Don’t do it, Sarah!

*SARAH scrambles out and exits. DITHERS enters.*

DITHERS I didn’t reach the countess’s room. Look what I found on the landing.

*DITHERS holds up CARLA’s phone. ALL gasp.*

SAM *(taking phone)* Carla’s phone? She’d never go anywhere without that. *(Browsing)* Look! She’s left her Instagram feed onscreen. *(Reading)* British Adventures Part 2.

BELLE *(Reading)* #EmptyCorridorSelfie!

*ALL gasp.*

SHARK *(Reading)* #PhotobombedByCloakedFigure!

*ALL gasp.*

SAM #RunningForMyLifeSelfie!

*ALL gasp.*

BELLE #AloneAndAfraid!

*ALL gasp.*

SHARK #GetAwayFromMe,YouHorribleCreature!

*ALL gasp.*

SAM And that’s it. There’s one more photo in this album, but it’s completely black.

DITHERS I’m sure there’s a perfectly reasonable explanation for all of this.

SAM I’m not taking that chance. I’ve got to find Sarah.

*SAM exits after SARAH.*

*Blackout.*

**Scene 12**

*Outside Padaraski Manor. PRANCE and CLEVERLY enter from one side, BOB, ROB, and ROBBIE from the other. ALL are wearing winter clothes, and moving stealthily. PRANCE and CLEVERLY see the others first, and draw guns.*

PRANCE Freeze, civilians!

BOB I’m freezing enough as it is. The storm may have stopped, but this snow’s not going anywhere.

PRANCE Is that you, Constable Constable?

BOB Me and the whole of Little Sodbury’s police department, yes.

CLEVERLY You and your team need to step out of this operation. Your security clearance isn’t high enough.

ROB Oh, yeah? Well, you won’t be able to get very far without our help. We have information vital to cracking this case.

ROBBIE You know Joe Padaraski’s first wife? Well, she’s not dead. In fact, she’s living right here in this house.

ROB Joe put her in a local old people’s home for a while, but had his butler Dithers bring her back to live here.

ROBBIE She might have the answers we’re looking for.

CLEVERLY Thank you for your intel. Now step down.

BOB We’re not letting you claim the credit for this. You’d better let us come along, or else.

PRANCE Or else what, Constable Constable?

BOB Or else I’ll hit you with my truncheon.

PRANCE *(laughing)* You can’t scare me. I’m an FBI agent. I have six weapons more deadly than a truncheon lodged up my left nostril alone.

BOB Well, you asked for it.

*BOB hits PRANCE with his truncheon. PRANCE screams in agony and falls to the ground, writhing.*

PRANCE Arrrrgh! The pain! The pain of it all! *(Lies still)*

CLEVERLY What have you done?

BOB Told you. These are pretty effective weapons if you know how to use them.

ROB Don’t worry, the effects will wear off in about 36 hours.

ROBBIE *(gazing upwards and pointing)* Wait a minute, Boss. Is there something in that tree?

BOB *(looking at the same place)* Where? I don’t see anything.

ROBBIE There. Something’s glinting.

ROB Oh, yeah. Just near the top. It looks familiar. Is that –

BOB It can’t be.

ROB, ROBBIE It is!

BOB The apple pie. We should never have come here! This place is evil, I tell you! Evil! *(Faints on top of PRANCE).*

ROB It looks like the three of us are going to have to set aside our differences if we want to crack this case. Agreed?

CLEVERLY Fine. Agreed. Follow me.

*ALL begin to move away stealthily.*

ROBBIE *(looking at PRANCE and BOB)* Shouldn’t we do something about –

CLEVERLY Oh, they’ll be fine.

*Blackout.*

**Scene 13a**

*The graveyard. STATUES are dotted around. Mist covers the ground. ROSE is kneeling with her back to the audience. SAM enters frantically.*

SAM Sarah! Sarah! Is that you?

*SAM touches ROSE on the shoulder. ROSE turns round.*

SAM You!

*Pause. SAM backs away. ROSE stares at SAM and walks slowly towards him.*

ROSE Me?

SAM Who are you? What do you want?

ROSE My name is Lily Padaraski. I’m Joe’s wife. *(indicating statue of LILY)* Couldn’t you see the resemblance? *(Pulls same pose as LILY)*

SAM Lily? She died a long time ago. She drowned in the lake!

ROSE That’s what Joe told everybody. The truth is, he put me in an old people’s home and tried to forget I existed. He said I was his sister, Rose. But I still had some wits about me. I started talking to the nurses there, telling them who I really was. So he brought me back, and locked me up in the manor where I couldn’t cause trouble.

SAM I knew there was something wrong with this whole setup.

ROSE And now, he’s trying to marry the American girl. Liberty Belle. I couldn’t allow it to happen.

SAM You mean you killed Joe?

ROSE Me? Kill Joe? I would if I had the chance.

SAM Then who killed him?

ROSE Oh, you poor fool.

SAM What?

ROSE See for yourself.

*ROSE points at the mausoleum, then exits.*

**Scene 13b**

*SARAH emerges from the mausoleum.*

SARAH Sam, it’s empty. Joe’s gone.

*JOE enters from the mist.*

JOE Don’t worry. I haven’t gone far.

*SARAH and SAM scream.*

SAM What are you? A ghost?

JOE I’m not a ghost. But I’m afraid I’m not your beloved Uncle Joe either.

*SARAH points a gun at JOE.*

SARAH Tell me who you are or I’ll shoot.

*DITHERS enters, gun pointed at SARAH. BELLE enters alongside.*

DITHERS Not so fast.

*ALL gasp.*

JOE It pains me to inform you we may have led you astray, about both my untimely death and my identity. You see, I’m not really your Uncle Joe at all. I’m merely his humble manservant, Dithers.

SARAH What? So you were all in on it?

BELLE I wasn’t in on it! You mean your love for me was a lie?

DITHERS No more a lie than your love for my butler. I knew what game you were playing the moment I met you, which is why I let you believe my butler was the one with all the wealth.

BELLE You mean I was going to marry the help? *(Faints)*

DITHERS Dithers has played his part well. But now it’s time for our little show to end, and for me to reveal the real reason I gathered you all here. It was so that I could choose the heir to my fortune. I needed to find someone worthy of inheriting my criminal empire, which is why I scoured the globe for the most ruthless and cunning criminals and con artists. I switched identities with my butler so that I could fake my own death and then observe who among you was smart enough to see through my game. I’m sorry to say that you’ve all failed the test.

JOE I told you this would be a futile exercise, Mr Padaraski.

DITHERS You did, Dithers, and I should have listened to you from the start. Family really does mean nothing.

**Scene 13c**

*CLEVERLY, ROB, and ROBBIE burst in.*

CLEVERLY Not so fast.

*ALL gasp.*

CLEVERLY FBI. You’re under arrest for multiple counts of fraud, treachery, and all-round nastiness.

ROB That’s right, we know who you are. The Primrose Players.

SARAH The Primrose Players? Who’s that?

ROB These are the most dangerous con artists in the Western Hemisphere.

CLEVERLY We’ve been tracing this pair of criminals across the world. A few years ago, we lost them completely. But here you are, hiding deep in the English countryside.

DITHERS Oh, look. It’s the FBI. I was beginning to wonder when you’d show up.

CLEVERLY Now drop your weapons!

*STATUES jump out and take CLEVERLY, ROB, and ROBBIE captive.*

JOAN Not so fast.

*ALL gasp.*

LILY You really think the Primrose Players would let themselves be arrested by the FBI that easily?

JACOB We guard this house 24/7, protecting the gang from the likes of you.

DITHERS In your haste to arrest the pair of us, you’ve overlooked the real prize: this pair of criminals are the culprit behind the Great Bakery Theft of 2014.

ROBBIE You stole all that fudge?

DITHERS The $47 lemon pie too.

ROB You monsters!

SAM I was hungry!

SARAH I told you to control yourself, Sam!

DITHERS And if you venture inside you will find a software pirate, a hacker, and an identity thief currently masquerading as Countess Knupf.

ROBBIE Don’t think we’re going to let you off the hook that easily. You stole the apple pie.

JOE Give it up. By the time you’re free, we’ll have disappeared once again. And this time, there’ll be no trace.

DITHERS Now that that’s taken care of, I have made a decision. Dithers, as the only one who has stood by me all these years, it is you who will inherit my fortune.

BELLE *(awakening)* You mean he’s still rich? *(Crossing to JOE)* Well, crabmunchkin, I do think we had something special.

JOE Nice try, golddigger. *(To DITHERS)* I’m honoured, my old friend. We really do make a great team, don’t we?

DITHERS Yes, nobody can hold a candle to the Primrose Players.

**Scene 13d**

*STAGEHANDS enter. STAGE MANAGER points gun at JOE and DITHERS.*

STAGE MANAGER Not so fast.

*ALL gasp.*

STAGE MANAGER Didn’t you ever think it was strange, how your house was full of people dressed in black who kept moving your furniture around?

DITHERS Now that you come to mention it, I did think it a little odd.

STAGE MANAGER Truth is, we’ve been staking out this place for years. But the show’s over. Hands in the air, all of you.

*Everyone holding a weapon drops it. ALL put their hands in the air.*

STAGE MANAGER Good, good. Nice and easy now. Don’t anybody try and be a hero. Now form a nice straight line. You heard me, move it! Single file!

*ALL nervously form a line across the stage.*

STAGE MANAGER Now bow, all of you. You heard me. The show’s over. So you’re all going to take a nice big bow, unless you want to die.

*ALL bow, very nervously.*

STAGE MANAGER That’s it. *(To audience)* Now clap, all of yas! That’s not good enough. Clap harder. OK, now the rest of you can come out.

*ALL move upstage. ALL not already onstage enter and bow. STAGE MANAGER keeps directing them.*

*STAGE and PRODUCTION CREW bow.*