



by Robert Duncan
based on his play Cluedo

ACT 1.

(The British Board of Film Censors certificate for the film CUT! (cert X) is projected on the curtain. As Otto Steinburger walks to centre stage the certificate cross-fades to a title panel "CUT! Produced by Otto Steinburger." He raises his hands and grins to the audience. At that moment there is a shot, and Adora Mann runs on in a basque. She screams and runs off. Arms still up, Otto Steinburger laughs maniacally and turns his back to the audience as the curtain opens. He marches into the gothic set and exits stage right. The stage is now empty. The voices of Otto Steinburger and his housekeeper Mrs Travesty are heard off)

MRS TRAVESTY: So it's six is it?

OTTO STEINBURGER: How many times do I have to repeat? Six. Six for dinner tonight. Six - including me (aside) but excluding you.

MRS TRAVESTY: Six it is. Oh it will be just like the old days Mr Steinburger. You and Mrs Steinburger. Oh what fine parties. Grand they were. Talk about style! Never seen such style hereabouts! I remember...

OTTO STEINBURGER: Do you think, perhaps some other time...

MRS TRAVESTY: Style! That's what it was. The finest table in the south of England. Hunting parties. Handsome young ladies in elegant gowns. So...so grand.

OTTO STEINBURGER: (enters) Mrs Travesty, my guests are due any moment. Do you think you could save your reminiscences for some other time?

MRS TRAVESTY: Does it hurt you too much to talk about it? You have been a quiet and brooding man since your wife, the lovely but sadly bedridden Mrs Steinburger, passed away.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Oh my God...

MRS TRAVESTY: (enters) The house was alive then. The smell of fresh flowers...

OTTO STEINBURGER: And bedpans...

MRS TRAVESTY: And it had to end like this.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Like what?

MRS TRAVESTY: Me dismissed. You a shadowy figure preferring the haunts of London. The company of the likes of Fruity Metcalf.

OTTO STEINBURGER: What on earth are you talking about? I'm here. I'm having a dinner party. And you, Mrs Travesty, have been reemployed for the evening to prepare it. Now could you possibly...

MRS TRAVESTY: There has been talk in the village you know.

OTTO STEINBURGER: What sort of talk?

MRS TRAVESTY: It doesn't matter. Grapefruit all right to start with?

OTTO STEINBURGER: What sort of talk Mrs Travesty?

MRS TRAVESTY: Followed by Chicken O Van?

OTTO STEINBURGER: Mrs Travesty. Could you please explain? What sort of talk - in the village?

MRS TRAVESTY: About the dear departed one.

OTTO STEINBURGER: My wife do you mean?

MRS TRAVESTY: The one that has gone on.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Mrs Travesty, you're the only one that's going on. Presumably you're talking about the untimely death of my dear wife.

MRS TRAVESTY: "I'll see you all right." That's what she always said to me. "There'll be a place in my will for old Travers" - that's what she said.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Old Travers?

MRS TRAVESTY: A place in the will. And what happened to the will? (mysteriously) It was never found...

OTTO STEINBURGER: It was never found because there wasn't one. Now do you think you could get things organised in the kitchen, so that when my guests arrive they can eat at a reasonable time, and not have the chance to consume every drop of sherry in the whole of Bigger Hampton Manor before you are ready to serve?

MRS TRAVESTY: Of course sir. Right away sir. Shall I get the wine from the cellar?

OTTO STEINBURGER: God no. Last time we lost a whole chapter from the Bordeaux vintage. You just concentrate on dinner. Is Wolf Rechtschreibung (to audience) the famous special effects expert, back yet?

MRS TRAVESTY: No - his train's probably late. Or he's been arrested for being a foreigner.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Now now...

MRS TRAVESTY: Seems to have been here long enough. Why doesn't he go back to his own country?

OTTO STEINBURGER: We have been...er...working together.

MRS TRAVESTY: Giving everyone the creeps. Wandering round the village.

OTTO STEINBURGER: He is a guest in this house.

MRS TRAVESTY: Sure he's not a bit... (points to head several times) ? Mrs Jones said her Brian started that way.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Brian?

MRS TRAVESTY: And now... come the full moon... he howls.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Howls?

MRS TRAVESTY: (howls) Like that.

(Returning howl from the distance)

OTTO STEINBURGER: My God, What was that?

MRS TRAVESTY: Only Brian. Anyway, as I was saying, watch that Mr Rechtschreibung person. Mark my words.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Enough now.

MRS TRAVESTY: Mrs Steinburger always used to say, it's funny...

OTTO STEINBURGER: What's funny?

MRS TRAVESTY: No, it's funny that Mrs Steinburger always used to say "I'll see you all right Travers." That's what she called me...

OTTO STEINBURGER: I know.

MRS TRAVESTY: "I'll see you all right. You'll never want for nothing."

OTTO STEINBURGER: I'm sure she didn't put it quite like that.

MRS TRAVESTY: "Never want for nothing." And now, a few months after her tragic, strange some villagers say, tragic death, where am I?

OTTO STEINBURGER: I don't know, where are you?

MRS TRAVESTY: In a room above the butchers. Dismissed from my job here at Bigger Hampton Manor. Only Tiddles to keep me company, and not a lot coming in.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Tiddles?

MRS TRAVESTY: The butcher's boy. It's a long story. Something to do with a meat cleaver. Anyway, this is 1935, Mr Steinburger, 1935. Don't you realise?

OTTO STEINBURGER: Of course. But think of it this way...Travers?... I am reemploying you for tonight. That means money. When I film my next blockbuster, Cut! at Bigger Hampton Manor, you will be in sole charge of sandwiches for the cast and crew. No, don't thank me. And when I am here and not in my London home, which I bought recently at gigantic expense - when I am here, and there's a great deal of mindless work to do, I will call you in. So don't worry.

MRS TRAVESTY: Oh thank you sir! You've made me feel a lot better. I always used to say to Mrs S as I brushed her hair, beautiful hair she had...

OTTO STEINBURGER: Do you think some other...

MRS TRAVESTY: What hair. Silky - like a silk purse. And talking about purses...

OTTO STEINBURGER: Mrs Travesty. I am only too aware of the style, length, condition and colour of my wife's hair. It was a great loss...

MRS TRAVESTY: The whole of her was. Peculiar that. 'Er getting more and more ill, and you keeping away like she was a leaper...

OTTO STEINBURGER: Leper...

MRS TRAVESTY: Almost as if...

OTTO STEINBURGER: Yes?

MRS TRAVESTY: Nothing.

OTTO STEINBURGER: I think 'nothing' is a very wise thing to say. After all, dear old Travers, who took my wife a warm comforting cup of Ovaltine every night for weeks before she slipped away?

MRS TRAVESTY: (very worried) That was me. You know it was.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Quite. Think about it in detail...but in your own time. Not mine. Now, is there a slight possibility of your going to attend to the necessary details? Any minute now...

MRS TRAVESTY: I suppose so. (starts to exit, then stops) What's it all about then?

OTTO STEINBURGER: What is what all about?

MRS TRAVESTY: The celebration.

OTTO STEINBURGER: I'm going away.

MRS TRAVESTY: Oh! You're going away?

OTTO STEINBURGER: Yes. I'm going away.

(MRS TRAVESTY exits, mumbling. She goes upstairs towards one of the rooms, that of Wolf Rechtschreibung)

MRS TRAVESTY: Going away eh? Nobody told me nothing about going away. But nobody tells me nothing anyway. Going away eh? Huh...

(OTTO STEINBURGER pours himself a drink. There is a loud knock at the door. Silence. Another knock. He crosses to door)

OTTO STEINBURGER: Mrs Travesty - do you think you could possibly answer it?

MRS TRAVESTY: (from upstairs) Of course. I've got nothing else to do.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Good.

(Steinburger crosses to desk, removing a framed photograph from a drawer. He leaves the drawer open and displays picture in a prominent position.)

(Mrs Travesty walks downstairs with a special effects gadget from Wolf Rechtschreibung's room.)

MRS TRAVESTY: That crazy foreigner can tidy his own bedroom in future. (Gadget lights up, pings, and says something in a tinny voice.)

MRS TRAVESTY: Ooh I never.

(Exits to answer door. Returns with Wolf Rechtschreibung who is dragging an enormous trunk.)

MRS TRAVESTY: Wolf Wotshisname. He's back.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Oh, so you've arrived. How pleasant. How was London?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Appalling. Your trains are...

OTTO STEINBURGER: Oh good. Your bedroom's still upstairs.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Really?

OTTO STEINBURGER: You've collected more luggage. (looks at trunk) How long do you intend to stay?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Until the conversation is run out of.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Better save it then. Come on, upstairs. I was just talking to Mrs Travesty about the exciting decision to film Cut! in this very Manor house. It will be special effects city...

(Wolf Rechtschreibung leaves Otto Steinburger and goes upstairs)

OTTO STEINBURGER: How is the work coming on?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: It goes well.

OTTO STEINBURGER: And when do you think...

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Soon, soon - excuse please...

(Wolf Rechtschreibung exits)

OTTO STEINBURGER: Mrs Travesty. Do you want to be paid for your services tonight?

MRS TRAVESTY: Oh Yes please.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Then make sure you announce my guests in a fitting manner.

MRS TRAVESTY: (firmly) I'll make absolutely sure.

(A knock at the door. Mrs Travesty exits, and reappears with Major Pongo Brown. She rings a small bell)

MRS TRAVESTY: (shouts) Major Brown.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Thank you Mrs Travesty. Excellent. My dear Major, how lovely to see you again.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Steinburger my dear chap. (They shake hands) Dry night tonight. Know what I mean?

OTTO STEINBURGER: Of course. Gin isn't it?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Always. Brrr! Cold out there. Reminds me of a night I spent with my men waiting for the hun...

OTTO STEINBURGER: Whatever. How are you settling into the village?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Fine. Fine. House is straight. Got meself a half size billiard table now. So life is complete. Too old for any other sport nowadays. Know what I mean? (Laughs leeringly)

OTTO STEINBURGER: Quite.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Course there's not much company in the village. No billiard players anyway. Have to play with myself most of the time. So what's this in aid of Steinburger? Mrs Travesty told me you're going away.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Yes, I'm going away.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Going away eh? Well well. What do you know. Going away.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Yes, I'm going away. Anyway, I think you'll find the other guests stimulating.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Dinner guests? Thought it was just a drink, and a chance to look at the location for your new movie. Not that I've got a part... yet. Should have put on the old dinner jacket like you. Bad form. Sorry.

OTTO STEINBURGER: No problem at all. But as I was saying, I think you'll find the company amusing. The vicar is coming...

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Oh.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Yes. Reverend 'Let's forget grace and get on with it' Acorn will be here... and Darlene Withers.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Oh.

OTTO STEINBURGER: And a collaborator on the film, a certain Wolf Rechtschreibung.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Dodgy name. Bit of an egghead? Never had much time for those chaps. Damned cowards at the front.

OTTO STEINBURGER: He's Austrian.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Damn foreigner eh?

OTTO STEINBURGER:And a friend of mine from London. A charming little lady...

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Things are looking up.

OTTO STEINBURGER: ...called Adora Mann. A dancer on the stage, and....

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Top hole. On the stage eh? Always thought I would have been rather good at that. But films came first. Funny lot though. Do you know there was this chap in the Entertainment Corps... used to dress up as....

OTTO STEINBURGER: ...an actress.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: By Jove Steinburger! How did you know?

OTTO STEINBURGER: Sorry? Oh I see! No, I was saying Miss Adora Mann is a dancer and an actress.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Ho! Sounds good to me. Put her next to me at dinner, Steinburger. You know what they say about a military man.

OTTO STEINBURGER: No?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Never mind. Tell me, I hear you have a damned fine terrace here.

OTTO STEINBURGER: It's outside.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Best place. Mind if I smoke out there later?

OTTO STEINBURGER: Burst into flames if you like! (They both roar with laughter) Another drink?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Rather. I say Steinburger, dashed fine place you've got here. Ideal film location. Heard a lot about it. (Stands up and looks at framed photos as Otto Steinburger prepares drink)

Well well. Who's this fine looking chap on the set of some movie or other? Only joking old boy, you look splendid. Those were the days. (stares at picture) It is by George. That's the set of Don't Shoot Or I'll Move. My brother Sooty was in that, God rest his soul. Gave his life for some crappy scene that ended up on the cutting room floor. Producer couldn't give a damn. Nasty business. (The coincidence dawns on him)

I say Steinburger, you weren't party to any...

OTTO STEINBURGER: Sooty Brown. Unusual name isn't it? Hardly likely to meet two in a lifetime. (uncomfortable silence) Let's talk about something else. Mrs Travesty. Funny old girl. She's going to keep an eye on things while I'm away. But she's not very bright. Perhaps you could help out...

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: In What way?

OTTO STEINBURGER: Financially.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: My dear fellow - only too happy. You mean you leave me with some money and I pay her gradually. Bit of control. That sort of thing. That's what you mean isn't it?

OTTO STEINBURGER: No. I mean that you pay her and all the bills out of your own pocket.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Good grief! Strange request for a fellow...

OTTO STEINBURGER: Not really. It depends how much you value the good family name of the Pongo Browns.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: I don't follow.

OTTO STEINBURGER: You will. There is no evidence whatsoever of my involvement with your useless brother, apart from the fact that I gave him a small and rather indifferent part in my film - so you can think what you like. In the eyes of the world I was selflessly presenting art to the masses. And where were you? Swaggering around a film set pretending to be the famous war hero, when you were nothing more than a craven coward, reading your lines and avoiding the front line. Anyway, don't worry Major. Your family secrets are safe with me. Providing, of course, you pay the few small debts that may arise whilst I am away.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Well I've never heard...

OTTO STEINBURGER: You have now. Say no more. (Knock at the door) Ah! Another guest. Act normally.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: You...you...blighter. This is blackmail. The Pongo Browns have never taken dinner with blackmailers. (Stands up) Never! I shall take my leave, you scoundrel.

OTTO STEINBURGER: I don't think so. If I'm not very much mistaken, Mrs Darlene Withers is about to join us - and she can gossip a little. Don't you agree?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: I need a drink...

OTTO STEINBURGER: Help yourself.

(Mrs Travesty rings a large bell as Darlene Withers enters)

MRS TRAVESTY: (shouts) Mrs Withers.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Back to it Travers. (Mrs Travesty glares and exits)

DARLENE WITHERS: Bunty, How kind of you to invite me to your dinner par...Oh. Good evening Major. Having a drink are we?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Yes, well. What's it to be? (Laughs) Seems I'm pushing the boat out.

DARLENE WITHERS: You shouldn't have any problem floating it... Well Bunty, er, Mr Steinburger, what's the occasion?

OTTO STEINBURGER: Just a little soirée to show everyone the location of my new film. A few old chums... and a new one.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: He's going away.

DARLENE WITHERS: Going away?

OTTO STEINBURGER: Yes. I'm... going away.

DARLENE WITHERS: Oh.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Yes. I felt I needed a change, so I'm....

ALL THREE: Going away.

DARLENE WITHERS: Sorry.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Well dear lady. Are you going to dazzle us with your wit and wisdom tonight - by telling us all the Latin names of houseplants?

DARLENE WITHERS: I may do. After all, a houseplant can survive and look beautiful ... just on a little drop of water a day.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: What Do you mean?

OTTO STEINBURGER: (Laughs) Excellent! A point to Mrs Withers eh Major?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Don't know what she's talking about. (Takes large swig)

DARLENE WITHERS: Bunty, er...Otto... you must take me to the garden before the evening's out, to see the progress of the gloxinia. The last time we were... I mean... I have heard from other people, that it's a fine specimen. Good strong roots digging into the old soil. That's what life's all about.

OTTO STEINBURGER: I agree, don't you Major?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Life's not so damned pleasant when you're digging in the old soil to make trenches. I remember when I was in...

DARLENE WITHERS: You really should get yourself a greenhouse, Major. A useful hobby would do you good, and it's far cheaper than supporting the landlord at The Feathers.

OTTO STEINBURGER: And a houseplant only needs a bamboo cane to support it.

DARLENE WITHERS: (Laughs) Very good Bunty ...er.. Otto ... er... Mr Steinburger.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: What about you Steinburger? Do you like houseplants?

OTTO STEINBURGER: Not really. My wife Trixie was the one who kept them alive. Pity they didn't return the compliment.

DARLENE WITHERS: You mean they're dying? I must resuscitate them immediately. (She grabs a jug of water from the drinks tray and starts to leave)

OTTO STEINBURGER: Oh please don't go. I would so miss your company.

DARLENE WITHERS: You have Major Brown.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Precisely.

DARLENE WITHERS: (sits down) Oh very well. (To Otto Steinburger) Quite like old times isn't it?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: What do you mean, old times?

DARLENE WITHERS: Oh er... I mean... well...nothing... sort of... well I...

OTTO STEINBURGER: What she means, my dear Major, is that she used to visit Bigger Hampton Manor a great deal, when my wife was alive. Didn't you?

DARLENE WITHERS: Yes, Yes of course.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Sounded Like...

OTTO STEINBURGER: Sounded Like she's been here many times before. Well she has - when Trixie was alive.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Fair enough. Not a military tribunal you know.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Oh good. Let's change the subject. Mrs Withers, I expect you'd like to know who else we are expecting tonight.

DARLENE WITHERS: Oh yes please.

OTTO STEINBURGER:.. The Vicar.

DARLENE WITHERS: Oh dear.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Don't worry. We have plenty of food in. Wolf Rechtschreibung. A special effects expert and a sort of colleague of mine.

DARLENE WITHERS: Sounds a bit of an egghead.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: That's What I said.

DARLENE WITHERS: Congratulations. Please continue.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Seems he's from a foreign land.

DARLENE WITHERS: How disgusting.

OTTO STEINBURGER: And a young friend of mine from London.

DARLENE WITHERS: A young man? Here? (Looks at Major Brown) That will make a pleasant change.

OTTO STEINBURGER: A young girl actually. A bit part actress and occasional dancer at a gentleman's club to which I belong.

DARLENE WITHERS: (darkens) I see.

OTTO STEINBURGER: As you say Mrs Withers, good to have some young blood around the place.

DARLENE WITHERS: Got any brains in her head, has she? Sounds like a scatty, dreary little money grabbing tart to me.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: You're jealous.

DARLENE WITHERS: Rubbish. What does she know about house plants? Huh! She wouldn't know a gloxinia if it jumped up and slapped her silly face.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Now now.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Yes, steady on old girl. Tell me Steinburger, has she got long hair, lily white skin and shapely pretty legs? Does she laugh like a little tinkling stream?

OTTO STEINBURGER: Not exactly.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Does she like older men?

DARLENE WITHERS: Oh shut up Major. I shall spend the entire evening talking to Wolf Rechwhatever about special effects, with particular attention to how they make those people naked in nature films, and as far as I'm concerned the little slut can rot.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: I think you are a bit jealous. Funny that. I mean to say, first you make some reference to this being like 'old times' and then you get in a fluster about some girlfriend of Steinburger's. Seems...

DARLENE WITHERS: Girlfriend? What are you getting at Major?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Nothing.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Precisely. (Roar of sports car engine outside) Ah! Could this be Adora Mann now? You'll love her! I'll ask you to be a little gentle with her. She is very young and fragile.

DARLENE WITHERS: Oh my God.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Come now. I'm sure you remember how it felt to be young, and among strangers. In front of a new audience...

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Vulnerable eh?

OTTO STEINBURGER: Exactly.

DARLENE WITHERS: Vulnerable? Huh! Sounds like she could keep her end up at the Folies Bergere.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Keep her end up! Oh that's very good!

DARLENE WITHERS: That is not what I meant Major. I suggest you keep off the gin for a while.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Message received and understood. Over and out.

(Enter Mrs Travesty, obviously disapproving. She rings an enormous bell.)

MRS TRAVESTY: Mr Steinburger, this 'person' has arrived. A Miss Adora Mann.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Show her in. Show her in.

MRS TRAVESTY: Well I don't know at all. With decent folks hereabouts.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Thank you Mrs Travesty.

MRS TRAVESTY: Heaven knows what'll happen when she tries to sit down...

OTTO STEINBURGER: Thank you Mrs Travesty.

MRS TRAVESTY: Indecent I call...

OTTO STEINBURGER: Mrs Travesty. Something will be boiling over.

(Enter Adora Mann)

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: You're right there Steinburger! Sorry. Out of order...

OTTO STEINBURGER: Come in my dear. Mrs Withers - a very old friend of mine...

ADORA MANN: Enchanted.

DARLENE WITHERS: (mimics) Enchanted too.

OTTO STEINBURGER: And Major Pongo Brown. Local chap.

ADORA MANN: A pleasure, I'm sure.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: The pleasure's all mine.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Now let me show you to your room. Presumably you have left your cases in the car (aside) not that you'll need much.

ADORA MANN: Oh. I am not intending to stay. I have...

OTTO STEINBURGER: Rubbish. Come this way. (They begin to walk upstairs)

ADORA MANN: Oh dear me. I don't know. I...

OTTO STEINBURGER: I think you should. Really.

ADORA MANN: No I can't. It's totally out of the question.

OTTO STEINBURGER: (at top of the stairs, quietly) Enough. You will be staying. The photographs are excellent. They show every little detail.

ADORA MANN: Oh no. Please. My career. (They both exit)

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Damned conspiratorial. All that whispering. Walls have ears Mrs W. Walls have ears, what, what, what?

DARLENE WITHERS: Only three watts? You're not very bright (Laughs at her own joke)

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: I don't understand... (he notices a revolver in the open drawer of the desk) Good grief. I had one identical to this when I was in the trenches. Useful little johnnie if you know what I mean.

DARLENE WITHERS: No.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Reminds me of a time during the unpleasantness. This square head was charging me. I raised my revolver, like this, holding it by the barrel. Darlene old girl, are you listening? Held it like this. Brought it down. Head not so square after that eh what? Hey... eh what? After that... had a bit of time to reload and...

DARLENE WITHERS: For heaven's sake stop waving it about Major. Stop showing off.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: I was only saying... (the revolver goes off and a picture falls down)

DARLENE WITHERS: You lunatic. What on Earth are you trying to do?

(Mrs Travesty runs in)

MRS TRAVESTY: Glory be. What was that? Sounded like gunfire.

DARLENE WITHERS: It was.

MRS TRAVESTY: That's all right then. (Exits. Wolf Rechtschreibung, Adora Mann and Otto Steinburger appear on the stairs)

OTTO STEINBURGER: Good lord Major. What were you doing?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Blasted thing was loaded. Went off in me hand.

OTTO STEINBURGER: They do.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: But why was it loaded, man?

OTTO STEINBURGER: I've never seen the point of keeping an empty gun as protection against intruders. Kindly put it back where you found it.

ADORA MANN: I'm shaking all over.

DARLENE WITHERS: That could cause even more damage to the structure of the property.

(They come downstairs)

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: That could have gone through the water tank and caused... what is it... what you say in Blighty...

OTTO STEINBURGER: Leakage.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Thank you.

DARLENE WITHERS: Who are you?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: I am Wolf Rechtschreibung. I'm staying here at the moment, gradige Frau.

DARLENE WITHERS: I am not a Frau. Speak properly.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Major Pongo Brown. Darlene Withers. Adora Mann... Wolf Rechtschreibung. He's a special effects type. Working on a rather important project for my new film. Ground breaking stuff eh, Wolf?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Shall I get this special effects wallah a drink, Steinburger? Could do with a freshener myself.

OTTO STEINBURGER: go ahead.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: What's it to be? Gin and tonic that miraculously turns into a whiskey and soda? Something bubbling in a test tube?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: No Thank you. A little wine, perhaps. Later.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Only joking! Old habit! What devilish wheezes are on the drawing board at the moment then?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Pardon?

DARLENE WITHERS: Have you been in this country long, Rightbum? Or whatever your name is?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: I leave Vienna six years ago. And go back. And leave. And go back. And...

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Got the idea. What did you think of that Houdini fella? Was that special effects or did he really get out of those handcuffs. Still got them on I say... what do you say Miss Mann?

ADORA MANN: Thank you for talking to me, and the answer's no.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Eh? Oh fine. Any ideas about special effects to beat the Hun at their own game? You're on our side presumably.

DARLENE WITHERS: Since you're here.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: I am a man without roots. I am a man of mystery.

DARLENE WITHERS: Oh shut up.

(Awkward silence)

ADORA MANN: so this is your country hideaway Bunty...

DARLENE WITHERS: Bunty? Mr Steinburger has lived here a long time. A very long time. Haven't you.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Ever since you were a young lady appearing in my films Darlene. (Acts) It's crucial we meet by the well at midnight Cynthia. Charles deserves to be cast asunder and we should do it. Only then will we find peace...

DARLENE WITHERS: To love and love and love. Oh Roger...

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Aye aye. I knew it! A Pongo Brown can always smell something fishy in the air...

(Mrs Travesty leaps to her feet and heads for the kitchen as smoke appears)

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Are you admitting to murder you naughty people? Is this Charles chappie at the bottom of the well or what? Bear witness Miss Mann...

ADORA MANN: Bare What?

DARLENE WITHERS: Oh for God's sake, Otto and I were re-enacting a haunting scene from Die Like A Dog. I was the lead.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: The lead! Very good!

DARLENE WITHERS: Not What I meant Major. No more gin for the Major, Otto.

(Otto Steinburger is serving drinks for everyone)

OTTO STEINBURGER: Adora, what can I get you?

ADORA MANN: The gin looks nice.

DARLENE WITHERS: You mustn't always go by looks. (Looks at Otto Steinburger) But then you don't do you?

ADORA MANN: I don't understand. I'm sorry I was late. I've been driving round the village for hours. My car was getting so hot I was afraid I might run out of petrol.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Well you're here now.

ADORA MANN: Yes, thanks to a very kind man at the public house.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Oh? Which one?

ADORA MANN: I think it was called 'The Temporary Sign.'

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Eh? Oh yes.

OTTO STEINBURGER: One gin for a very welcome visitor. (Adora Mann drinks it in one) Now I expect you're all wondering why I'm holding this little soirée.

ADORA MANN: I'm sure I have no idea.

OTTO STEINBURGER: It's quite simple. You see... I'm going away.

ADORA MANN: Going away?

DARLENE WITHERS: Yes. He's going away.

ADORA MANN: Going away? Well well.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Came as a bit of a surprise. Steinburger Going away.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Yes... I'm going away, so I thought I would invite some special friends and acquaintances in for dinner.

ADORA MANN: I had to miss an audition today. But you said I must be here, so I came.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Very wise.

ADORA MANN: Could have been my big chance. They wanted a singer who can dance.

OTTO STEINBURGER: But you're a dancer who can sing.

ADORA MANN: I know. But I thought I would try - and then you ordered me to come here.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Ordered her to come? Strange way of putting it. That sort of thing is all right in the army. But not in civvy...

DARLENE WITHERS: Do be quiet Major. Don't you want to hear all about Miss... what is it? ...Mann! I should have remembered that... Don't you want to hear about her 'career' - close inverted commas?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Steady on old thing.

OTTO STEINBURGER: I simply told her that I might be able to help her in her career. If she helped me... in certain ways.

DARLENE WITHERS: What certain ways?

OTTO STEINBURGER: Adora Mann has not exactly arrived as yet - when it comes to stardom - and I am attempting to ease her in.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Casting couch eh? You bounder. You cad. You lucky so and....

DARLENE WITHERS: I'm sure she will get precisely what she deserves in life...

ADORA MANN: Why, Thank you.

DARLENE WITHERS: Especially in that dress.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Tell me my dear. Is life in the modern cinema really as wicked as we read in despatches?

OTTO STEINBURGER: What Do you mean 'despatches'?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: I mean the newspapers.

DARLENE WITHERS: Well say so. Despatches indeed. Grow up.

ADORA MANN: Life on the silver screen is like a drug. The more you have the more you need.

DARLENE WITHERS: how do you know?

ADORA MANN: I was told.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Your chance will come my dear. Just wait and see. There is always a place in the movies for a girl like you - with a little help from... er... interested parties.

ADORA MANN: I've been to some interesting parties. I say Bunt... er... Mr Steinburger. This is a great big manor house, a perfect location for a film featuring a new young star. (she sidles up to him) Do you live here all alone?

OTTO STEINBURGER: Ever since Mrs Steinburger passed on.

ADORA MANN: I imagine there used to be fine parties here. Men in dinner jackets. A small orchestra. Dancing.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Something like that.

ADORA MANN: Is there a terrace? Fragrant with the perfume of flowers? Lovers drifting through the gardens to the strains of a waltz, softly lit by the moon?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: By Jove Steinburger, she paints a pretty picture! Canny eh?

OTTO STEINBURGER: Very canny.

ADORA MANN: I must see it after dinner. I shall explore.

DARLENE WITHERS: Do that.

ADORA MANN: May I have another gin please?

OTTO STEINBURGER: I'm sorry. I'm forgetting myself this evening.

DARLENE WITHERS: Best thing.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Herr Otto person - before I was not listening to your utterances. You are going away?

EVERYONE: Yes. He's going away.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: I see. Excuse me please. I think I left something outside on the drive.

OTTO STEINBURGER: You know very well you haven't.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Haven't I? Never mind. I go and look anyway. (He wanders off)

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Funny chaps, foreigners. Sounded like a nice car you arrived in Miss Mann. What make is it?

ADORA MANN: It's a sports car.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Oh? Ripping fun. On the open road. Picnic stowed in the back. Travelling rug to keep the knees warm. Doing a crisp 40 miles per hour.

DARLENE WITHERS: Do you recommend a travelling rug for keeping the knees warm dear?

ADORA MANN: I don't know what you mean.

DARLENE WITHERS: Of course you don't. Forget it. When's the cleric arriving Otto?

OTTO STEINBURGER: The vic? Should be here by now. Perhaps he had to call in at the church.

ADORA MANN: He's probably been delayed.

DARLENE WITHERS: Since he's not here yet, I should think you could be right.

ADORA MANN: Yes, I think so.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Dinner should be on parade soon. Can't wait. Getting a bit peckish.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Thought you said you couldn't eat with... what was it Major? Began with a B didn't it?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: What? Can't remember now.

DARLENE WITHERS: What could you have meant Major? Couldn't eat with B? Bilious attack? A bad egg? Hardly likely. Bunty? Couldn't eat with Bunty! No, who would have such a stupid name? I give up.

OTTO STEINBURGER: I wish you would.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: (changes subject and grabs ear) Is that a car?

DARLENE WITHERS: No Major, it's your ear.

ADORA MANN: (giggles) That's very witty. I wish I could say things like that. I suppose I'm a bit silly really.

DARLENE WITHERS: This is possible.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: It is a car.

OTTO STEINBURGER: If I'm not very much mistaken, that will be the late vicar.

ADORA MANN: You mean he's dead?

(They all look at Adora Mann in silent disbelief. Outside there is a screech of brakes and a thump. Major Pongo Brown looks out towards the terrace)

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Seems the vicar has run over your foreign fellow. You know the one.

OTTO STEINBURGER: (without moving) Has he got up?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Yes. Brushing himself down. Lucky he wasn't British.

(Knock at the door. Mrs Travesty enters followed by smoke)

MRS TRAVESTY: Funny lot you've got here tonight. Someone else from the haunts of London is it? Friend of... (points at Adora Mann)

OTTO STEINBURGER: Perhaps You should answer it Mrs Travesty - and then you'll know.

MRS TRAVESTY: All this running around for a few shillings.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Thank you Travers.

MRS TRAVESTY: It was never like this when Mrs Steinburger was alive. (Looks at Adora Mann) She was a lady.

ADORA MANN: Fancy.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Mrs Travesty - the door! (Exit Mrs Travesty)

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Don't seem to be endearing yourself to many people tonight, Steinburger.

DARLENE WITHERS: Quite.

ADORA MANN: I wonder why you asked us at all.

OTTO STEINBURGER: I told you, I'm going away.

(Mrs Travesty swings in on a rope. There is a mighty bell dong)

MRS TRAVESTY: (shouts) Reverend Acorn.

(Reverend Acorn enters, carrying a parcel)

REVEREND ACORN: Pop out and see if my car is all right would you Mrs Travesty? Ah, a veritable flock! The stalwarts of the parish under one roof. And Major Brown. Sorry if I'm late, but I've been into town. Only just returned. Then I ran over some stupid lump in the drive. Good evening to you all.

EVERYONE: (gracelessly) Good evening.

REVEREND ACORN: And a stranger. Let me introduce myself. I'm...

ADORA MANN: You must be a vicar.

REVEREND ACORN: Correct! Drink please Steinburger. I'm a little parched after my journey.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Sherry?

REVEREND ACORN: No. a large brandy would suffice.

(Mrs Travesty leans round the door)

MRS TRAVESTY: Your car's all right vicar.

OTTO STEINBURGER: And the man he ran over?

MRS TRAVESTY: Didn't look. Got your favourite tonight vicar - plum duff!

REVEREND ACORN: Capital! I say Steinburger, when I came in I thought I heard you say something about going away. Did you? I would be most interested.

DARLENE WITHERS: Yes, he's going away.

REVEREND ACORN: Tired of it all are we?

OTTO STEINBURGER: Yes we are. The lies, the corruption.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Steady on, Steinburger.

OTTO STEINBURGER: I'm tired of all the cover-ups vicar. village society makes me sick.

REVEREND ACORN: Come to me my son - in your hour of need and I will administer unto you. Come to the fete on Saturday like you did last year - when your dear wife, God rest her soul, had just gone on to her great reward, and Mrs Withers was so kind in comforting you. I was deeply touched when I saw you together, behind the bric-à-brac stand.

DARLENE WITHERS: (sarcastically) What did you think of my flower display at the church this week vicar?

REVEREND ACORN: Oh! Congratulations! I was about to say... oh I do hope you didn't think I'd forgotten. In fact I mentioned it to Major Brown in the post office only this morning.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: But I wasn't...

REVEREND ACORN: Wonderful! I told him. The sort of caring attention that exemplifies parish life. If everyone was like you, my dear Mrs W, our steeple fund would be overflowing with milk and honey now.

ADORA MANN: Steeple fund?

OTTO STEINBURGER: Yes, The vicar has been collecting for some time. But it moves slowly doesn't it Reverend? Almost as if a little is leaking away.

REVEREND ACORN: Good heavens, Steinburger. Surely not. What are you suggesting man? Someone else dipping into the take... er... collection. Don't be absurd. You're on the parish council. You know the position.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Yes I think I do. Let's change the subject shall we? Still eating well are you? Still managing to support huge amounts of grand food on your small stipend?

ADORA MANN: Pardon?

OTTO STEINBURGER: His salary. How do you manage it vicar?

REVEREND ACORN: (angry) My dear sir, I hardly think that is any of your...

OTTO STEINBURGER: No? We'll see.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Dammit Steinburger. The knives are out tonight. The night of the long lance. What are you implying? Should keep off that stuff if I were you. Makes you damned aggressive.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Shut-up or I'll give you a good slap.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: See What I mean? Anyway, steady on. You're talking to a man that was mentioned in despatches...

OTTO STEINBURGER: As an idiot.

DARLENE WITHERS: Bunty, What has got into you? Firstly you start on the Major, which is excusable. Then me. Then the cleric. And I didn't approve of all that whispering when you went upstairs with little miss what's her name.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Damned conspiratorial, I'd say.

ADORA MANN: This reminds me of a film.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Reminds me of the trenches.

REVEREND ACORN: Sodom and Gomorrah I'd say.

OTTO STEINBURGER: What about you, Mrs Withers? Does it remind you of something? A houseplant perhaps?

DARLENE WITHERS: Oh don't talk poppycock. Kindly explain yourself before I lose my temper - and you know what happens then.

OTTO STEINBURGER: I should do. It brought the shooting of Die Like A Dog to a standstill for a month.

DARLENE WITHERS: Tell us, what are we doing here?

OTTO STEINBURGER: A little patience, and all will be revealed.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: As the actress said to the bishop! Oh, sorry vicar. Miss Mann. Anyone for another drink?

(Wolf Rechtschreibung staggers in, covered in dust with engine parts stuck to him. He is carrying a rolled up newspaper)

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: I have been subjected to the running over. Big ow. (He drops a dagger from the newspaper)

DARLENE WITHERS: What on earth's that?

ADORA MANN: Looks like a dagger.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Why are you carrying a large dagger, Rightbum?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Dagger?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Dagger. You just dropped it on the floor.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Oh that dagger! It is for...er... um... very careless drivers in your country.

OTTO STEINBURGER: The dagger?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: When is dinner?

OTTO STEINBURGER: The dagger, Wolf. What's it for?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Um...rats. That's it. Rats. To keep away the rats...

OTTO STEINBURGER: There aren't any rats in this house.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: I know. That is how well it works! You see I have a phobia about being bitten by diseased rats.

DARLENE WITHERS: I should think most people have. Now tell us Reverend Acorn, what does your parcel contain? We are all aching to find out, aren't we chaps?

EVERYONE: (unwillingly) Yes.

REVEREND ACORN: This parcel contains a valuable church treasure. It was bent by an over enthusiastic verger when he was trying to clean out a candle holder. Just before he snuffed it.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Poor fella. Was he very old?

REVEREND ACORN: I'm sorry? Oh I see! No, it was the candle he was snuffing out.

ADORA MANN: Snuffing to do with me! (She laughs at her own joke. Everyone else glares at her)

OTTO STEINBURGER: You haven't told us what it is yet.

REVEREND ACORN: (sits back and crosses his legs) No.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Well Tell us then for God's sake. What is in your parcel?

REVEREND ACORN: Oh that. (Reluctantly leans forward and begins to unwrap parcel) I brought it in because there are evil people who lurk around vehicles. There was one in the drive.

(Wolf Rechtschreibung groans)

OTTO STEINBURGER: Be quiet. Open it Reverend.

REVEREND ACORN: (struggles with string) Oh to break through this bondage.

DARLENE WITHERS: Don't bother. I've lost interest now.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Really. We don't need to see the damned thing.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Open it.

REVEREND ACORN: Can't get through this string. Knife anybody?

ADORA MANN: Why Yes! I have one in my handbag! (Produces a dagger)

EVERYONE: Strange.

ADORA MANN: Not strange at all. I bought it today in a scout shop on my way to Bigger Hampton Manor. The man said it would do me fine, and then saluted. I don't know why. He was a very nice man. He showed me some tents and his selection of woggles. He even invited me to go camping with him, but I said no... even though he said he'd be prepared. I suppose all scouts say that.

REVEREND ACORN: How interesting. Now let's cut the string and I will reveal all.

DARLENE WITHERS: Heaven forbid.

(Reverend Acorn cuts the string and displays a dagger)

REVEREND ACORN: There. Is it not a thing of beauty?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: By Jove! That's mine! (gropes in top pocket) No it's not. Sorry. Nothing.

EVERYONE: Strange.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Please explain to us all why you have a dagger in a parcel? A church artefact? I don't think so...

DARLENE WITHERS: Not the old sacrificial lamb ploy I hope.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Funny lot you vicars. Going to hurl it at some member of the congregation who's not attending to your sermon are you? Choirboy who gets his Benedictus and Benedicat muddled up?

REVEREND ACORN: If you occasionally took in one of my shows... er... services Major, you'd know I don't carry on in such a manner.

MRS TRAVESTY: He's certainly carrying on in this Manor.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Silence. Now Reverend - reason for waving this instrument of destruction around the place?

REVEREND ACORN: It belongs in a sealed case in the chancel for all to see but none to touch. But a verger damaged it and I have had it repaired. So there's nothing to get suspicious about. Or to accuse me of murky deeds. Or...

OTTO STEINBURGER: Enough. Onwards. Have you met Wolf Rechtschreibung? Rechtschreibung, this is the vicar.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Pardon?

OTTO STEINBURGER: Reverend Acorn, local vicar.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Please?

REVEREND ACORN: No, not the police. Vicar. Vicar. Oh never mind. (Speaks very slowly as if talking to an idiot) How - do - you - do - Herr - Rechtschreibung ...

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Very well Thank you.

REVEREND ACORN: And to what do we owe the honour of your visit?

DARLENE WITHERS: Yes. What are you doing here?

OTTO STEINBURGER: Using my hospitality. Enormously. Rechtschreibung is actually the proud possessor of an Oscar, aren't you Rechters?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Oscar? Great Scott. Could have won one of those myself if my performance had been better.

OTTO STEINBURGER: He won it for a special effect he devised for Die Like A Dog didn't you eh?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: You are most kind. Would you like to see my big shiny one?

DARLENE WITHERS: I don't think so.

OTTO STEINBURGER: But it was truly wonderful. I should know.

DARLENE WITHERS: Why should you know?

OTTO STEINBURGER: I think Rechtschreibung should answer that. Wolf?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: I don't understand. What time's dinner?

REVEREND ACORN: Yes indeed. Feeding of the five thousand... when, prey?

OTTO STEINBURGER: Soon enough. There will not be quite enough for five thousand vicar, but Mrs Travesty knew you would be here, so it won't be far off it.

ADORA MANN: That is what is called an icy remark. I don't understand why we are all here - but I think I would like to leave. Bad atmospheres scare me.

OTTO STEINBURGER: You will not be going. What would we do for stimulating conversation without you?

ADORA MANN: I never know what to say. What shall I say now?

DARLENE WITHERS: How about goodbye?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Take no notice my dear. Relax. Worse things happen at sea. Rechtschreibung - Tell us more about this Oscar of yours.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Well it was for an effect I created...

OTTO STEINBURGER: The creation was mine, all mine. You found my sketches on my desk and copied them totally, launched them on the Oscar committee and took all the credit.

REVEREND ACORN: Libellous indeed.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Perhaps. But it is true. It was the last time I put him up, or more correctly, put up with him.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Otto, I am a guest in dein haus - how can you suggest...

ADORA MANN: Oh Yes.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: What?

ADORA MANN: I've got something to say about special effects.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Capital! Things getting a bit strained. Change of subject ideal.

OTTO STEINBURGER: What is it for Heaven's sake?

ADORA MANN: Well it's true isn't it, that the man disappeared in The Invisible Man?

OTTO STEINBURGER: Yes Yes...

ADORA MANN: Well, that happened to me.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: You mean you disappeared, like Claude Rains?

ADORA MANN: Oh no. I mean I closed my eyes in the film and I couldn't see him. Spooky...

DARLENE WITHERS: Fascinating. Pity you didn't get that role Major. You'd look good invisible. Probably have won an Oscar all of your own.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Eh? Don't understand.

DARLENE WITHERS: Never mind. Now Bunty... er Otto... er Mr Steinburger - time for opening out. What's this all about? You have implicated this awful little foreign person as well. What is going on? Tell us at once.

(Mrs Travesty enters from kitchen)

MRS TRAVESTY: 'Ere, which one of you has pinched my dagger?

DARLENE WITHERS: Charming.

OTTO STEINBURGER: What are you talking about for Heaven's sake?

MRS TRAVESTY: My dagger. I use it to rescue roast potatoes that have fallen into the back of the oven and got stuck in all the muck therein.

DARLENE WITHERS: Can't wait for this haute cuisine.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Thank you Travers.

MRS TRAVESTY: Sort of reach in and stab stab I go. Stab stab stab...

OTTO STEINBURGER: Mrs Travesty.

MRS TRAVESTY: Stab stab I go. Wasn't going to make a long speech about it or anything. Just wanted to know what a woman like me is capable of with a dagger. That's all. Nothing more...

OTTO STEINBURGER: Silence.

MRS TRAVESTY: Well, where is it then?

OTTO STEINBURGER: God knows. In the spoon drawer for all I know.

MRS TRAVESTY: You're right! I remember seeing it there. Why didn't you say so before? It would have saved a great deal of my valuable time.

(Exit Mrs Travesty)

DARLENE WITHERS: I dread to think what dinner will be like.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Excuse me a moment. There's something I have to do upstairs. (He goes upstairs. Wolf Rechtschreibung looks up the stairs)

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: He's gone into my room.

ADORA MANN: I'm surprised it wasn't mine.

DARLENE WITHERS: Give him time.

(Silence)

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Well, here we are.

DARLENE WITHERS: Quite.

(Silence)

ADORA MANN: Well well.

REVEREND ACORN: Well well well well well.

(Silence)

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Well well...

DARLENE WITHERS: Good Heavens. Look at that plant. (Jumps to her feet to examine a very large plant, trained in a loop and held down with string) Seems a strange way to train it. (She touches the string and the plant straightens with a loud twang)

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: (jumps to his feet) By Jove, What was that?

DARLENE WITHERS: The string broke. Don't just stand there you idiot. Come and help me. Hold this end.

ADORA MANN: Can I do anything?

DARLENE WITHERS: Yes, jump in a lake. No, pass my bag. There's a dagger in it.

EVERYONE: Strange.

DARLENE WITHERS: Bought it today. Ideal for shaving my intersections...

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Shaving your intersections?

DARLENE WITHERS: Shaving my intersections - to encourage growth. Just the job. Pass it over immediately, and don't try to steal it.

ADORA MANN: Who'd bother?

DARLENE WITHERS: You perhaps. It would be ideal for sharpening whips.

ADORA MANN: I don't know what you mean.

DARLENE WITHERS: Neither do I. Now come on Major. Recht - thingy. Help me for goodness sake. Reverend - take this bit of string and pull.

(The plant is reinstated after much struggling. Otto Steinburger reappears from the stairs)

OTTO STEINBURGER: Everything all right?

EVERYONE: Fine.

(Otto Steinburger comes slowly downstairs. Enter Mrs Travesty)

MRS TRAVESTY: Dinner in ten minutes. Drink up.

DARLENE WITHERS: Such style.

(Mrs Travesty begins to leave. Otto Steinburger stops her)

OTTO STEINBURGER: Mrs Travesty. I think it might be a good idea if you stay here for a while. What I have to say concerns you too - and I would like to get it off my chest before it is burdened with your cooking.

MRS TRAVESTY: Well I must say...

OTTO STEINBURGER: Sit over there please.

MRS TRAVESTY: I haven't got time to hang about talking to...

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Better do it Travers. Ugly mood prevailing tonight.

MRS TRAVESTY: I've got my pride Major. (Sits down)

OTTO STEINBURGER: Now I've asked you all here tonight, not as each one of you conceitedly thought, to show you the location for the film you were certain to star in. No. Each one of you has a little secret. Something you would prefer to keep within these four walls. (Looks round stage) Three walls. Except Mrs Travesty, whose only need is a few walls.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Blackmail! Told you. You bounder.

DARLENE WITHERS: Is That What the B stood for? Bunty, I'm disgusted.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: In my country, B stands for Baden.

ADORA MANN: Pardon?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Baden. Baden Baden.

ADORA MANN: Pardon Pardon?

DARLENE WITHERS: Oh shut up.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Please, let me continue. Major Pongo Brown - since you so rudely interrupted, I will start with you. The Major has been extremely kind, and has volunteered to supply the necessary finances to run Bigger Hampton Manor in my absence. Very generous. And all

because I cast his brother in one of my movies, and know rather a lot about the stiff upper lip of the Pongo Browns. Shall I go on?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Leave it there Steinburger.

DARLENE WITHERS: No, carry on.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: It will be your turn soon - then you won't be so keen on all the gory details.

DARLENE WITHERS: I have nothing to hide.

OTTO STEINBURGER: We'll see. So there we are. A little secret about the Major. Mrs Travesty, you will look after the place while I am away. For this I will make sure the Major pays you five shillings a week - unless, of course, he finds anything out of order, any sign of neglect, any lack of attention whatsoever. Then, I'm afraid, you will lose a week's money. I think he will play the game, like the consummate actor he is - because, after all, it is his money. If everything is correct on my return, then I will consider your position and financial status. I really think that's extremely fair. Don't you agree? Of course you do - you have no choice.

MRS TRAVESTY: Don't I? We'll see about that. I'll get another position... then you'll be in the soup.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Or in hot water. With your soup it would be hard to tell the difference.

(Mrs Travesty looks horrified)

OTTO STEINBURGER: Sleep on it Travers old thing. You'll see the sense. Now, our dear vicar. The complete man of the church. Involved in every aspect. Including of course the tortoise-like steeple fund.

REVEREND ACORN: There's no proof...

OTTO STEINBURGER: No? I have proof, believe me. Your role in my immediate future is a simple one. All you have to do is continue with your fund raiding - but you take a little more... for me. Upon my return you will hand it over, as I am bound to have used up all my dear wife's money by then, on shameful living and unworthy pursuits. Make sure there is enough for Mrs Travesty too. She may need a little rest and I would not let her down, and the Major would probably have used up all his money by then. After all, I am an honourable man.

(Everyone Looks at audience)

REVEREND ACORN: I shall pray for you. Something on the lines of 'Forgive him - for he knows not what...'

OTTO STEINBURGER: Save it for grace. Now. All clear so far? That, the remaining three will be delighted to hear, is the end of the financial dealings. My home will be run well in my absence, and I will have funds on my return. Capital. Yes, very apt - Capital.

DARLENE WITHERS: When I leave here I am going straight to the police. You are a scoundrel, man. A rotter and a cad. I have nothing to answer for, so I am the only one in a position to act. Mark my words Steinburger - your louche casting couch behaviour won't do you much good in prison, unless you want to get off with Knuckles in cell 23. You're heading for the dock, my man.

OTTO STEINBURGER: The only dock I'm heading for is located at Southampton. Now be quiet for once and listen. The only reason you are here is because of our mutual past. It was a well kept secret, wasn't it, our affair? I only did it for the money of course. My dear wife, flat out on her bed, smelt a rat. Pity you weren't there with your dagger eh, Rechtschreibung. Cut off my allowance...

MRS TRAVESTY: Pity She didn't cut off...

OTTO STEINBURGER: Silence. I needed money for a few of life's necessities - a car, my bookmaker's bill, the odd night at the Ritz...

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: I once had an odd night at the Ritz. I...

OTTO STEINBURGER: And dear Darlene Withers was only too happy to oblige. A kiss or two... a few pounds. A loving hug... a new suit. A crazed embrace... that could earn enough for a weekend in Paris.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: What did you have to do to get the car?

OTTO STEINBURGER: A whole army of extras helped me there.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: By Jove.

DARLENE WITHERS: How low can you go?

OTTO STEINBURGER: I think that's what you said at the time. However, I tired of you, didn't I? The old boiler had to give way to a spring chicken - who is a little unwilling at the moment, but that will be amended shortly. I asked you here because I thought you'd like to meet your successor. But you took it in such bad spirit! I detected a little jealousy about my spring chicken. A fresh plump little addition to my nest.

DARLENE WITHERS: Does she lay yet?

OTTO STEINBURGER: Our relationship was good enough. After all, here was I, tied to a bedridden but demanding dragon of a wife. Unable to move undetected. An affair brought a little fun into my life but, as I believe fox hunters say, the chase was more exciting than the kill.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: What's he talking about? Did the fox catch the chickens or what? What's it all about pray?

OTTO STEINBURGER: Precisely. Prey. And when I got my prey I very quickly tired of it. Luckily my wife died suddenly, so I used some of her money to acquire a super house in London.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: A bigger chicken run?

OTTO STEINBURGER: Precisely. So, Mrs Darlene Withers, aged actress, horticultural genius and much respected local figure, does have a past - and it will all come out if a word of tonight's meeting gets any further.

DARLENE WITHERS: I could kill you Bunty. You invited me here just to make you jealous?

OTTO STEINBURGER: That's right.

DARLENE WITHERS: Thank you.

OTTO STEINBURGER: It was nothing.

DARLENE WITHERS: You're right.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: You say you invite this good lady to show off a younger woman? To make her realise she's er... how you say...?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Over The Hill?

MRS TRAVESTY: Past it?

ADORA MANN: Entered late middle age?

DARLENE WITHERS: That will do.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Quite. My motives are not your concern. Herr Wolf Rechtschreibung - how did it feel when you saw the incredible illusion of the cowboy turning into a rabbit right there on screen? When that piece of wizardry was recognised as a piece of genius by the Oscar committee? Did you feel proud? Were you the toast of Vienna?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Of course. As they say in old Wien, happiness is a warm plate of Schnitzel indeed.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Really? How fascinating.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: We make a joke in old Wien. Awarding is rewarding! Get it, as you limey gits say?

OTTO STEINBURGER: Not really. However...

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Happiness is a living Hapsburg.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Enough. So you were proud of your achievement? An achievement that you plagiarised, completely, from me?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Well I added some of my own...

OTTO STEINBURGER: All you added was your name at the end of the proposal. A lesser man than I would have taken action immediately, but after a great deal of consideration I decided not to expose you.

ADORA MANN: What does that mean?

OTTO STEINBURGER: My dear child. Do you really not know the meaning of 'expose'?

DARLENE WITHERS: You amaze me.

ADORA MANN: No, I know what expose means, eh? (She grins at Major Pongo Brown) I mean 'paid your eyes'.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Paid your eyes? Oh, plagiarise! That means copy. He copied my work.

ADORA MANN: Oh.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Back to business. As I said, Rechtschreibung, I decided not to expose you for the plagiarist you are. I decided to invite you to Bigger Hampton Manor instead.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Damned strange behaviour.

MRS TRAVESTY: He does things like that.

OTTO STEINBURGER: ...and while you were down here with the others, I took the liberty of searching your room. Most interesting. You seem to have got a long way with...Project X.

EVERYONE: Not Project X?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: You search my room? Find my secret papers? I could kill you Steinburger. Fancy looking through someone else's things...

ADORA MANN: And finding Project X!

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Hardly the behaviour of a gentleman.

OTTO STEINBURGER: I didn't feel at all guilty in the circumstances. As a matter of fact, elation was more the emotion that struck me. It is your turn now Wolfy baby. Your turn to do the donkey work - mine to take the glory.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: What?

OTTO STEINBURGER: While I am away on my travels, you will stay here as my guest, and finish your research. Upon my return, you will hand me Project X in a plain brown envelope, ready for me to build in to my exciting new movie, Cut! With the simple legend inscribed upon it - Project X, the ultimate special effect illusion. Copyright Otto Steinburger.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Never. Never never.

OTTO STEINBURGER: I think you will, or the world will be left with no illusion about your first illusion - that it wasn't yours at all.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: But Project X is my... my...

OTTO STEINBURGER: Life's work?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Life's work. It is far greater than your schoolboy illusions.

OTTO STEINBURGER: That you felt deserved an Oscar.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: You'll never get away with this. (To Darlene Withers) Please gradige frau, I appeal to you.

DARLENE WITHERS: I am not a frau. Stop being so disgustingly foreign. And you do not appeal to me at all.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Steinburger, you'll never get away with this.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Wait and see. Some mysterious letters have been written, that you mustn't know about. Date stamped evidence will be lodged with my bank, with instructions to release everything on demand. So I should get to work Wolfy baby - I want fame and fortune when I return from... going away.

ADORA MANN: Bunty, I could kill you You're a meanie. A cruel and naughty man. I'm right, aren't I Darlene?

DARLENE WITHERS: Mrs Withers to you. Yes, probably for the first time in your life you are right. Tell us you foul pig, what have you got planned for your simpering little tart of a girlfriend?

ADORA MANN: How could you? We should all be together, against him. He's a cad... and a rogue. That's what he is.

OTTO STEINBURGER: My plans for the delectable and fascinating Adora Mann are rather more short term. She has to accept and enjoy my every whim, or certain photographs will reach the wrong hands. Photographs like this... (he whips some photographs from his pocket and shows them to Major Pongo Brown)

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: I say... good lord... oh boy... by Jove. Wait a minute...(turns a photo the other way up) ...Oh I see. Where did... I mean... who was... should I say... well... by Jove.

DARLENE WITHERS: (shouts) Major.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Oh. Um... good one of you Miss Mann. Erm... who's the lucky chap?

OTTO STEINBURGER: Baron Orgle.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Barrel Organ?

OTTO STEINBURGER: Baron Orgle. Feel privileged Major. You are the only person to have seen these photographs so far. They will be destroyed tomorrow morning if everything goes according to plan. Otherwise... where does the Baron's devoted wife live?

ADORA MANN: Oh no. Anything but that.

DARLENE WITHERS: Anything?

OTTO STEINBURGER: My line I think.

ADORA MANN: You cruel...

REVEREND ACORN: Heartless...

MRS TRAVESTY: Conniving...

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Underhand...

DARLENE WITHERS: Disgusting...

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Schweinhund.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Yes, I am rather, aren't I? So Miss Mann will look after my immediate needs, dear old Travers and Major Pongo will provide the elbow grease and wherewithal to run Bigger Hampton Manor in my absence, the vicar and our special effects genius between them will provide my pocket money and pension upon my return - and Darlene Withers, dear Darlene, has supplied an amusing diversion.

EVERYONE: You'll never get away with it.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Now Mrs Travesty, I think we are ready to eat. (To others) Travers has been slaving away in the kitchen all day. We mustn't disappoint her.

(Mrs Travesty exits)

OTTO STEINBURGER: Reverend Acorn, won't you lead the way? The needs of the inner man, etcetera etcetera...

REVEREND ACORN: Get thee behind me, Satan.

OTTO STEINBURGER: (confidentially) Plum duff for afters!

REVEREND ACORN: Oh very well. (Exits hurriedly)

OTTO STEINBURGER: Splendid! What about you, Wolf?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Schweinhund!

OTTO STEINBURGER: Bless you. (Wolf Rechtschreibung exits) Major, why don't you escort the fabulous Darlene Withers into dinner? You'd make a splendid couple. (Darlene Withers exits angrily) Oh dear! Mrs Withers seems to have other ideas. Never mind, better luck next time.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: You're a bounder sir. And a cad.

OTTO STEINBURGER: That's What I like about you Major. You understand me. (Major Pongo Brown exits) Now come along, my little one. (He takes Adora Mann's arm)

ADORA MANN: I just won't be able to eat a thing. I can feel it in my stomach.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Later. It's amazing what one can force oneself to do, when one has to. Ah! Dinner. Dinner. Dinner!

(Otto Steinburger leads her into the dining room as the lights fade. As the light come up again, a murmur of voices is heard from the dining room. The door opens and all re-enter)

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Good spread Steinburger. Capital.

REVEREND ACORN: The pheasant was well hung.

MRS TRAVESTY: Begging Your Pardon Reverend, That wasn't pheasant, that was Chicken O van.

REVEREND ACORN: Indeed? (Burps) In that case it was extremely well hung.

ADORA MANN: I didn't try that bit.

DARLENE WITHERS: Not The only thing round here that needs to be hung.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Ere ere.

DARLENE WITHERS: The expression is here here - and is for the exclusive use of the British.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Well, I think we should all charge our glasses and drink a toast - to me!

MRS TRAVESTY: Huh! (Mrs Travesty starts to exit to kitchen)

OTTO STEINBURGER: You too Mrs Travesty.

MRS TRAVESTY: I don't drink with the likes of you.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Bravely spoken Travers.

MRS TRAVESTY: Or You. (Exits)

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Oh.

REVEREND ACORN: If you'll excuse me, I think I'll just nip back to the dining room. A little unfinished business with the Stilton I'd like to attend to.

(Reverend Acorn exits to dining room and Wolf Rechtschreibung starts to climb the stairs)

OTTO STEINBURGER: You're leaving as well, Wolf?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Please. I have most important things to do.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Of course, Project X! My great invention.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: You push me too far, old matey boy fella me lad what? I blow off now.

(Wolf Rechtschreibung exits upstairs)

OTTO STEINBURGER: That is a real idiot. Another glass of port anyone? (Silence) No? I'd better rescue the decanter before our dear vicar finishes that as well!

(Otto Steinburger exits to dining room, closing the door behind him. Mrs Travesty enters from the kitchen.)

DARLENE WITHERS: (conspiratorially) Mrs Travesty, Major, Miss... er... thing. (Beckoning them to join her) Now, what are we going to do? Comply?

ADORA MANN: For the sake of my career I'll have to do as he says. But I won't comply.

DARLENE WITHERS: Give me patience. Major?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Lock The boulder in the cellar I say, and throw away the key.

ADORA MANN: But how will he get out? Oh, I see what you mean.

MRS TRAVESTY: If I had my way he wouldn't get out - ever! He needs one of our daggers up his...

DARLENE WITHERS: Mrs Travesty! Surely you don't mean...

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: I think she does, by Jove. Explain yourself Travers old thing.

MRS TRAVESTY: Well, I think it's up to one of us to get rid of... (Otto Steinburger enters) Shhh...

(They move apart hurriedly. Mrs Travesty exits to dining room. Darlene Withers crosses to garden door)

OTTO STEINBURGER: And where are you off to in such a hurry Darlene?

DARLENE WITHERS: To the garden. I need a change of air. Must have been the Stilton. Coming Major?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: What? Oh! Yes. (He crosses to her) I could do with a smoke.

DARLENE WITHERS: You'd better come too, Miss... er...

OTTO STEINBURGER: Why should she?

DARLENE WITHERS: Er... she wants to see the orangery. (Grabs Adora Mann's arm) Don't you? (They exit, followed by Major Pongo Brown)

(Otto Steinburger looks after them suspiciously. Hearing voices from the dining room he exits hurriedly through the study door, shutting it behind him. Reverend Acorn enters from the dining room, with Mrs Travesty)

REVEREND ACORN: Pardon? Oh I Quite agree Mrs Travesty, we must indeed confer. Where are the others for God's sake? (Looks up) Sorry. (Wolf Rechtschreibung comes downstairs) Ah boffin chappy! Just the man we need in our hour of tribulation.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Please?

REVEREND ACORN: What do you think we should do about it?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: About what?

REVEREND ACORN: About what? Your life's work is threatened, you are on the verge of ruin and public humiliation, and you say 'about what?'

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Oh That. Otto Steinburger. As I see it there is only one solution to the problem. He must die!

REVEREND ACORN: Steady on Rechtschreibung.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Die! Die! Die!

MRS TRAVESTY: Yes.

REVEREND ACORN: Die? Die?

(Otto Steinburger re-enters. They all sing and dance 'Diddly I di di')

REVEREND ACORN: Die? Die-ning room. Urgent business in there. See you later (exits hurriedly to dining room)

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Where's My dagger?

OTTO STEINBURGER: Found a rat, Wolfy?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Rat? Ja wohl! (Exits)

OTTO STEINBURGER: What are they up to Mrs Travesty? What have they been saying?

MRS TRAVESTY: Nothing much. (Starts to go) I must get on with the clearing up.

OTTO STEINBURGER: Mrs Travesty. Travers. Perhaps I have been too forceful. As an ancient retainer, with a mindless trust in your employer, and a basic if dumb respect for these grand surroundings and the mortals who have lived and breathed in these portals - would you side with me against our guests tonight?

MRS TRAVESTY: You What?

OTTO STEINBURGER: Are you on my side?

MRS TRAVESTY: Things have gone... too far.

(Mrs Travesty exits to kitchen. Otto Steinburger looks distinctly worried for a moment, and then moves to the telephone on the desk)

OTTO STEINBURGER: Exchange? Give me the police - and hurry. Is the Inspector there? Inspector. This is Otto Steinburger at Bigger Hampton Manor. What? No, I haven't found you a part in my film... not yet. Eh? Yes, I'm sure you'll be walking the red carpet before too long. Inspector you must listen. I'm in great... No no, you don't necessarily have to become a drug addict to act... Inspector, please listen. My life is in danger. No. She's dead. I said my life is in danger. Don't apologise. No... it really doesn't matter. No... it won't affect your chances. Oh God, listen Inspector. I'm in fear of my life dammit - there's a plot afoot to kill me. Get over here... Well, can't you miss Band Waggon for one week? I have some people round here and I think they're after my blood. I've left some black envelopes for... What? Who do I suspect? It could be any one of them, but in my opinion... (suddenly all the lights go out) Inspector... Inspector! (Rattles telephone) Damn. He's hung up. Blasted fuses. (He strikes a match and we see him exit to study as he hears offstage voices overlapping)

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: (off) what the devil's going on? Steinburger, where the hell are you man?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Where is good old Travers? Jolly old thing, what?

DARLENE WITHERS: Who's that? Oh it's you. What happened?

MRS TRAVESTY: It's them fuses. Bloody things.

REVEREND ACORN: Lighten our darkness I beseech you oh Lord. Who's there?

MRS TRAVESTY: I'll get a light. Shan't be a tick.

ADORA MANN: Oh dear. Things always happen to me in the dark. (Squeals) Ooh.

DARLENE WITHERS: If this is someone's idea of a joke I don't find it remotely funny.

(Footsteps are heard, confused noises, a door bangs, sound of a dragging body. Then a thump and silence)

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Mrs Travesty, where have you secreted yourself? Ah!

MRS TRAVESTY: (entering with an oil lamp) If it's not the gas it's the electric. I'm giving in my notice.

REVEREND ACORN: (enters) Well done Mrs Travesty, you good and faithful servant.

(Darlene Withers and Adora Mann Enter)

ADORA MANN: Does this sort of thing always happen in country houses?

DARLENE WITHERS: Oh Do be quiet you stupid little tart.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Where are the fuses Mrs Travesty?

MRS TRAVESTY: (indicating) Through there Major.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Got any matches? (searches in pockets) Ah! Matches. Leave it to the military. The Light Brigade. No charge. I'll fix the fuses in a jiffy.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Where is Steinburger?

ADORA MANN: He said he was going away.

EVERYONE: Strange.

(Major Pongo Brown opens the cupboard door. Otto Steinburger's body falls out. General reaction. Adora Mann screams. All freeze)

CURTAIN

End of act one.

ACT 2.

(The body has gone. The Inspector and his Sergeant are alone. They are studying a plan of the house)

INSPECTOR: Sergeant, go and get that housekeeping woman. Cook or whatever she is. Mrs...

SERGEANT: Travesty. What do you want her for?

INSPECTOR: Remember your place Sergeant. Do as you're bid.

SERGEANT: (goes to door and yells) Mrs Travesty!

(Mrs Travesty runs in, in confusion)

MRS TRAVESTY: Yes sir. Your majesty. Um... how can I serve you? Cup of tea? Spotted dick? Big dollop of...

INSPECTOR: be quiet and listen, woman.

(Mrs Travesty bows deeply)

INSPECTOR: Mrs Travesty, did any of the guests here tonight own a dagger?

MRS TRAVESTY: We all did! Oops, shouldn't have said that.

INSPECTOR: Better you do, young lady...

MRS TRAVESTY: Young! Ooh I say...

INSPECTOR: Or you'll be banged up for withholding information.

MRS TRAVESTY: Oh no sir, not me sir, please. (She drops to her knees) Oh please sir, I beg of you from my bottom, um... um, the bottom of my heart.

INSPECTOR: Well if you want to stay out of trouble, go to the kitchen, get yourself a tray, and gather all the daggers. Everyone mind. By fair means or foul.

MRS TRAVESTY: Yessir. Yes. Right away. (She exits backwards, bowing, until she is out of the passage door. There is a terrible crash and the sound of breaking glass, furniture falling etc)

INSPECTOR: That's the way to treat them, Sergeant. The truth will be mine before I can say Jack... what is it?

SERGEANT: Robinson, sir.

INSPECTOR: Correct. Now, where are they all?

SERGEANT: Major Pongo Brown...

INSPECTOR: The military man?

SERGEANT: Yes sir.

INSPECTOR: Thought as much.

SERGEANT: He's on the terrace, smoking. I don't mean he's on fire! On fire eh? Fire? (Grins encouragingly)

INSPECTOR: Sergeant.

SERGEANT: Sorry sir. The foreign idiot's in the study. Or is it a viewing theatre?

INSPECTOR: I don't know. Go on.

SERGEANT: And That famous actress that made my Dad hot under the collar in Who Put the Broad in Broadway? Darlene Withers, her of the 'come and get me big boy' eyes back in the silent movie days. Her of the...

INSPECTOR: Oh get on with it Sergeant. We haven't got all night.

SERGEANT: (mysteriously) haven't we? Anyway, she's in the garden, giving the floribunda a good seeing to.

INSPECTOR: Tweaking out the intersections?

SERGEANT: So I'm lead to believe sir. Miss Adora Mann...

INSPECTOR: Yo ho ho?

SERGEANT: That's the one sir. She's in the orangery dancing with an invisible partner to a rhythm created by her own feet on the deserted dance floor.

INSPECTOR: Cor. And Reverend Acorn?

SERGEANT: Finishing supper.

INSPECTOR: Finishing supper? At a time like this? Callous peasant.

SERGEANT: No, cock au vin sir. Oh - and Mrs Travesty is out finding all the daggers.

INSPECTOR: I know that. (Thinks) Why don't they ever learn?

SERGEANT: Beg Your Pardon sir?

INSPECTOR: Why don't they ever learn? That's what we say about murderers in the force. Sort of tradition really. Have you searched in the grounds?

SERGEANT: I don't think anybody had...

TOGETHER: Coffee at dinner.

INSPECTOR: Please take this case seriously Sergeant. This is a murder case. The facts are these. A telephone call from Bigger Hampton Manor. Otto Steinburger, clearly distressed, believes he is to be murdered. We arrive, see the body, survey the scene of the crime. Everyone's got daggers for God's sake.

TOGETHER: Strange.

SERGEANT: And we establish the fact that the cupboard, from which the unfortunate Otto Steinburger fell...

INSPECTOR: Yes?

SERGEANT: Maybe breathing his last...

INSPECTOR: Yes Yes...

SERGEANT: Gulping for a few extra seconds of air on this mortal coil...

INSPECTOR: Sergeant...

SERGEANT: On this woeful sea of troubles...

INSPECTOR: What?

SERGEANT: Sorry sir. The cupboard... has two doors.

INSPECTOR: I can see that.

SERGEANT: That's all right then.

INSPECTOR: Quite. Intrigue interlaced with intrigue. Mystery adhered to mystery. Woe upon woe... should we call in the yard?

SERGEANT: I don't see the point - no one will hear us. (Inspector glares at Sergeant) Sorry sir.

INSPECTOR: Right, bring in the six suspects. Clever interrogation will soon strip the mask away and reveal the guilty party.

(The Sergeant crosses to the door, stops and turns)

SERGEANT: Why don't they ever learn?

INSPECTOR: Quite. Send them in Sergeant. Jump to it man. Hurry.

SERGEANT: Right away sir. (Turns to go again and stops) I'll be back directly.

INSPECTOR: Fine.

SERGEANT: Right.

INSPECTOR: Right.

(Sergeant exits)

INSPECTOR: Good man.

(Inspector crosses to desk, picks up an old chicken bone from a plate, smells it)

INSPECTOR: Yuk. Poo...

(examines photos, vases etc)

SERGEANT: (off) This way please. Hurry up please. (Finally he appears at door to study. He lets the suspects in, directing them like traffic)

INSPECTOR: Come in Mr Rachen... schribum... bung... Racbum... Reekreib...

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: (comes up close to Inspector and spits) Rechtschreibung.

INSPECTOR: (wipes eye) er... may I call you Wolf? Wolfy? Sit there please. Mrs Withers - that's right, leaning by the desk with your hand on your hip looking bored. Reverend Acorn, sit with your knees together. Miss Adora Mann, lean seductively on the sofa. Major Pongo, over here - legs crossed. No, a little more arrogant. Everybody comfortable? This could take some time. It's my sad duty to inform you that Otto Steinburger is... dead.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Said he was going away. Damned sudden. Funny cove.

MRS TRAVESTY: Who'd have thought it...

DARLENE WITHERS: I think it's extremely rude. Shows lack of breeding.

ADORA MANN: I suffer from lack of breeding.

DARLENE WITHERS: Not for long by the sound of it.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Steinburger dead? How strange.

INSPECTOR: Yes, Quite so. Shortly after 9.30 this evening I had an emergency call from the deceased, informing me that he had reason to believe his life was in danger.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: His wife was in danger? She died ages ago.

INSPECTOR: That's precisely what I said to him! (Roars with laughter) Sorry. Yes, he believed his life was in danger.

EVERYONE: No!

INSPECTOR: Does that give you a clue as to why I am holding you all here?

EVERYONE: No?

INSPECTOR: Otto Steinburger has been brutally murdered and you are all suspects.

EVERYONE: Murdered? Ridiculous! Why suspect us? Pillars of the community... etc (They all rise)

INSPECTOR: Because you six were the last people to see the famous film producer, Otto Steinburger, alive!

DARLENE WITHERS: So What? Are you trying to say, you silly little man, that we are all accused of murdering the bloody man? Don't be absurd. I wish to leave. Major?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: What? Yes, certainly. Damned cheek. Evidence, that's what's needed.

(Enter Mrs Travesty with tray of daggers)

MRS TRAVESTY: Here we are Inspector. All six daggers.

INSPECTOR: Thank...

MRS TRAVESTY: All clean and neat.

INSPECTOR: C...clean?

MRS TRAVESTY: Yes, I washed them up. They were all mucky. One looked like someone had been cutting up a pork chop with it. I couldn't let you have them like that. I run a respectable house, Don't I Major?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: I shouldn't think so.

INSPECTOR: You mean you cleaned them up? Washed off all the evidence? You stupid half-baked crazy woman...

MRS TRAVESTY: (smiles) Knew you'd be pleased. Now, have I missed anything?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Only That The Inspector is accusing us all of murder.

MRS TRAVESTY: Oh, fine.

INSPECTOR: Mrs Travesty - complete this tableau of criminal masterminds. Sit on the edge of the sofa, looking servile.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: (gets up) enough of this rubbish. Shall I see you home Mrs Withers?

INSPECTOR: Not so fast sir.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Ring me in the morning if anything shows up. (Starts to leave)

INSPECTOR: Nobody is leaving this room until I have satisfied myself...

DARLENE WITHERS: Oh please.

INSPECTOR: ... that the person is innocent. Please be seated (to Mrs Travesty) and you, Madam.

MRS TRAVESTY: Madam? Well, I never did.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Nor did I. I'm a busy man, Inspector. Please I will hurry orf to my room. I know nothing. My ignorance speaks for all.

INSPECTOR: Oh do be quiet.

EVERYONE: Quite.

INSPECTOR: Now, I understand you were all present when the body was discovered.

EVERYONE: Yes of course. Who told you?

INSPECTOR: Did anyone examine it?

(They all look vaguely at each other)

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Where was it? Oh yes!

ADORA MANN: We were too scared.

REVEREND ACORN: I had my eyes shut in prayer.

DARLENE WITHERS: How could we? The lights were out.

EVERYONE: Yes! Very good!

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: I could not find my spectacles.

MRS TRAVESTY: Where was it?

INSPECTOR: What happened exactly? (Everyone looks at each other) Major?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: I was on the terrace smoking my old pipe. Bit of shag after dinner is just the thing. I heard a lot of voices and made my way into this room.

EVERYONE: Us too.

MRS TRAVESTY: It was a fuse sir. It's always happening at Bigger Hampton Manor. It's the antique wiring you see...

INSPECTOR: Who discovered the body?

EVERYONE: You did.

INSPECTOR: Of course I didn't. You were all in here when I arrived.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: I went to mend the fuse, and as I opened the cupboard door, Steinburger's body just... fell out on the floor.

INSPECTOR: And you presumed he was dead?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: No need to presume, Inspector. He was a goner if ever I saw one. And I've seen some dead bodies in my time. Look at that lot in Ben Hur.

INSPECTOR: You were in that? And so you phoned the police?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: I know my duty Inspector. But I didn't because you arrived. Very fast. I commend you and will recommend you for a more elevated position.

INSPECTOR: How kind. Did anybody touch the body before I arrived?

EVERYONE: No.

ADORA MANN: Someone must have touched it.

INSPECTOR: Ah! Who?

ADORA MANN: The murderer.

REVEREND ACORN: May one enquire how our dear departed brother met his fate?

INSPECTOR: He was stabbed.

EVERYONE: No.

INSPECTOR: But I will save all the gory details until I have questioned you all together and separately.

DARLENE WITHERS: Goodness. How terribly dull.

INSPECTOR: I'm inclined to agree Madam. Now the Sergeant and I have carried out a brief survey of the premises and we have reason to believe that the crime took place elsewhere and the body was dragged into that cupboard by some person or persons unknown.

ADORA MANN: Surely nobody would be brave enough to move a body.

DARLENE WITHERS: You did it, so tell us.

ADORA MANN: I didn't do it. I really didn't. You have my word for it.

(They all look at her)

ADORA MANN: I know you all suspect me. I just know it.

INSPECTOR: No one is guilty, Miss, until they have been proved innocent. (Sergeant coughs) I mean no one is innocent until... that is... everyone is... Sergeant!

SERGEANT: Sir?

INSPECTOR: Perhaps you can guide us through this tray of weapons that Mrs Travesty has so kindly cleaned up destroyed the evidence thereon.

MRS TRAVESTY: Cor, I'm daft aren't I?

EVERYONE: Yes.

SERGEANT: This dagger...

REVEREND ACORN: That belongs to the dreaded Rechtschreibung.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Thank you.

INSPECTOR: Yours sir? Any particular reason why such an object should be in your possession at a country house at which you were being entertained as a guest?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: What's next Sergeant?

INSPECTOR: The dagger Mr Rechtschreibung?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Um... to whittle away at wooden props for the special effects making of... ask Mrs Travesty, she gave it to me as a birthday present.

MRS TRAVESTY: What Do you mean? I've never seen the bloody thing before.

EVERYONE: We have.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Shhh...

DARLENE WITHERS: He keeps it with him all the time...

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Says he's scared of dirty rats...

REVEREND ACORN: Says it keeps them away...

ADORA MANN: All foreigners are mad, aren't they?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: That is true.

INSPECTOR: Next. Sergeant?

SERGEANT: This belongs to the Reverend. I know, because I searched his car.

REVEREND ACORN: Not the glove compartment?

SERGEANT: No sir.

(Reverend Acorn crosses himself, says a quiet thank you to above)

INSPECTOR: So how do you know it is the vicar's?

SERGEANT: (mysteriously) Because he didn't have a dagger in his car.

(Everyone Looks at each other, bewildered)

INSPECTOR: Good detection Sergeant. Next?

SERGEANT: This one belongs to Mrs Travesty. In spite of her washing up, there's still caked on food on the handle.

INSPECTOR: Astute fellow.

SERGEANT: Thank you sir.

MRS TRAVESTY: Well, that's put me in the clear all right.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: No it doesn't. She's your murderer Inspector.

MRS TRAVESTY: Ooh I never did.

INSPECTOR: Carry on Sergeant.

SERGEANT: While searching the premises sir, I observed a fur coat hanging in the vestibule.

DARLENE WITHERS: That's mine. I hope you haven't touched it or I'll sue. It took seventeen needless hunts and some barbaric killing to get the foxes for that - so it's obviously very dear to me.

SERGEANT: One of the pockets had many holes in the bottom, signifying that the owner (stares at Darlene Withers) has carried a dagger in it on many occasions.

DARLENE WITHERS: So What? Never know when you have to slash back a bit of Virginia Creeper. Mind your own business.

INSPECTOR: I'm sorry Mrs Withers, But this is my business. That dagger is a potential murder weapon.

DARLENE WITHERS: Murder weapon? Don't jump the gun...

EVERYONE: Gun?

DARLENE WITHERS: this is highly amusing. Carry on Sergeant.

SERGEANT: The next clue is something beginning with D...

MRS TRAVESTY: D?

ADORA MANN: I love games like this! Give us a clue Sergeant.

SERGEANT: Another dagger sir.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Begins with a D all right.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: In Austria we have many princes and princesses stabbed by the dagger. Elizabeth, by way of exemplifying, was attacked by as... as... in...

ADORA MANN: As in what?

REVEREND ACORN: He's trying to say assassin. Anyway, who cares? Onwards Inspector.

INSPECTOR: A very likely murder weapon. Mr Steinburger could have been stabbed.

MRS TRAVESTY: Well you know that. He could have been shot for all we know.

EVERYONE: Shot?

DARLENE WITHERS: That particular dagger was in Adora Mann's handbag. Proof, as if it was needed, that she did it.

ADORA MANN: I knew everyone suspected me - just because I happen to have a dagger in my handbag. You're meanies, the lot of you.

INSPECTOR: Miss Mann. Perhaps you could calm down and answer a simple question. Why were you carrying a dagger in your handbag?

ADORA MANN: I always carry one. Makes me feel safe when I'm walking the London streets at night...

DARLENE WITHERS: (triumphantly) Ah!

ADORA MANN: Going home from a show or an audition I mean. People lurk in doorways. People you wouldn't want to meet on a dark night. A girl's got to protect herself, and I do. You're a long time dead Inspector, unless of course, you're Otto Steinburger.

INSPECTOR: What Do you mean?

ADORA MANN: Well, he's not a long time dead yet - is he?

DARLENE WITHERS: Oh very profound. Arrest her at once Sergeant. She is obviously guilty to the core.

REVEREND ACORN: Be still, my children. There is no proof that this young person has erred.

ADORA MANN: 'Eard what?

DARLENE WITHERS: She is obviously not responsible for her words or actions. She is a silly little half bake who would stop at nothing to cunningly devise a plot to obtain money through menaces.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Surely a half bake wouldn't be able to be as cunning as you suggest. Take the Huns. They were cunning. I remember an incident during the last...

INSPECTOR: Enough. Silence. Shall we proceed?

SERGEANT: Another dagger. Must belong to the Major.

DARLENE WITHERS: Is that the great thing you were groping for?

REVEREND ACORN: Yours Major. I know it.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: No it's not.

REVEREND ACORN: Yes it is. I feel it. Call it divine intuition.

DARLENE WITHERS: Why?

REVEREND ACORN: Why not?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Ah! Clarity itself! The Major has done the murdering of.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Ridiculous. Respected chappie in the community. Right Mrs W?

DARLENE WITHERS: I haven't the faintest idea. I wouldn't have thought so.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Some bounder gets his head blown off and everyone...

INSPECTOR: Head blown off, Major?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Figure of speech. Probably stabbed by that silly cow for all I know.

DARLENE WITHERS: Silly cow? I sincerely hope you're talking about the real silly cow in this room. If it hadn't been for her none of this would have happened.

ADORA MANN: You can't blame me, just because I'm young and pretty.

DARLENE WITHERS: Anyway Major. Why are you getting so upset? You did it, didn't you! I knew it all along. Gin sodden killer - that's Major Pongo Brown. Always said it, haven't we vicar?

REVEREND ACORN: Only occasionally. Let us give him the benefit of the doubt. Is that fair Major? ... You vicious swine.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Steady on , vicar old crappy person. I think the Major should have a chance to explain... his premeditated and violent behaviour.

ADORA MANN: I can't believe this. The Major hasn't been given the chance to speak.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Thank you Miss...

ADORA MANN: Murderers should always be allowed to speak.

DARLENE WITHERS: He's your man Inspector. Arrest him. Then we can all go home.

SERGEANT: Shall I handcuff him roughly and march him away?

INSPECTOR: Certainly not. He's clearly innocent, aren't you Major?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Of course.

INSPECTOR: There, I told you. Right. Now why did you start a volley of gunfire in this room?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: It's quite simple...

DARLENE WITHERS: Lies.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: I just...

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Rubbish.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Wanted to...

ADORA MANN: Major, how could you?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Talk about it.

REVEREND ACORN: Lord forgive him.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: (quickly) I wanted to talk about it with Steinburger. He liked firearms, Ever since that war movie he made. Bang Bang You're Dead I think it was called. We had long evenings talking about the old...

DARLENE WITHERS: Don't Be So ridiculous. When did you ever come here?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: At the Fox and Duck.

DARLENE WITHERS: Otto always went to the Pig and Whistle...

ADORA MANN: When he wasn't in his London haunts.

DARLENE WITHERS: Be quiet. Well Major?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: I heard once that he was interested. Anyway, that's why I picked the bloody thing up.

DARLENE WITHERS: I'll ask you to control your language in my presence. Save it for the public bar.

INSPECTOR: So to sum up - a dagger owned by Wolf Rechtschreibung...

MRS TRAVESTY: Strange.

INSPECTOR: Another, allegedly an artefact owned by the church of Reverend Acorn...

DARLENE WITHERS: Strange.

INSPECTOR: A dagger used as a cooking implement by Mrs Travesty...

REVEREND ACORN: Strange.

INSPECTOR: A gardener's lethal dagger in Mrs Withers' handbag...

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Strange.

INSPECTOR: Another dagger. This time from the very pocket of Major Pongo Brown...

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Strange.

INSPECTOR: And a dagger, used for a bit of overnight protection by Miss Adora Mann...

ADORA MANN: Strange.

INSPECTOR: Right. Everyone leave the room please. Wait in the study until I send for you. You may smoke and pace up and down in a concerned manner. You may mumble 'I could do with a drink' and give each other worried looks. But you may not leave the house. (They file out) Miss Mann - you stay here. I need answers to a few questions.

ADORA MANN: Me? I know I shall cry.

DARLENE WITHERS: (from door) Why not? It's your fault.

ADORA MANN: That's not true. And to think I was going to ask you if I could stay the night at your house...

DARLENE WITHERS: Tonight? Of course! Breakfast will be served at 8.30.

ADORA MANN: How lovely. Thank you so...

DARLENE WITHERS: And after you have brought my tray you can clean out the fires and make the beds.

ADORA MANN: Oh.

(The door closes)

INSPECTOR: Right, sit down Miss. Tell me, did you find Mr Steinburger difficult?

ADORA MANN: Virtually impossible.

INSPECTOR: Did he have a strange and mysterious hold over you?

ADORA MANN: No.

INSPECTOR: Come with me if you will... (she stands up) er... no.

ADORA MANN: Oh silly me. (Sits)

INSPECTOR: Come with me in your mind. When dinner was over, did everyone stay on - drinking, laughing, swapping anecdotes about poor people who have to work for a living, while the rich bask in their own self-praise, conceit and arrogance?

ADORA MANN: No. We came in here for a little while. Then everyone went off to different places. I went to the orangery, alone of course - but none the less romantic for that. I dreamed I was dancing with a handsome man. I hummed music and whirled round and round. I suppose if you compared my life to a brick wall, every other brick would have 'maybe' or 'could have been' carved on it.

INSPECTOR: Er... quite. Why should anyone want to kill Otto Steinburger?

ADORA MANN: I really don't know. Being innocent, how could I?

INSPECTOR: If there was someone here tonight who did have a motive for the murder, who do you think it would be?

ADORA MANN: Oh, I think I know that. Definitely.

INSPECTOR: Who?

ADORA MANN: Otto Steinburger.

INSPECTOR: But he was the one that was murdered.

ADORA MANN: I'm sorry, I thought that was what you said.

INSPECTOR: Who would have wanted to kill him Miss Mann? Who had reason to do so - in your opinion?

ADORA MANN: Major Pongo Brown - without a doubt. He had the motive. And the reason.

INSPECTOR: And what was that?

ADORA MANN: He said Mr Steinburger was something beginning with B.

INSPECTOR: B?

ADORA MANN: Yes, and I can't remember what. It wasn't Bunty. Although that does begin with B.

INSPECTOR: Miss Mann, it's important. You must think.

ADORA MANN: (very long pause) No, I give up.

INSPECTOR: What Do you mean, you give up?

ADORA MANN: I can't think of anything beginning with B at all. Can I go back to the study now and look all upset and shaken?

INSPECTOR: If you insist. Before you go, did Mr Steinburger mention anything odd to you, something not quite right about the other guests?

ADORA MANN: I don't think so. Did he mention anything to you? When you arrived?

INSPECTOR: Of course not. He was dead.

ADORA MANN: (giggles loudly) Oh Yes! Silly me!

INSPECTOR: Quite. Off you go. And send Reverend Acorn in will you?

ADORA MANN: Of course. I hope I've been helpful.

INSPECTOR: Just one thing puzzles me. You explained why you carry a dagger in London, but why were you carrying one tonight?

ADORA MANN: (Looks thoughtful) ...Just in case.

INSPECTOR: I see.

(Adora Mann opens the door to leave, and all the other suspects fall through it)

INSPECTOR: For Heaven's sake, could you all wait outside please? Reverend, please stay here. (The door is closed) Sit down.

(Reverend Acorn sits, and produces a bag of sweets)

REVEREND ACORN: Jelly baby?

INSPECTOR: Have they been christened? (Roars with laughter) I've had a long day Reverend. A nasty business this morning. A man was walking past the flower shop when a golf ball hit him on the head.

REVEREND ACORN: Really?

INSPECTOR: Yes. He staggered into a large display of chrysanthemums, slipped on a flower pot, fell into the road and was run over by a steamroller.

REVEREND ACORN: How sad. But it was doubtless the way he would have wanted to go. Why are you telling me this my son?

INSPECTOR: To prove that death must not be taken lightly, Father. There has been treachery here tonight. It's in the air. I can smell it.

REVEREND ACORN: I'm sorry - that could have been the plum duff. However, I agree with your noble sentiments - said, if I may say so, by a man from a noble profession.

INSPECTOR: Thank you. How long had you known Otto Steinburger?

REVEREND ACORN: I welcomed him to the flock a year ago.

INSPECTOR: Surely he's been in the village longer than that?

REVEREND ACORN: Oh yes. He had been here several years before I got round to welcoming him. But why do you ask? You know him as well as I.

INSPECTOR: Routine. Did you like him?

REVEREND ACORN: Like him? Like him? I don't think anyone could have liked Otto Steinburger. He was a selfish, mean, conniving, wretched excuse for a man. The sort of person you detested on sight.

INSPECTOR: Just answer yes or no, please sir.

REVEREND ACORN: I could never make up my mind. His wife had all the money you know.

INSPECTOR: Had. Alcohol. Drugs. Women. There cannot be much left if your article in this month's parish magazine is true.

REVEREND ACORN: Ah! Don't believe everything you read.

INSPECTOR: I hope you don't mind me asking you Reverend. Is your name really Acorn? Or is it A.Corn, like an initial for Albert Corn or something like that?

REVEREND ACORN: No no. My name is Acorn. But as it happens my Christian name is Albert. And a fine Christian name it is. There were many Alberts in the Bible. One was a lesser known disciple.

INSPECTOR: How fascinating. Now Reverend Acorn, put yourself in my position...

(Reverend Acorn Stands up and imitates the Inspector's stance)

INSPECTOR: No, I mean in my position who would you accuse of this murder? Apart from yourself of course.

REVEREND ACORN: Is it my duty, as a man of the church, to sit in judgement upon others? Would it be right for a man of the cloth to accuse his fellow man? When I stand in front of that great judge in the...

INSPECTOR: The murderer, Reverend.

REVEREND ACORN: That dreadful little foreign fellow obviously. You can tell just by looking at him. Mean little piggy eyes. Stingingly ambitious. Not British. Vile little special effects person.

INSPECTOR: So that's your theory?

REVEREND ACORN: Purely a guess.

INSPECTOR: Thank you. Most constructive. Now - why did you really have a dagger with you tonight?

REVEREND ACORN: (quickly) it had been repaired.

INSPECTOR: (even quicker) Where?

REVEREND ACORN: Barton's Jewellers.

INSPECTOR: When?

REVEREND ACORN: Today.

INSPECTOR: How...?

REVEREND ACORN: Three and sixpence.

INSPECTOR: Can you...?

REVEREND ACORN: Receipt right here.

INSPECTOR: Did...?

REVEREND ACORN: Yes.

INSPECTOR: (slows down) And where were you just before the murder, if I may be so bold?

REVEREND ACORN: In the dining room of course. Where else?

INSPECTOR: Ask a silly question. Very well. You may go - but don't leave the house. I expect to be charging someone before the evening's out.

REVEREND ACORN: Well don't leave it too long. I have early service in the morning and I don't want to be yawning through it. (Pause) Mind you, the congregation usually do.

INSPECTOR: Send In Darlene Withers.

REVEREND ACORN: What Do you say?

INSPECTOR: Please.

(Exit Reverend Acorn. The Inspector stands alone. He paces. Looks at the door. Finally opens it. Darlene Withers is standing there)

INSPECTOR: Mrs Withers, could you come in? Please? (She enters) Didn't the vicar Tell you I wanted to see you?

DARLENE WITHERS: Of course he did. Have you no manners Inspector? If you need me, you request my presence yourself - you don't send some messenger.

INSPECTOR: The vicar is hardly a messenger Mrs Withers.

DARLENE WITHERS: Ridiculous. His kind are all messengers.

INSPECTOR: Oh I see! Very good. Shall we proceed?

DARLENE WITHERS: As long as you don't start accusing me, or talking about my dagger, or asking about my carnal relationship with Mr Steinburger.

INSPECTOR: Really? I mean... um... er... did you like Otto Steinburger?

DARLENE WITHERS: Film producers are like doctors. You go to them with your problems. They're always useful to have around. I used to call him when I took to my bed. He would come round and administer unto me. Just like a doctor - sometimes I couldn't keep him away.

INSPECTOR: Did you try apples? (Laughs at his joke) Um... anyway. One cannot ignore local gossip Mrs Withers. There was talk in the village about you and Mr Steinburger. Between you and me, was there an affair?

DARLENE WITHERS: Between you and me? You know there wasn't. You wouldn't have a chance of mounting those dizzy heights. Oh! You mean between Otto and myself? Dear old Bunty. Of course not. You don't want to listen to gossip Inspector... Gossip. Don't like it personally. Mind you, I often feel I have to pass it on to someone who does.

INSPECTOR: Quite.

DARLENE WITHERS: Is That it? I'll send in that awful little foreign person.

INSPECTOR: No. Not yet. I wish to continue my line of investigation with you first.

DARLENE WITHERS: Well make it snappy. I'm getting bored stiff with you.

INSPECTOR: Of course. Now, did you notice anything suspicious about tonight?

DARLENE WITHERS: Yes... I mean no...well, yes... no... yes...

INSPECTOR: Just answer the question.

DARLENE WITHERS: I thought I had. Now don't try to trick me, my good man. That is the sort of behaviour that gets the force a bad name, especially among the criminal fraternity. Ask me who killed Mr Steinburger instead, now that I've proved beyond doubt that I didn't do it.

INSPECTOR: Very well, who killed Mr Steinburger?

DARLENE WITHERS: Haven't you spotted it yet? You should be back on the beat, Sergeant.

INSPECTOR: Inspector.

DARLENE WITHERS: At present. Miss soppo bloody Adora Mann. There's your murderer. That simpering little money grabbing tart is as guilty as hell. It sticks out like whatever she keeps in that cheap dress of hers. Arrest her immediately. Where's your Sergeant fellow? (Stands up and shouts) Sergeant!

(Sergeant hurries in)

DARLENE WITHERS: Sergeant, arrest Miss Adora Mann. Take her down to the station and book her for the murder of Otto Steinburger. Motive - money and jealousy. Go.

(Sergeant turns to go)

INSPECTOR: Wait Sergeant. Mrs Withers, this is my enquiry. I suggest you pipe down.

DARLENE WITHERS: Pipe down yourself, You dreary little man. Very well. Wait and see. Apologise later.

INSPECTOR: I will. Wait and see I mean. Thank you Sergeant.

SERGEANT: Why don't they ever learn?

INSPECTOR: Thank you Sergeant. (Sergeant exits) So you think Miss Mann was jealous?

DARLENE WITHERS: (patting her hair) She was jealous of me. It stands to reason. A good looking vivacious girl at a dinner party.

INSPECTOR: I thought you didn't like her.

DARLENE WITHERS: I meant me. That's what I'm saying. She meets me at a dinner party, and all her petty jealousies float to the surface. A woman of the world with a decent education and some manners, face to face with a sort of female Major Pongo Brown. Jealousy breeds quickly Inspector. Grows to such an extent that it's worth killing for. Mark my words.

INSPECTOR: But she seems so sweet and innocent.

DARLENE WITHERS: Huh.

INSPECTOR: Besides, If all you say is true - why didn't she kill you instead?

DARLENE WITHERS: You don't wilfully damage works of art Inspector.

INSPECTOR: You may go - for now.

DARLENE WITHERS: Aren't you going to thank me?

INSPECTOR: What for?

DARLENE WITHERS: For solving your crime of course. Or are you going to pretend you worked it out for yourself? Men! I'll send in Wolf whatever his name is...

DARLENE WITHERS: But I want to see...

(Darlene Withers exits. The door is shut, and opens again. Wolf Rechtschreibung enters)

INSPECTOR: Ah! The special effects man! So you haven't made yourself disappear!

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Please?

INSPECTOR: Never mind. I'll come right to the point. Why are you in this at all?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: This what?

INSPECTOR: This house. Why are you in this house? This enquiry? (Fist on hand) this whole damn business?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: I am special effecting the film that Otto Steinburger is making.

INSPECTOR: Was making.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Er... quite. I am a film man Inspector. My world is film. I run through the gate and project myself on the wall Inspector.

INSPECTOR: Strange behaviour.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: I am at one with celluloid.

INSPECTOR: Is that right? So you worked a lot with Mr Steinburger? Did you like him?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: No.

INSPECTOR: (silence) Is That it?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: What?

INSPECTOR: Was he good at his craft? Was he impressive on location? I've always thought I'd be rather good at all that. I see myself in a heroic role. What do you think Mr Recht... bung... schre... bung?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: I have no idea. I wouldn't have thought so.

INSPECTOR: Thank you. What sort of camera did he use?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Bolex.

INSPECTOR: All right. I only asked.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: But enough about you and your hopeless ambitions. To more important tidings Inspector - I received a black letter.

INSPECTOR: Aha!

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Yes. A black letter aha.

INSPECTOR: A black letter. Curious. Could portend bad tidings.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Please?

INSPECTOR: Could be bad news. A death perhaps. Perhaps a death! Aha!

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: It was a letter from Steinburger. (Produces letter) I start.

INSPECTOR: Start.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: I start. I translate. Steinburger's German very mouldy indeed old chappie. I start. "I warmly extend my big one to you of friendship. When we meet we shall shake each other's..." I think I get that right. Der. Der. Der. He invites me for the staying of. Der. Der. He breaks news of wifey's death. Der. Der. Complains of the wind... (turns page over) ... of war in Europe. Bla. Bla. Says he will meet me at Hampstead Station. I wait and wait... and wait...

INSPECTOR: Let me see that.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: There. I thank you for coming in Hampstead Station.

INSPECTOR: I thank you for coming in anticipation.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: That's what I said. So I arrive with finalness. Where's Steinburger?

INSPECTOR: He's been murdered.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Quite. Otto and I were colleagues. Film makers, Inspectorate. Locked together by the silvery screen eh wot?

INSPECTOR: So that explains everything does it Recht... shebung... Rebunk... burg... er... Wolfy? Film makers? I think not sir. That explains nothing at all. Absolutely not.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: I agree in entiretyness. But it does explain why I'm here. I was invited. Sort of. With regard to the second part of your question...

INSPECTOR: Question?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Why am I in this enquiry? I am in it...

INSPECTOR: You certainly are.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: I am in it because I was here when whatever happened... er... happened. Film makers old crappy person, film makers...

INSPECTOR: Quite.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Working to bring brightness into the dull dreary lives of the populate. Cheer for mankind. Laughingness and tears...

INSPECTOR: Quite.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Securing bonds between Bigger Hampton Manor and old Vienna...

INSPECTOR: Quite.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Portraying the game of life over a steaming plateful of schnitzel.

INSPECTOR: Quite.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Doing the what comes naturally...

INSPECTOR: Oh shutup. Get to the point.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: All I say is that the art of the moving picture can be applied to many things. The automobile. The old banger, out for merry spinnings on Sunday old boy. Medicine. Open wide...

INSPECTOR: Murder?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Certainly. There have been many movies devoted to this very subject. Otto Steinburger himself has pulled a big one or two out of the bag. But not in this case. No Inspector. Look elsewhere for your murderer (mysteriously) Or is it suicide?

INSPECTOR: Of course not.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Look elsewhere Inspector. Do I make myself queer?

INSPECTOR: No stone will be left unturned.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Ah! Fine British joke Inspector! Ready? Many many seagulls at a drugs party. No tern was left unstoned! Unstoned! Get it Inspector chappie? He he?

INSPECTOR: Some other time Mr Recht... bung... schrungbung... Er.. Wolf. Let's talk about something else. Imagine for a moment that you have invented a perfect special effect. A special effect that would have people saying 'how did they do that?' But you're no orator. No salesman. You are just a genius inventor. For the sake of the silver screen, and all it promises, would it not be better to give the credit to another, more articulate, film maker? To spread the word, milk it a bit, even if you yourself didn't benefit from it in financial or egotistical ways?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: No.

INSPECTOR: Surely you mean 'Yes' Wolfy?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Do I? I'm sorry. I wasn't listening.

INSPECTOR: Let's put it another way. Do you have access to Mr Steinburger's files?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Yes and no.

INSPECTOR: I see. Now stand by sir, I'm going to ask you something very suddenly.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: I'm ready.

INSPECTOR: (suddenly) Who killed Steinburger?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: (pulls back in shock) I... I... I... don't know.

INSPECTOR: I think you do Mr Recht... bung... er, sir. Why did you have a dagger hidden in your papers this evening?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: May I answer the one about who killed Steinburger instead?

INSPECTOR: Very well.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Before I went Londoning today...

INSPECTOR: Yes?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: I was in my room working on a secret project. I open my door and I hear voices - angry voices. They stop when they see me on the stairs.

INSPECTOR: Who did?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Steinburger and Mrs Travesty.

INSPECTOR: Well - can you remember anything they said? Anything at all?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: So indistinct. I can't really.

INSPECTOR: You must remember something. Please think sir. It's most important.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: (thinks) No. Nothing.

INSPECTOR: Just one little thing. No matter how seemingly pointless.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Ah!

INSPECTOR: Yes?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: (thinks hard) No.

INSPECTOR: Please, please think Mr Wolf.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: There was one thing. Now what was it? Let me see.

INSPECTOR: Yes? Yes?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Mrs Travesty shouted 'I'm going to kill you tonight Mr Steinburger'.

INSPECTOR: Did she? Are you sure?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Not really. Please I go now - ja?

INSPECTOR: Ja... er yes. If you think of anything else useful, let me know.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Of course. (He wanders around vaguely, and finally finds the door. Exits)

INSPECTOR: I wish I had something to go on.

(Crosses to the door and summons Mrs Travesty. She enters)

INSPECTOR: Sit down Mrs Travesty. Over here please. Let me get straight to the point. Did you like Mr Steinburger?

MRS TRAVESTY: Oh, I couldn't answer that Inspector. It wouldn't be right to speak ill of the dead. Not like me at all.

INSPECTOR: So you know he's dead?

MRS TRAVESTY: You told us.

INSPECTOR: Oh Yes, of course. You have been with the Steinburgers a long time I believe. You knew the late Mrs Steinburger? Nursed her during her bedridden years?

MRS TRAVESTY: Poor woman. A crippling illness. An ill-tempered lothario of a husband... and me. What a pointless life. Not that I had anything to do with the Ovaltine.

INSPECTOR: Ovaltine?

MRS TRAVESTY: I only took it up to her.

INSPECTOR: What?

MRS TRAVESTY: Placed it nice and neat on her little table...

INSPECTOR: So what?

MRS TRAVESTY: Brushed her lovely hair...

INSPECTOR: Mrs Travesty.

MRS TRAVESTY: Til it shined I did.

INSPECTOR: Quite.

MRS TRAVESTY: Frothy it was. All bubbly on the head, and thick and sticky at the bottom.

INSPECTOR: Her hair?

MRS TRAVESTY: No, the Ovaltine. Not that it had anything to do with her death, so you can put that right out of your mind.

INSPECTOR: Enough of this. We need to know about the death of Steinburger. Not his stupid wife.

MRS TRAVESTY: Ooh I say.

INSPECTOR: So you have worked here a long time?

MRS TRAVESTY: Many many years with Lord Boxbury-Soames. Boxy we used to call him...

INSPECTOR: Ah, So you shortened his name?

MRS TRAVESTY: No, it was his shape. Sort of... (indicates box shape with her hands)

INSPECTOR: Enough of this Mrs Travesty. Get on with the plot. So after Lord Boxbury-Soames died, the Steinburgers took over Bigger Hampton Manor?

MRS TRAVESTY: You should know. You only live down the road. Anyway, I watched Mr Steinburger turn into a brooding man, Inspector, a brooding man. Lord knows, I tried to help, but he has turned against me and the home life - preferring the haunts of London.

INSPECTOR: Haunts?

MRS TRAVESTY: It's all haunts up there - apart from Scotland Yard of course. Haunts. And that's where Mr Steinburger went. Without so much as a small gratuity. After I cared for them, took them to my ample bosom. Took them in.

INSPECTOR: Surely they took you in?

MRS TRAVESTY: Sort of. Well we took each other in. 'Travers', That's What his dear departed dead wife used to call me - this is before she died of course - she used to say 'Travers, ill see you all right'. She didn't of course. The will was never found and it all went to Mr Steinburger as next of kin. And he was handing out no favours.

INSPECTOR: But surely some sort of pension?

MRS TRAVESTY: Nothing. He dismissed me the day after his wife died, and a couple of days later he sent me a message saying he wanted to see me. I thought it was something to do with the will.

INSPECTOR: And was it?

MRS TRAVESTY: No, it was to tell me that I could work here odd days when he was at home, for a very small wage. That's no good to me Inspector. I splash out a bit.

INSPECTOR: Have you seen a doctor About this?

MRS TRAVESTY: Eh?

INSPECTOR: It doesn't matter. So where do you live now?

MRS TRAVESTY: I have lodgings over the butcher with Tiddles...

INSPECTOR: Tiddles? A cat?

MRS TRAVESTY: No, the butcher's boy. Honest Inspector, I don't know how to make ends meet. I've always been in service, known my place, been 'downstairs'. The lower echelon as my old Dad used to say. I've always been poor, but kindly. I used to have a jolly red face until life drained it away. Mrs Steinburger always used to say 'Travers' that's what she called me...

INSPECTOR: I know.

MRS TRAVESTY: 'Travers' she said as I brushed her long black hair, 'Travers, I'll see you all right...'

INSPECTOR: So you said.

MRS TRAVESTY: And then she was gone. And me? I hear you ask. I faded away. Crept below stairs. Vanished. I know my place.

INSPECTOR: This is a murder inquiry Mrs Travesty. And you'll need a few good alibis - or your life won't be worth living.

MRS TRAVESTY: (tears) It's not.

INSPECTOR: Do you know anything about black envelopes?

MRS TRAVESTY: I've never understood what envelopes are for.

INSPECTOR: Forget it. Why Do you have an evil dagger in your drawers? Tell me. Why? And where were you before the murder? Tell me...

MRS TRAVESTY: I was in the kitchen Inspector. I know my place. I was clearing up and making some irritating mince pies that I was going to embarrass Mr Steinburger's friends with. They're a bit thick and crusty.

INSPECTOR: Well, Major Pongo Brown is, But as for...

MRS TRAVESTY: No, the mince pies. And the answer to the third part of your question is ...No.

INSPECTOR: Third part?

MRS TRAVESTY: I wouldn't think of accepting a loan.

INSPECTOR: I wasn't...

MRS TRAVESTY: And as for the murderer, it was Reverend Acorn.

INSPECTOR: The good Reverend? I find that most unlikely.

MRS TRAVESTY: It's obvious, and him a man of the cloth. Whatever next? I don't know.

INSPECTOR: Are you suggesting the Reverend is a plausible rogue?

MRS TRAVESTY: I know my place.

INSPECTOR: And That place will not be in Heaven if you carry on like this. Reverend Acorn indeed. Where did you get this idea from?

MRS TRAVESTY: Well, he is the greediest man I've ever seen. He would stop at nothing to eat everything - and how can you do that when you've only got a small stipend? I'll tell you, you steal... and you murder.

INSPECTOR: How Do you know he's only got a small stipend?

MRS TRAVESTY: Talk in the village. They do say that the verger once saw him get it out in the post office.

INSPECTOR: Really?

MRS TRAVESTY: Yes - and then he went and blew it in Mrs Bannister's grocery store. The next day he did the same thing again.

INSPECTOR: Good Heavens!

MRS TRAVESTY: So what I'm saying is, he seems to have a lot more money than he should have.

INSPECTOR: Eh? Oh I see! Very well Mrs Travesty, Thank you for the information.

MRS TRAVESTY: (crossing herself) I hope I don't have to answer for this on Judgement Day.

INSPECTOR: Don't worry. Just mention my name. You may go. (Mrs Travesty crosses to door) Ask Major Brown to join me would you?

MRS TRAVESTY: (bows out backwards) Certainly Sir. Thank you Sir. I will leave you Sir. (Yells) Major, you're wanted.

(Enter Major Pongo Brown)

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Righto Travers. Left wheel.

(Mrs Travesty exits. There is the sound of falling downstairs, cups and plates breaking. A distant scream. Major Pongo Brown closes door and crosses to drinks)

INSPECTOR: Make yourself at home Major.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Always do. (pours a drink) Drink Inspector? Oh ! Not while you're on duty. Isn't that what you chaps say? Or some rubbish like that. Never mind, I'll have one since we're in the mess.

INSPECTOR: We certainly are. Major, did you kill Otto Steinburger?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: What? Stab a chap in the back? Kick him when he's down? Strictly reserved for the hun, old boy. Can't behave like that in a civilised society. This is Britain Inspector, Britain.

INSPECTOR: So the answer's no. Are you sure?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Course I'm sure. But I know damn well who did. Darlene Withers. Darling Darlene. Stands to reason.

INSPECTOR: Then why were you here tonight? It seems very strange. No connection with Steinburger, apart from the fact that he found you a bore.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Rubbish. Thought I was a pukka chappie. Everyone does. No, look to Mrs Withers for your killer Inspector. Dagger to trim up some damn silly plant. Rubbish. Doesn't sound very plausible does it?

Woman's mental anyway. Everyone in the village says so. Never even comes into the pub for a game of darts. Still waters Inspector. Still waters...

INSPECTOR: Do you know if she had an association with Otto Steinburger?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: What? Well... yes... I mean... that is... no... well, not strictly... yes... I mean no.

INSPECTOR: Are you hiding something Major?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: (composing himself) Good heavens no! Don't know much about Darlene Withers at all. Seems a nice enough cove to me.

INSPECTOR: But you've just accused her of murder.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Did I? Don't take any notice Inspector. Have one for the road.

INSPECTOR: I'm not leaving Major, and neither are you. Do you know anything about black envelopes?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Got one in the army once, from an old girlfriend.

INSPECTOR: Black?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: No, she came from Lowestoft I think. Wet sticky job.

INSPECTOR: The girl?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: No, the envelope - when I got it in the trenches. This runner was approaching, dodging the gunfire, running from tree to tree. Finally arrived. As he breathed his last he said 'mail for you.'

INSPECTOR: And it was a black letter?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Yes.

INSPECTOR: (Roars with laughter) He should have said blackmail then! Eh?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: What are you suggesting?

INSPECTOR: Blackmail! See?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: What Do you know about blackmail?

INSPECTOR: I was only... saying... um... well that is...

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Well show some respect. Fella died.

INSPECTOR: Steinburger, Yes.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: No, I meant the messenger boy. Not Steinburger. Couldn't give a damn about him. And you're sure you know nothing about blackmail?

INSPECTOR: Er... no.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Good. And don't mention it again.

INSPECTOR: No... er... you may...

(Major Pongo Brown exits rapidly)

INSPECTOR: Go... er (shouts) Sergeant!

(Sergeant enters)

SERGEANT: Sir?

INSPECTOR: Come in Sergeant, and shut the door. In all my years in the force I have never come across such a series of conflicting statements.

SERGEANT: Sorry to hear that Sir.

INSPECTOR: They all admit hating the deceased, and all had access to a murder weapon. And every one of them accuses someone else of the crime. One of them already knows, and they're not saying.

SERGEANT: Which one is that sir?

INSPECTOR: The murderer of course, you fool. Sorry Sergeant, it's no use, I must confess...

SERGEANT: You Sir? I can hardly believe it...

INSPECTOR: What? No, not me. I must confess that I'm baffled. Up against a brick wall. Somehow we've got to trick the murderer into a confession. But how? I wonder... no. Too much of a long shot.

SERGEANT: What is?

INSPECTOR: Mind you, it has a one in six chance of success.

SERGEANT: What has?

INSPECTOR: Bring 'em all in Sergeant.

SERGEANT: Very Good Sir. (Opens door and signals as if directing traffic) This way please you lot. The Inspector wants to see you.

(Six suspects enter, muttering)

INSPECTOR: Kindly take a seat. Sergeant, will you join me outside for a moment? Do excuse us. Make yourselves comfortable.

(Inspector and Sergeant exit)

ADORA MANN: What can it be?

DARLENE WITHERS: Oh, be quiet. Give sensible people some time to think.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: In old Vienna we say trial and tribulation is a sad and mouldy schnitzel indeed.

DARLENE WITHERS: Didn't you hear what I said? Be quiet.

REVEREND ACORN: Why do you always try to take charge? You're the same at jumble sales and coffee mornings. Bossy.

DARLENE WITHERS: Natural leadership. If you don't like it find another parish.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Steady on old girl. He won't need another parish if they find him guilty of murder.

ADORA MANN: Murder?

DARLENE WITHERS: Yes, murder. And what's all this about black envelopes?

MRS TRAVESTY: The Inspector asked me about them. I said I didn't know - but I told him Reverend Acorn did the murder.

REVEREND ACORN: Mrs Travesty - I shall condemn you from the pulpit. You will never ring my bell again.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Acorn didn't do it. It was you, Mrs Darlene Withers.

DARLENE WITHERS: Wasn't.

ADORA MANN: Was.

DARLENE WITHERS: Silence. We all know it was you, with your pathetic film career - the best horizontal dancer in the business. It was you.

ADORA MANN: Oh no it wasn't.

EVERYONE: (and possibly the audience) Oh Yes it was.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: What are they doing out there? What do they know? I hope they don't think I did it - because we all know it was old Mrs Travesty, because Steinburger very angry with 'old Travers' killing wife with an oval tin.

MRS TRAVESTY: Ovaltine. It was nothing to do with me. I just gave her the Ovaltine. She never told me what finally killed her.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Maybe it was severe flatulence after your cooking.

ADORA MANN: (sidles over to Major Pongo Brown, tickling him under the chin) You know something, you naughty little Major?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: I say. I mean... gad... steady on.

ADORA MANN: You must tell the nice policeman something.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Anything. Want to slip away, eh? Make some excuse?

ADORA MANN: Not exactly.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: What then?

ADORA MANN: You must tell him why you killed Otto Steinburger.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: But... but this is preposterous. It wasn't me. War hero and all that. It was Withers.

DARLENE WITHERS: Where will you be when I hold my next garden party Major? Persona non grata. That will be you - and please don't apologise later, when Miss vile Adora Mann has been beheaded or whatever they do.

REVEREND ACORN: Peace. All will be harmony again, in our green and happy hamlet. The bell will toll again and all this will be lost in the shrouds of time, when our dear brother, from a foreign land, has been taken from us.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Please?

REVEREND ACORN: (violently) When you have been given the decapitating axe for your vile deeds in this house tonight. When your reign of terror is over, you foul special effects type. (Calms down) The bell, Recht...bung whatever your name is, will toll for thee.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Please? You mean murder? Mrs Travesty did murder. She nasty mean old killer lady.

MRS TRAVESTY: It was Reverend Acorn.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: No, simpleton. Withers did it.

DARLENE WITHERS: I will not say it again. It was the Adora Mann thing.

ADORA MANN: It wasn't me, silly. It was Major Pongo.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: It was Rechtswein-thing all right. Ghastly dagger to kill a few rats. Huh.

REVEREND ACORN: Mrs Travesty.

MRS TRAVESTY: Reverend - and you a vicar and all.

ADORA MANN: But it...

DARLENE WITHERS: Silence. They're coming back.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Murderer.

(Inspector and Sergeant enter)

DARLENE WITHERS: No. Ah, Inspector! Sergeant! Welcome back! How's the old plot going?

INSPECTOR: Thank you Sergeant. (Sergeant exits) Now, despite determined efforts to pull the wool over my eyes, I have managed to glean several important clues from my enquiries. That probably surprises you doesn't it?

DARLENE WITHERS: It astounds me. I should think we are about to hear some blundering guesswork from an inept half-bake. I have told you who is responsible for this murder of yours, and the fact that you haven't made an arrest yet is nothing short of criminal.

INSPECTOR: You clearly do not understand the workings of the legal mind Madam.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: And you don't seem to understand the workings of the criminal mind, Inspector. Couldn't give a damn what Withers said...

DARLENE WITHERS: Major...

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: I gave you the answer, all shipshape.

ADORA MANN: So have I, and he won't listen.

MRS TRAVESTY: No one ever listens to me. Not since poor Mrs Steinburger passed on. I remember...

EVERYONE: Oh shut up.

INSPECTOR: Um - quite so Mrs Travesty.

REVEREND ACORN: Much as it pains me to deliver another of God's children to the gallows, and to the lurid horrors that follow, I too have explained the crime.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: As a deeply clever and arty old boy I would like to...

INSPECTOR: Silence! Will you listen to what I have to say? I am the one who is solving the murder.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Well, solve it then for Heaven's sake. I want to go to bed.

DARLENE WITHERS: Rude.

INSPECTOR: Will you be quiet Mr Rechtsschreibung? (Grins at audience, having got it right) Hey!

MRS TRAVESTY: And I've got the washing up to do. Dirty dishes don't clean themselves Inspector.

INSPECTOR: I didn't know that.

MRS TRAVESTY: I thought you policemen were supposed to be clever. So tell us.

INSPECTOR: Well, let me take you back to earlier this evening, when Mr Otto Steinburger was...

(The dining room door opens. Sergeant enters, carrying a silver salver on which are six black envelopes)

SERGEANT: Beg Pardon, Inspector. But I found these six envelopes.

INSPECTOR: Six envelopes? Good Heavens. Let me see. Where did you find them?

SERGEANT: They were on the sideboard.

INSPECTOR: Really? (Mocks surprise. The Sergeant winks, crosses to the door and exits)

DARLENE WITHERS: Who are the envelopes addressed to?

INSPECTOR: No one. They're all blank.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Envelopes?

DARLENE WITHERS: (other pronunciation) no. Envelopes.

ADORA MANN: Envelopes?

DARLENE WITHERS: No. env... Oh forget it.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Since there are six of them, and there are six of us, it stands to reason that we are intended to have one each.

INSPECTOR: Not necessarily. I shall keep these as evidence.

DARLENE WITHERS: Of What? (Crosses to Inspector) The Major's right. They are meant for us. (Darlene Withers takes them from the Inspector's hand)

INSPECTOR: Here, just a minute...

DARLENE WITHERS: I shall have this one. Major? Rech..thing? All in time you old tart. Mrs Travesty? Reverend?

MRS TRAVESTY: I want that one.

REVEREND ACORN: I want it.

INSPECTOR: Give them back at once. I order you.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: That's mine.

ADORA MANN: Get off.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: That one's for me.

(They snatch from each other and finally drop the envelopes, muddling them totally)

INSPECTOR: Don't open them. They may be incriminating. (As he talks the six suspects open the envelopes) Don't open them. Pass them over. Please... stop reading them...

(The suspects have now opened all the envelopes. They read the contents and put them away quickly in pockets and handbags)

INSPECTOR: Those envelopes were meant for me. Am I right in assuming that they contain clues to the murder of Otto Steinburger? (No answers) Well?

(The next person to speak reveals to the Inspector who has the 'guilty' envelope)

GUILTY ENVELOPE HOLDER: The contents of the envelopes are personal Inspector, and have no connection to the crime.

(The Inspector now knows who is guilty. He then commences one of the six variable sections)

INSPECTOR: Really? Later, in the course of my investigation, I shall no doubt wish to return to the envelopes. Failure to reveal their contents will result in immediate arrest. Anyway, time is short. Shall we continue?

REVEREND ACORN: To the bitter conclusion.

INSPECTOR: Quite. Now listen carefully...

.....VARIABLE SECTIONS.....

MAJOR PONGO BROWN GUILTY:

INSPECTOR: On our arrival at the scene of the crime, the Sergeant and I made a modest search of the house, and I am proud and happy to announce that we have established the location of the murder, How Otto Steinburger was murdered, and by who.

DARLENE WITHERS: Whom.

INSPECTOR: (ignores correction) I'll tell you that later.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Bravo Inspector.

INSPECTOR: Thank you. Mrs Travesty - would I be right in thinking that you were in the kitchen tonight?

MRS TRAVESTY: Of course I was. Where do you think I cooked the dinner? In the bathroom?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: It tasted like...

MRS TRAVESTY: Thank you Major. Yes Inspector, I was in the kitchen all the time after dinner, making those mince pies - remember? Or trying to. But I got to thinking, and before I knew where I was I was enveloped in a cloud of gloom. I thought about time's gone by. When I was a young girl, and we'd all put on our Sunday best - always shoes on Sundays - and we walked in the park, hoping to meet young men. The sun was always shining in those days. Of course the world was younger then. You get a wise and sad old head on your shoulders when you get to my age.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Oh shut up.

INSPECTOR: Mrs Travesty, did you leave the kitchen at any time?

MRS TRAVESTY: Oh no, I was too busy thinking about...

INSPECTOR: Quite. You see, it is strange because I have established that the murder was committed in the kitchen. It was in that room that Mr Steinburger was... stabbed in the stomach.

DARLENE WITHERS: Good Heavens. How could you Mrs Travesty? After all Mr Steinburger has done for you?

MRS TRAVESTY: Eh? How could I What? I don't understand.

DARLENE WITHERS: Arrest the awful woman.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Right first time Mrs W. Inspector, I've seen this type in the army - too often for comfort. Sweet as pie one minute, killing you the next. It's happened to me many times. Chap in catering, similar to old Travers here, poisoned everyone. Left us for dead and escaped, over the fence.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: India?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: No, Aldershot. Bad business. Tell you what Inspector. Had a bad feel about her dagger story. Load of rubbish. She's your killer. You can see it in her mean little eyes.

MRS TRAVESTY: Well I never did.

DARLENE WITHERS: Aren't you being a bit hasty Major?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: So you're involved as well? Might have guessed.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Impossible.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: And you? My God, I'm surrounded by villains. Plausible rogues. Cornered, like a stuck rat.

EVERYONE: Rat? (They all look at Wolf Rechtschreibung)

INSPECTOR: Major, I think you're going a little too fast.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Old habit. But I tell you, there's been dirty work here tonight. Here, in this house.

REVEREND ACORN: Of course there has. Steinburger's been murdered.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Eh? Oh Quite. Yes indeed. That's my theory too.

INSPECTOR: Major, the victim was stabbed in the stomach with a dagger.

ADORA MANN: How dirty can you get?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Try me...

INSPECTOR: May we proceed?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Wait a minute. I've just remembered. Before the lights went out I saw the Travesty woman leave the kitchen. Headed towards the study or whatever it is. Well well! What do you say to that, Travers old thing?

MRS TRAVESTY: I'm a silly woman Inspector. A silly forgetful old woman. I was only saying to Mrs Steinburger the other day, Or was it last year?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: She's dead too.

MRS TRAVESTY: Well it couldn't have been her then. Anyway...

INSPECTOR: Did anyone else see Mrs Travesty enter the study?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Ja Inspector. I was in the study. Frau Travesty came in. She was very angry. Started talking about mincing pies or something rubbishy and British...

MRS TRAVESTY: Cars can't go without petrol.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: And Strauss never wrote a waltz on stinking mince pies.

INSPECTOR: Major, how can you be so sure Mrs Travesty left the kitchen?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Don't be so damn silly, man. Just told you. I saw her. I was just coming in from the terrace.

INSPECTOR: So you saw him entering the kitchen?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: No, leaving it. I just said that.

INSPECTOR: Mr Steinburger left the kitchen?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: I saw it.

INSPECTOR: Mr Steinburger?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Yes. I mean no. It was Mrs Travesty I saw.

INSPECTOR: Entering?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Leaving.

INSPECTOR: Mrs Travesty?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: No. Steinburger. I mean...

DARLENE WITHERS: Arrest him Inspector.

INSPECTOR: All in good time. So Major, you saw Mr Steinburger enter the kitchen?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: I think so. I can't remember. He went round all the rooms as far as I know. Seemed concerned.

MRS TRAVESTY: I don't remember seeing him in the kitchen, and I was there all evening.

INSPECTOR: But we have just established that you left the room briefly, to see Mr Rechtschrei...bong...bung.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: If you want to get away with this you've got to concentrate.

MRS TRAVESTY: I know that.

ADORA MANN: So why did you say you were there all evening?

DARLENE WITHERS: Arrest her Inspector.

ADORA MANN: Who, me?

DARLENE WITHERS: If you like. Let's get on.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Wait! I remember now!

INSPECTOR: What?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: What?

REVEREND ACORN: You said you remembered something.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Me? Oh yes! Just before the lights go out due to the electricity failings, I hear Steinburger on the telephone. He was talking to some idiot person, a crackpot person indeed.

INSPECTOR: That was me.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: So I was right. And then there was much noise... and then... many voices... a sound of scraping... and...

INSPECTOR: Yes?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Silence.

(Pause)

INSPECTOR: So Otto Steinburger wasn't in the kitchen, Major.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Haven't the faintest idea. I was on the terrace reading the Sporting Life.

INSPECTOR: In the dark?

(Worried pause)

MRS TRAVESTY: Bloody man.

INSPECTOR: Pardon?

MRS TRAVESTY: Useless sod. I hated him. Hated him for his selfishness. I'll tell you... my family were poor, pathetically poor, but at least we was honest. Disgustingly honest. My old father used to say to me 'Travers' he'd say, because that's what he called me. 'Travers' he'd say, 'you may be ignorant, but you're honest. Stupidly honest.' I've always remembered that. But Mr Steinburger. A mean selfish overbearing useless excuse for a man.

INSPECTOR: So you didn't like him?

MRS TRAVESTY: I hated him. The way he treated me. The way he treated his poor wife. She used to call me Travers too. Did I mention that?

EVERYONE: Yes.

MRS TRAVESTY: Oh did I? Anyway, I hated him. Hated. Hate hate hate. He had to be taught a lesson. Someone had to do it Inspector.

INSPECTOR: (slowly) So you admit you killed him?

MRS TRAVESTY: Eh? Good Lord no. Couldn't do a thing like that. My old father always used to say...

INSPECTOR: Quite. But how do you explain that Mr Steinburger was stabbed in the stomach ? In your kitchen?

MRS TRAVESTY: I don't know. Take the bloody dagger to one of your psychological lavatories. Have it examined. You'll be disappointed.

INSPECTOR: But you mentioned revenge.

MRS TRAVESTY: Oh That! I was going to spill his Ovaltine all over him after the guests had gone. That would have shown him! Revenge would have been sweet! Ha ha! Can't do the dirty on old Travers.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Who'd want to?

DARLENE WITHERS: She's your murderer Inspector.

MRS TRAVESTY: Well I Never.

REVEREND ACORN: Dearly beloved, we have heard some harsh words tonight. This woman is guilty of the crime Inspector, and must be apprehended. I am disappointed in you Mrs Travesty. One of my parishioners. A sheep, straying from my flock.

MRS TRAVESTY: Mind your own bloody business. Inspector, I ain't done nothing wrong. I've lead a clean life. A poor life... but an honest one.

INSPECTOR: I know. (He looks round) Rechtschr... you... would you agree that the passion aroused when you're on the verge of, say, solving a tricky special effects problem, is akin and as powerful as

the passion aroused by young lovers, who have eyes for no other apart from themselves, blinkered from the world outside?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Please?

INSPECTOR: In short, would I be correct in thinking that the one thing that stood between yourself and your great love, fame in the special effects world, was Otto Steinburger?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Eh?

INSPECTOR: In short, was it a difficult task to stab Mr Steinburger in the stomach?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: But he wasn't...

INSPECTOR: Yes, Major?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Nothing.

INSPECTOR: Let me finish your sentence, Major Pongo Brown. He wasn't stabbed in the stomach. Is that what you were going to say?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Don't talk rubbish. I...

INSPECTOR: You are right, Major. In one. Otto Steinburger wasn't stabbed in the stomach... he was stabbed in the head!

REVEREND ACORN: My God.

(Silence)

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Utter rubbish. What are you playing at Inspector?

INSPECTOR: It is not rubbish. This was the murder weapon (picking up the Major's dagger) It was you, Major Pongo Brown. Own up. Be a man.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: What? Right. Got to use your senses in the army. Eyes. Ears. All the rest of it. Old habits die hard Inspector. Like the Hun - they die hard. The moment I entered this room tonight, felt something wasn't quite right. It was the way Steinburger started blackmailing me. Didn't feel right at all. Got a bit of a nose for these things. Couple that with the fact that he virtually confessed to murdering my brother, and you have a potentially fiery situation on your hands. Never heard the like. Helped the brother slip away to the other side. To his death I mean - not to the Hun. Damned irresponsible. Don't like chaps like that, so I got him, fair and square. I thought, what's the difference? Spent my life wiping out people, along with all the other great fighting leaders of history. Only difference is - no uniform. Never mind. Still means one less person on the planet. Ho hum. (He grabs the gun from the drawer, and then Adora Mann) I'm off. I'll cross over the channel under cover of night. Probably be taken in by a French farmer and allowed to sleep in his barn. His daughter will bring me fresh bread and news from the front - and probably fall in love with me. It's all starting again! Back to action! Pongo on the move! And don't you struggle my dear or I'll be forced to shoot you. What's another life to a man of battle like me?

ADORA MANN: Ooh, let him go Inspector. I'm too young and pretty to end up as another military casualty. Let him go and I'll show you my photographs.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Silence. I will leave now, stealthily. I'll run from tree to tree, avoiding the moonlight. I wonder if I can still run? Anyone know the right direction for Calais? Don't try and stop me, stand back.

(Sergeant enters. There is a struggle and finally Major Pongo Brown is overpowered)

MRS TRAVESTY GUILTY:

INSPECTOR: On our arrival at the scene of the crime, the Sergeant and I made a modest search of the house, and I am proud and happy to announce that we have established the location of the murder, How Otto Steinburger was murdered, and by who.

DARLENE WITHERS: Whom.

INSPECTOR: (ignores correction) I'll tell you that later.

DARLENE WITHERS: Super. Does that mean we can all go home?

INSPECTOR: No. Hungry tonight, were we Reverend?

REVEREND ACORN: Peckish, yes.

INSPECTOR: So it seems. I believe you were in the dining room for a very long time after dinner?

REVEREND ACORN: Of course. A man must eat. The fat of the land and all that. Very nice too, apart from the sprouts. Humble fruits of the soil indeed...

MRS TRAVESTY: Well, There is a green hill far away - why don't you go and pick your own bloody sprouts. What a cheek.

REVEREND ACORN: Peace my good woman.

MRS TRAVESTY: Don't peace me off. 'Umble fruits indeed.

REVEREND ACORN: Quiet wench. Stand in the Inspector's way and you risk eternal damnation.

MRS TRAVESTY: The sprouts weren't that bad.

REVEREND ACORN: I'm talking of Mr Steinburger's death. Continue Inspector, to the bitter conclusion.

INSPECTOR: Thank you Reverend. Tell me Sir, did you leave the dining room at any time?

REVEREND ACORN: Leave the brimming bowl? The welcoming dish? Never.

INSPECTOR: That's strange - because the murder was committed in the dining room, and Otto Steinburger was stabbed there... forty one times!

(Gasp from everyone)

DARLENE WITHERS: Mr Acorn, how could you? A man of the church. Well well. Now I've seen everything. Arrest the awful man Inspector.

REVEREND ACORN: But I didn't...

DARLENE WITHERS: Absurd. Why try and deny it? Afraid of being caught? Liar as well as murderer, eh?

MRS TRAVESTY: I suspected him all along. What did I tell you Inspector? Holier than thou and all that. I knew it. I might be ignorant, but I'm not stupid. Greed - the seventh deadly wonder of the world.

REVEREND ACORN: Eh?

MRS TRAVESTY: And to think I was going to bake a nice cake for your rotten fete. You know the one - when you arrive in your straw hat, riding your bicycle and waving at everyone, like the King of

England. Not that the King arrives riding a bicycle, begging your pardon Inspector, but you know what I mean. Under the white collar and beaming smile lurks a murderous villain. A deceitful...

INSPECTOR: Mrs Travesty - I think perhaps you are letting your imagination run away with you.

MRS TRAVESTY: Am I? Wait and see.

ADORA MANN: I agree with the Inspector. Reverend Acorn seems very sweet to me. Sweet as pie...

DARLENE WITHERS: One of the sweetest murderers you've ever clapped eyes on in fact. Please don't interrupt when there's a sensible conversation going on, and no one's talking about your stupid rude film, sports cars, travelling rugs, scout masters or blasted bust measurements. Be quiet and save it for your half baked friends.

ADORA MANN: Very well. We'll talk about that later. Just girls together.

DARLENE WITHERS: Silence.

INSPECTOR: Quite. Let's continue.

MRS TRAVESTY: Goodness me, aren't I a silly old woman!

EVERYONE: Yes.

MRS TRAVESTY: Ah, But I have a fact that will put the vicar behind bars until that grey misty morning...

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: When the hollow footsteps approach the cell...

DARLENE WITHERS: And a member of his own profession reads a few last words, and...

ADORA MANN: Then he has the full English, unless he's decided to go on a diet by then, and he's dragged screaming to the gallows...

EVERYONE: Ugh.

INSPECTOR: Mrs Travesty. You have a fact for us?

MRS TRAVESTY: Oh Yes. I just remembered. I saw the vicar leave the dining room - and head for the garden.

ADORA MANN: Strange.

INSPECTOR: Well, Reverend. We seem to have a difference of opinion. So you did leave the dining room?

DARLENE WITHERS: He most certainly did. How could I forget? Strolled into the garden, probably looking for some edible plants or something.

INSPECTOR: Mrs Travesty. How do you know the Reverend Acorn left the dining room?

MRS TRAVESTY: Are you the sort of man that doesn't listen to women Inspector? I just said I saw him.

INSPECTOR: So you saw him enter the dining room?

MRS TRAVESTY: No. leave it. I just said that.

INSPECTOR: Mr Steinburger left the dining room?

MRS TRAVESTY: Yes. Er...

INSPECTOR: Steinburger?

MRS TRAVESTY: Yes. I mean no. It was the vicar I saw.

INSPECTOR: Entering?

MRS TRAVESTY: Leaving.

INSPECTOR: Reverend Acorn?

MRS TRAVESTY: No, Mr Steinburger. I mean...

DARLENE WITHERS: Arrest her Inspector.

MRS TRAVESTY: Me?

DARLENE WITHERS: She's lying. Arrest her.

MRS TRAVESTY: I was confused. Everyone was going in and out of rooms. In and out.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Like a French fart.

INSPECTOR: Farce.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Thank you.

REVEREND ACORN: That's strange. I don't remember seeing Steinburger, and I was alone in the dining room all evening.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Ridiculous. We have just established that you left the room. If you want to get away with this, you've got to concentrate.

DARLENE WITHERS: I knew it! I knew it all along! I've just remembered something of vital importance. Get ready to replace the old dog collar with a noose, Reverend.

INSPECTOR: Well, Mrs Withers?

DARLENE WITHERS: Just before all that racket, banging etc - I heard Bunty, er, Mr Steinburger talking to some complete idiot on the telephone.

INSPECTOR: That was me.

DARLENE WITHERS: Quiet. And then the lights fused and there was a lot of shouting. And then there was a scratching noise... dragging...and... silence.

(Pause)

INSPECTOR: So Mr Steinburger wasn't in the dining room, Mrs Travesty?

MRS TRAVESTY: I don't know. I was too busy washing up in the kitchen.

INSPECTOR: In the dark?

(Pause)

REVEREND ACORN: Dreadful man. Causing all this fuss - just because he's been murdered. Typical. Always had to be the centre of attention. Couldn't stand him. Always ruining the parish meetings, asking questions, making points. Can't stand that sort of person at a meeting. Horrible cruel face.

Mean little piggy eyes. Didn't know how to dress, or be a film producer for that matter. Said he was going to make a documentary that implied that overeating could lead to obesity. Damned new fangled ideas. Selfish, overbearing, snivelling excuse for a man.

INSPECTOR: So you didn't like him?

REVEREND ACORN: (composing himself) Who? Old Otto Steinburger? Fine man. One of the best. Liked his father too. Stinker Steinburger of the grand old fourteenth.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Soldier?

REVEREND ACORN: No. miner. But he played a good hand of rummy.

INSPECTOR: So you liked Steinburger?

REVEREND ACORN: Hated him. Had to be done. Had to be wiped out before he could cause any more mischief. (Mysteriously) He knew too much.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: I say. That's rather good.

REVEREND ACORN: I thought so.

INSPECTOR: Can we continue? So you killed Mr Steinburger, Reverend. Stabbed him with your freshly repaired dagger?

REVEREND ACORN: Eh? What on earth do you mean? Kill him? Don't be a silly Inspector Inspector. Be a good Inspector, and arrest the guilty party. Can I go now?

DARLENE WITHERS: Arrest him Inspector. He's your murderer.

REVEREND ACORN: How can you say that? Just because I hated Steinburger and wanted him dead? Just because he was blackmailing me? Because he spotted me for the fraud I am? I'm a desperate man Mrs Withers. I find it impossible to make ends meet. I'll show you my small stipend one day. That will prove it.

DARLENE WITHERS: Heaven forbid.

INSPECTOR: Enough. Reverend Acorn, give me one reason why I shouldn't have you locked up immediately.

REVEREND ACORN: I'll give you two. I have a christening tomorrow, and I didn't do it.

INSPECTOR: I know. (He looks round) Mrs Withers, would I be correct in saying that you are rather proud of your standing in the village? That you think of yourself as the lady of the Manor?

DARLENE WITHERS: Of course. I command gigantic respect from one and all. There is frequent talk of my style, intelligence and, I need hardly mention it, my beauty.

INSPECTOR: So some ne'er do well, some nasty piece of work, threatening to gild the lily, would prove a slight embarrassment.

DARLENE WITHERS: Indeed.

INSPECTOR: So to silence this informer, this snake in the grass who took advantage of your affections. This Bunty Steinburger... you felt it necessary to stab him forty one times.

MRS TRAVESTY: But he wasn't...

INSPECTOR: Yes?

MRS TRAVESTY: Nothing.

INSPECTOR: Let me finish your sentence Mrs Travesty. He wasn't stabbed forty one times. Is that what you were going to say?

MRS TRAVESTY: Course Not. How should I know?

INSPECTOR: You know very well, Travesty. You know that Mr Steinburger was stabbed, just once, in his stomach.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Great Scot.

(Silence)

MRS TRAVESTY: It was too good for him. Too good an end for the lousy git. Everyone in this stupid village thinks I'm some sort of underprivileged simpleton. Someone to help out with mindless chores. I'm not Inspector. I'm a cunning woman, waiting for a chance to claim what's mine. Cooking - huh! Why can't old Travers go on a cruise? Eat tea at the Ritz? What's 4/6d to a woman with an inheritance? My goodness, I bet that stupid Mrs Steinburger would have left me twice that. And they think I'm simple. Huh! Yes, I killed Mr Steinburger, because he used me as a slave. As a skivvy. Yes! It was me. Me! I crossed the class barrier to prove that all is flesh and blood, and revenge tastes just as sweet in a hovel as in a mansion. It was down the back stairs and up yours. (She grabs the gun and Wolf Rechtschreibung) I will make my escape, and lie low in the village. Like Matter Harry or whatever her name is. No one will look for me there. And if anyone tries to stop me I'll kill this stupid foreigner. Goodbye Inspector. Major. Mrs Withers. Reverend Acorn. I'm glad you enjoyed the supper. Sorry about the sprouts - and all the times I've done them, I don't know.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Please let her go Inspector. What is the use of this silly woman, compared to the life of a special effects genius like me.

MRS TRAVESTY: You ungrateful pig - after the nice supper I gave you. And there was me thinking you'd fallen for my obvious charms and we'd get married. The second murder will be easy - so I'll be on my way. I've got plans. Soon as the heat's off I'm hitting the road - in a car with a chauffeur. Just me and the butcher's boy sitting in the back. We'll cross over to Scotland! Then Australia and on to Belgium! And then we'll stop and settle as soon as the petrol runs out. What a trip it will be. I'll be happy again, just like in the old days. Goodbye. I might even go to Hollywood and marry Rudolph Valentino or one of the other black heartthrobs. Watch the gossip columns. Walk if you know what's good for you Mr Rech...scumbag... or whatever your name is.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Save me Inspector. She has a great madness.

MRS TRAVESTY: Look who's talking. There's a bus stop just down the road. Move.

(Sergeant enters. There is a struggle and finally Mrs Travesty is overpowered.)

REVEREND ACORN GUILTY:

INSPECTOR: On our arrival at the scene of the crime, the Sergeant and I made a modest search of the house, and I am proud and happy to announce that we have established the location of the murder, How Otto Steinburger was murdered, and by who.

DARLENE WITHERS: Whom.

INSPECTOR: (ignores correction) I'll tell you that later.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Tophole! Well done old chappie.

INSPECTOR: Thank you. Mrs Withers, am I right in thinking you were in the garden for a while this evening?

DARLENE WITHERS: I dallied amongst the greenery for a spell. You know that.

INSPECTOR: Very interesting. Very interesting indeed.

DARLENE WITHERS: Certainly a damn sight more interesting than the company in the rest of the house. Peasants, fools and incompetents.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Steady on old girl.

DARLENE WITHERS: Silence. Yes Inspector. I spent some time rubbing shoulders with nature in its purer form - and attempting to forget such unnatural spectacles as Major Pongo Brown and that foreign idiot.

INSPECTOR: So you admit it - you were in the garden?

DARLENE WITHERS: For God's sake I think we've established that.

INSPECTOR: Did you leave it at any time?

DARLENE WITHERS: Absolutely not. Categorically not.

REVEREND ACORN: She's your murderer Inspector.

DARLENE WITHERS: Please don't start spouting rubbish vicar. This is not one of your interminable sermons.

REVEREND ACORN: Harsh words indeed.

INSPECTOR: You see Madam, I have established that the murder was committed in the garden and...

ADORA MANN: Never!

INSPECTOR: Yes. It was in the garden that Otto Steinburger was stabbed three times.

ADORA MANN: With a sharp object?

INSPECTOR: Yes.

ADORA MANN: Such as a dagger?

REVEREND ACORN: Arrest her Inspector.

DARLENE WITHERS: I'm warning you vicar. Keep your half baked ideas to yourself.

REVEREND ACORN: Certainly not. I have always suspected you of being a hypocrite... and possibly a murderess. There's something barbaric about your outlook. You like blood sports - you run with the horse and the hound. You even wear dead foxes. There is no place for that sort of behaviour in the Kingdom of Heaven. It is hard to imagine Saint Peter opening the gates to let your lot come cantering through.

DARLENE WITHERS: He will if he knows what's good for him.

REVEREND ACORN: I must say Inspector, I found it very strange that Mrs Withers just happened to have a dagger in her handbag. A coincidence indeed. Arrest her Inspector. Justice must be done.

DARLENE WITHERS: And to think I bother to go to the church to do my beautiful and artistic floral arrangements, which always impress the proletariat, and make them jealous of my creative ability. An act of unselfishness like that should not be greeted with an accusation of murder. Do you not agree Miss Adora Mann?

ADORA MANN: It does seem rather unfair.

DARLENE WITHERS: If I want your opinion I shall ask for it. Pray continue Inspector, before the Cleric makes a complete fool of himself... again.

INSPECTOR: Very well, I...

REVEREND ACORN: My goodness me! I have just remembered something. Something that will put this ghastly woman in the dock for the murder of a fine man - well, Mr Steinburger anyway. I saw her heading towards the terrace - for the extraordinary and unlikely reason of seeing Major Pongo Brown.

INSPECTOR: Major?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: She did come to see me. Yes, I remember it as if it was yesterday.

INSPECTOR: It was today Major. But Mrs Withers, you said you didn't leave the garden.

DARLENE WITHERS: I said I didn't leave the garden apart from a short visit to the terrace. I wish you'd listen Inspector.

ADORA MANN: I didn't hear you say that.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Nor did I.

DARLENE WITHERS: Well listen more carefully in future. If, of course, you have the mental capacity.

INSPECTOR: Reverend Acorn. How did you know that Mrs Withers left the garden?

REVEREND ACORN: I saw her of course. I was just coming out of the dining room.

MRS TRAVESTY: That seems likely to me. There was a lot of coming and going.

INSPECTOR: So you saw him going to the terrace?

REVEREND ACORN: No, leaving it. I just said that.

INSPECTOR: Steinburger left the terrace?

REVEREND ACORN: I saw it.

INSPECTOR: Steinburger?

REVEREND ACORN: Yes. I mean no. It was Mrs Withers I saw.

INSPECTOR: Entering?

REVEREND ACORN: Leaving.

INSPECTOR: Mrs Withers?

REVEREND ACORN: no. Mr Steinburger. I mean...

DARLENE WITHERS: Arrest him Inspector.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: What I can't understand is, why was Steinburger walking to and from the terrace?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: He wasn't. Mrs Darlene Withers, fine lady, was coming away from the terrace...

MRS TRAVESTY: And Mr Steinburger was in the dining room...

ADORA MANN: Wasn't Reverend Acorn in the dining room?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: No, he was just coming out. If you want to get away with this you've got to concentrate.

INSPECTOR: When Mrs Withers was coming away from the terrace, and Mr Steinburger was entering... I think.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: But at the moment of which you are speaking, Steinburger was on the telephone, I heard him. Sounded like he was talking to a complete and utter jibbering idiot.

INSPECTOR: That was me.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Oh. Anyway, then the lights went out and there was a lot of shouting... scraping... a dragging noise and...

(Pause)

INSPECTOR: And what?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: ... Silence.

INSPECTOR: So the good Mr Steinburger wasn't on the terrace, Reverend?

REVEREND ACORN: I don't know. I was too busy in the dining room.

INSPECTOR: In the dark?

(Pause)

DARLENE WITHERS: I don't care a damn where bloody Otto was. The great thing is that he's not here now. Wiped out. Exterminated as Major Pongo Brown would probably say - and good riddance. My God, to think I let him play around with my emotions. He should really have been an earl or a duke or something before he was blessed with that privilege. The man was a commoner, and I still let him have his evil way with me. Can you imagine, Inspector? Of course not. Too frustrating for you. He had to die. Die I say! Die! Yes! He had to be removed before he had the chance to tinker with my libido any further. The selfish, overbearing, snivelling excuse for a man.

INSPECTOR: So you didn't like him?

DARLENE WITHERS: Well, we're all adults here. I admit it.

INSPECTOR: You Do?

DARLENE WITHERS: Of course.

INSPECTOR: Murder?

DARLENE WITHERS: Murder? What do you mean, murder? I was admitting to the tinkering with my libido. Murder? Don't be so absurd. Arrest Major Ponghole Brown or whatever his name is for that. And for the rest, that's just between us, and must go no further.

INSPECTOR: So you don't admit to murdering Otto Steinburger, although he was killed on the terrace - with a dagger suspiciously like yours?

DARLENE WITHERS: Of course not. Someone else crept onto the terrace while I was with Major Brown.

INSPECTOR: So why are you accusing the Major?

DARLENE WITHERS: Oh I don't know. Arrest her. (pointing at Adora Mann) She's your murderer.

ADORA MANN: You're a very mean lady Mrs Withers. You blame everyone else because you don't want to be hanged yourself. That's very selfish.

MRS TRAVESTY: I agree.

DARLENE WITHERS: Silence. Remember who I am.

MRS TRAVESTY: Who are you? The murderer?

DARLENE WITHERS: Remember your place, Travers - or I will tell the Women's Committee about your sprouts.

MRS TRAVESTY: Well I never did.

DARLENE WITHERS: Shelve Your useless questioning Inspector, because I didn't do it. Couldn't be bothered.

INSPECTOR: I know. (He looks round) Major Pongo Brown, it seems like a slight overreaction to do what you did - just because Steinburger insulted your family name.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Insulted? He wiped out my brother with his bloody useless film casting. What are you getting at, Inspector?

INSPECTOR: Was it difficult to edge your way onto the terrace while Mrs Withers was coming to look for you?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: But I...

INSPECTOR: In short, was it difficult to stab Otto Steinburger... three times?

REVEREND ACORN: But he wasn't...

INSPECTOR: Yes?

REVEREND ACORN: Nothing.

INSPECTOR: Let me finish your sentence Reverend Acorn. He wasn't stabbed just three times. He was stabbed forty one times in the body.

(Gasps from all)

REVEREND ACORN: Peace my son. I was going to say no such thing.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Good Heavens.

REVEREND ACORN: When I stand at the eternal gates, St Peter will say "Albert" because it's all first names up there. "Albert, you have lead a blameless life." For all the critics present, I will admit he may mention the Steeple Fund. He may say "Why did you take advantage of the Steeple Fund for your own ends?" And that is exactly what bloody Steinburger was asking. And I shall say precisely what I would have said to the famous film producer if he hadn't made the incredible journey before I. I shall

say that the earthly messengers are not endowed with a big enough stipend. Big enough for their worldly needs. He will understand. A man has to eat, Inspector. Even if he is an envoy from a celestial land many moons away. How I shall get over the main point I have not yet decided - a point that seems to have eluded the parishioners. I am talking of course of the fact that we do not have a steeple. A point, I think, that the dreaded Steinburger had picked up. I may have cursed the dreary little man for his perception - but killing is another story. St Peter would not issue a free harp, or introduce me to Sara Bernhardt, if I had been involved in that sort of thing. This is a damn good theme - I shall use it at the 10 o'clock service tomorrow. Be there.

INSPECTOR: I'm sorry reverend. We have proof that you committed the murder. Come along quietly.

REVEREND ACORN: (leaps up) Never! Never never! No one on earth will try me. (He grabs the gun and Mrs Travesty) Of course it was me! After he found out about my jiggery-pokery with the steeple fund, he left me with little alternative. If a man of the church is proved to be a thief and a liar he runs the risk of losing the confidence of his parishioners. A vicar should be quaint, Inspector. It is his job to ride his bicycle through his parish, waving good morning and spreading hope along his blameless way. Accused of an unscrupulous crime, and this simple pleasant character becomes the butt of gossip and doubt. And now, found guilty of murder? Why, that could put off the staunchest of parishioners. No. It will not do. It will not do at all.

I am left with no other alternative than to follow my second chosen career. I shall become a restaurateur... probably in some foreign land. So this is it. After years of fiddling the steeple fund I am finally free to open my restaurant. I'll need staff. In fact, after all these years of cooking the books I'll be booking the cooks!

That's rather good, isn't it Travers old girl?

MRS TRAVESTY: Ooh, glory be Inspector. Let him hop it. I don't want to be a sacrificial lamb. Besides, I think he's being a bit unfair to an old woman. The sprouts weren't that bad.

REVEREND ACORN: Silence. I shall go now - and take her with me. We'll hide in the vestry until the heat's off. There are mountains of tea and biscuits there, and I think there's still a lump of Margery's fruit cake there. We will survive ! I'll inherit the earth!

Move woman, or I'll blow your head off. Tut tut. I'm normally far meeker than this. Move!

(Sergeant enters. There is a struggle and finally Reverend Acorn is overpowered.)

DARLENE WITHERS GUILTY:

INSPECTOR: On our arrival at the scene of the crime, the Sergeant and I made a modest search of the house, and I am proud and happy to announce that we have established the location of the murder, how Otto Steinburger was murdered, and by who.

DARLENE WITHERS: Whom.

INSPECTOR: (ignores correction) I'll tell you that later.

ADORA MANN: Well I never.

INSPECTOR: Yes indeed. Major Pongo Brown, would I be right in thinking you were on the terrace briefly tonight? Would I be correct in my assumption you were taking a bit of fresh air after being cooped up in the dining room with Reverend Acorn?

ADORA MANN: Pongo.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Yes my dear?

ADORA MANN: No, I was just going to say it was a bit pongo in there, what with the vicar and his eating habits.

DARLENE WITHERS: Thank you for telling us.

INSPECTOR: Well?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Yes, I was on the terrace. So what? Like to have a sniff round when things are looking harrowing. Army habit. Relaxes the system. And talking about relaxing the system...

REVEREND ACORN: That's quite enough thank you.

INSPECTOR: So you admit that you were on the terrace?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Of course.

INSPECTOR: Did you leave it at any time?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Never. Never. Military man, Inspector. Battles to be won.

REVEREND ACORN: Fight the good fight.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Righto.

INSPECTOR: I have established that the murder was committed on the terrace, and...

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: No!

INSPECTOR: Yes, on the terrace - and the unfortunate Mr Steinburger was stabbed in the head.

ADORA MANN: With a sharp object?

INSPECTOR: Yes.

ADORA MANN: Such as a dagger?

INSPECTOR: Yes.

ADORA MANN: Walls have ears eh, Inspector?

INSPECTOR: No they don't.

ADORA MANN: Oh.

DARLENE WITHERS: So why are you keeping us here Inspector? Do you enjoy the sound of your own nasal utterings because, Lord knows, we don't. Arrest the man. He's your killer. Knew it all the time. Local drunk, slaughtering has-been old windbag. Didn't I say? Hope this is given a favourable write-up in the Police Gazette, or whatever organ you pore over.
"Educated local lady solves murder that baffled local constabulary." That sort of thing. By golly Inspector, action is needed now. I was right all along. Stabbed the blighter to death - just the sort of thing he's always doing. Right vicar?

REVEREND ACORN: Verily a vow of silence should prevail at this juncture.

DARLENE WITHERS: Rubbish. Besides, I was deeply disturbed by the way he waved that gun we found all over the place. Could have killed somebody.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: He did.

DARLENE WITHERS: I'm talking. He held that gun like a man about to murder. Did the same thing with his dagger. Wipe out, as they say in those dreadful films that the transatlantic element make. Chicago or somewhere revolting.

INSPECTOR: Mrs Withers, I think the Major should say a few words.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: I...

DARLENE WITHERS: Lies.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: But...

DARLENE WITHERS: Nails in the coffin Major. Nails in the coffin. I saw you leave the terrace. Heading towards the orangery to see that dreary little tart over there. Can't understand why, when I was in the house. Men! Huh!

ADORA MANN: If you're referring to me, you're right. Not the dreary little tart bit. I'm not little. But he did come to see me. He made a rude suggestion.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: I didn't.

INSPECTOR: You didn't go to see her?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Oh Yes, I went to see her. But I didn't make a rude suggestion.

ADORA MANN: You did.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Never. I asked you if you would like to see my pas de deux.

ADORA MANN: There.

INSPECTOR: Mrs Withers, how did you know that Major Brown left the terrace?

DARLENE WITHERS: How dare you cross question me, you impudent fellow?

MRS TRAVESTY: Give him a chance.

DARLENE WITHERS: Remember your place, my good woman. I saw him coming from the terrace as I was coming from the garden.

INSPECTOR: So you saw him entering the orangery?

DARLENE WITHERS: No, leaving it. I just said that.

INSPECTOR: Otto Steinburger left the terrace?

DARLENE WITHERS: I saw it.

INSPECTOR: Mr Steinburger?

DARLENE WITHERS: Yes. I mean no. It was the Major I saw.

INSPECTOR: Entering?

DARLENE WITHERS: Leaving.

INSPECTOR: The Major?

DARLENE WITHERS: No. Steinburger. I mean...

ADORA MANN: Arrest her Inspector.

DARLENE WITHERS: Shut up. Arrest her Inspector.

INSPECTOR: All in good time. So you saw Otto Steinburger go onto the terrace? Or away from it?

DARLENE WITHERS: To it. From it. I haven't the faintest idea. Could have been walking backwards for all I care.

INSPECTOR: Away from the terrace? Into the orangery? Out of the orangery?

DARLENE WITHERS: In, out. I don't know. In, out, in out...

ADORA MANN: Shake it all about...

DARLENE WITHERS: Silence.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: If you want to get away with this you've got to concentrate.

DARLENE WITHERS: But at the moment of which we are speaking, Mr Steinburger was on the telephone. I heard him. Talking to a half bake. Probably some drunken fool for his next stupid film.

INSPECTOR: That was me.

ADORA MANN: Oh dear, what a super blunder! Then all the lights went out and there were a lot of scratches... (mysteriously) scraping... a dragging noise... and... silence.

INSPECTOR: Thank you. So the good Mr Stinkburger...

ADORA MANN: Steinburger.

INSPECTOR: Sorry. Steinburger... wasn't on the terrace?

DARLENE WITHERS: I don't know. I was too busy in the garden. Examining the plants for possible greenfly.

INSPECTOR: Without any lights?

(Pause)

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Bloody Man.

DARLENE WITHERS: Major!

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Hated him. Inept, useless film maker. Helped my brother to the celestial gates. Knew something was up tonight, the moment I arrived. It was the way he started blackmailing me. Got a nose for these things. Thought something was not quite... right. Otto Steinburger deserved to die. The man was a leech. A menace. A wart on the backside of humanity.

INSPECTOR: So you didn't like him?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Something had to be done. Too much at stake. Had to teach him a lesson he wouldn't forget.

INSPECTOR: By killing him?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Precisely.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: My God. You admit this thing of terribleness?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: admit it? Admit what? I was going to teach him a lesson alright.

REVEREND ACORN: By stabbing him in the head?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Eh? What? Good Lord no. Stab a chap? Run him through with the old bayonet? No. I was going to draw a moustache on his mother's portrait. Like that idiot Hitler who's emerging over in that ghastly country. (Waves dismissively) Over there. That would have shown the blighter! Ha ha! You don't trifle with the Pongo Browns and get away with it. Yes! That would have taught the bounder what's what. Ha!

INSPECTOR: So did you kill him?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Kill him? What are you on about you poor deluded fool? Of course I didn't. It's peace time Inspector. Peace time. It must be... the government say so.

MRS TRAVESTY: He's your man Inspector.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: He has secreted a confession tonight old chappie.

REVEREND ACORN: May your soul be... hear the rest on Sunday at 10am.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Inspector. You seem a fair man. I admit it. I hated the dreaded Steinburger. Wished him dead after the way he treated the brother and tried to blackmail me. Doesn't endear you to a chap that... But... I just didn't do it. Couldn't kill a bloke in peace time. Not cricket...

INSPECTOR: I know. (He looks round) Miss Adora Mann, was it easy to... to... go to the terrace, while the Major had come to look for you? And dispose of the one brick wall that stood, too high to climb, between you and the coveted career on the silver screen? Was it difficult to administer the fatal thrust with your dagger into Otto Steinburger's head?

ADORA MANN: I... I... I didn't. Please don't suggest...

DARLENE WITHERS: He wasn't...

INSPECTOR: Yes?

DARLENE WITHERS: Nothing.

INSPECTOR: Let me finish your sentence Mrs Withers. He wasn't stabbed in the head. Is that what you were going to say? You were right.

DARLENE WITHERS: Rubbish. I was going to say...

INSPECTOR: Right in one, Mrs Withers. Mr Steinburger wasn't stabbed in the back. He was stabbed in the chest, seven times. (Picks up dagger) With this dagger.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Good heavens.

(Silence)

DARLENE WITHERS: Ridiculous.

INSPECTOR: Not at all. The good Mr Steinburger was stabbed, seven times. And, I think everyone knows, hell hath no fury...

DARLENE WITHERS: Oh all right. I disposed of the stupid man. Everybody wanted to, but I did it. I hated him. Any man who trifles with the affections of a woman deserves to die. Bloody idiot. I was his. Can you imagine Inspector? No, you probably cannot. Too frustrating for you. But I was his, body and soul. What more could a man want? Then his wife died. At last he had a chance to marry me. But no. He disappeared to his London haunts and used me as a sort of human weekend cottage. Not good enough Inspector - not good enough.

I said to him one evening, "Now look here, marry me or I'll break your arm," but he procrastinated. No romance, that was his trouble. But tonight! Flaunting some dreary little person, probably conceived in some dreadful back street somewhere, as if she was Mae West or some other transatlantic beauty.

Too much Inspector... too much. Had to finish off the blighter. Better to have loved and lost. I did both. Wiped out the useless go-getter cad. Anyway, now it's all over can I go home? I've got mountains to do. Can't sit around talking to you lot. (She grabs the gun and Reverend Acorn) let me go Inspector or it will be the worse for the vicar. Probably better for the steeple fund. I've killed once tonight. I'm in the mood! Another Christian to the lions. Acorn face will die unless you let me make my escape. I'll go and stay with my sister at Farquar Manor, and the rest of you can bugger off.

REVEREND ACORN: I implore you Inspector - give generously to the collection of life. This unhappy woman is beside herself with grief, and could upset the eternal balance of things. She must be freed at once.

DARLENE WITHERS: Oh save it for tomorrow's sermon. I'm off. Through the vestibule to collect my hat, then away. Goodbye - and don't try to follow me if you know what's good for you. Forward, you silly cleric person.

(Sergeant enters. There is a struggle and finally Darlene Withers is overpowered.)

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG GUILTY:

INSPECTOR: On our arrival at the scene of the crime, the Sergeant and I made a modest search of the house, and I am proud and happy to announce that we have established the location of the murder, how Otto Steinburger was murdered, and by who.

DARLENE WITHERS: Whom.

INSPECTOR: (ignores correction) I'll tell you that later.

REVEREND ACORN: Well bless you, my son.

INSPECTOR: Absolutely. Miss Adora Mann, I have reason to believe that you spent some time in the orangery tonight.

ADORA MANN: I told you that.

INSPECTOR: Quite. Dancing alone, I seem to remember.

ADORA MANN: Dancing to a little band in my head, with my feet whispering messages of love to the deserted dance floor.

DARLENE WITHERS: I feel sick.

ADORA MANN: For a few moments, the worries of the evening were replaced by another more mellow and enchanting mood. That of the dance, Inspector.

INSPECTOR: Quite...

ADORA MANN: Oh, the dance...

INSPECTOR: Yes, But...

ADORA MANN: Always the dance, toujours la danse as they say in...

DARLENE WITHERS: That dreadful French country, wherever it is. Can we get on? Arrest her, Sergeant.

INSPECTOR: Miss Mann, did you leave the orangery at any time?

ADORA MANN: Leave? Leave during a routine? Never. The show must go on, Inspector.

INSPECTOR: Of course. But I have to tell you that the murder was committed in the ballroom.

MRS TRAVESTY: Well I Never did. Fancy.

INSPECTOR: And the good Steinburger was stabbed in the orangery.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Painful.

REVEREND ACORN: Stabbed? With a dagger?

INSPECTOR: Yes. In the back.

REVEREND ACORN: With a dagger like Miss Adora Mann's?

INSPECTOR: Very.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Well what did I tell you of. She's your murderer Inspector, if you want one so much. I knew it all the time.

DARLENE WITHERS: You never mentioned it. It was me.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: You murdered Steinburger?

DARLENE WITHERS: Of course I didn't Major. It was me who said this sappy tart was the killer. Absolutely obvious. Cavorting little halfwit.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: One moment. I think I see it all. Otto has photographs of this lady, so she buys a dagger from a scout shop - to silence him. Arrest her Inspector. As they say in old Vienna, you can't judge a schnitzel by the batter. Righto?

DARLENE WITHERS: He's right Inspector. Take her away. Take her now. Take my advice. Take...

REVEREND ACORN: She's right Inspector. It's the mighty and grim reaper for you my girl.

ADORA MANN: Who?

REVEREND ACORN: The grim reaper.

ADORA MANN: I've never been reaped.

(Silence)

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Now please, I go to bed now, ja? You have your murderer, bloody pig Steinburger is dead. What a great loss to the emerging film industry and to all his dear friends (spreads his arms) Us! How can I put it? Genius. Respected. Admired. And...

DARLENE WITHERS: Oh shut up.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: But I'll tell you somethings. I saw you leave the orangery tonight fraulein.

REVEREND ACORN: Yes, she came to see me.

ADORA MANN: No I didn't.

REVEREND ACORN: Yes you did. You sat next to me at the dinner table and said you liked a man with a healthy appetite.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Did She?

REVEREND ACORN: Yes.

INSPECTOR: Mr Rectal..bum...swei...thing... er...

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Rechtschreibung.

INSPECTOR: Um...Wolf. How do you know Miss Adora Mann left the orangery?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: I saw her, naturalicht.

MRS TRAVESTY: That's obvious.

INSPECTOR: So you saw him entering the orangery?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: No. leaving it. I just said that.

INSPECTOR: Mr Steinburger left the orangery?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: I saw it.

INSPECTOR: Otto Steinburger?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Yes. I mean no. It was Adora Mann I saw.

INSPECTOR: Entering?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Leaving.

INSPECTOR: Miss Mann?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: No. Steinburger. I mean...

DARLENE WITHERS: Arrest him Inspector.

INSPECTOR: So. We have established that Miss Adora Mann did leave the orangery - albeit to witness Reverend Acorn consuming the remainder of the plum duff.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: If you want to get away with this you've got to concentrate.

REVEREND ACORN: Wait! At the moment of which you are speaking, Steinburger was on the telephone. He sounded agitated. The recipient of the call was obviously very stupid.

INSPECTOR: That was me.

REVEREND ACORN: Ah. Then all the lights went out and I heard voices... footsteps... dragging... a rumbling noise. I must admit to thinking that my digestive system was reacting unfavourably.

INSPECTOR: Thank you. So contrary to your statement Wolf Rech... Wolf, Otto Steinburger was not in the orangery.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: I don't know. I was too busy reading in the study.

INSPECTOR: Without any lights?

(Pause)

ADORA MANN: Goodness, how I hated him.

REVEREND ACORN: Please my child.

ADORA MANN: Horrible man. Sweet and friendly on the casting couch, and then not coming up with the parts you expect.

He had some photographs of me which show areas that are not normally on view to the general public. He was going to use the photographs - and not to publicise the film I was meant to be in. That is the sort of exposure a girl doesn't want Inspector. How I wanted him to die. When I got here this evening I thought I had been invited for a festive occasion. If I'd known he was going to die tonight I would have stayed at home. But die he did. Goodbye Otto All Hands Steinburger. Goodbye, you rotten, snivelling excuse for a man.

INSPECTOR: So you didn't like him?

ADORA MANN: No.

INSPECTOR: And revenge gave you satisfaction?

ADORA MANN: Oh Yes. I loved every moment.

DARLENE WITHERS: Arrest her Inspector.

ADORA MANN: What for?

INSPECTOR: You have just admitted killing Otto Steinburger.

ADORA MANN: Killing him? Oh no. Why should I kill him?

INSPECTOR: For revenge?

ADORA MANN: Oh that! No - I took the photographs from his pocket at dinner - you remember, when he took his jacket off? And removed the one of me on the rug. Remember that one Major?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: I'll say.

ADORA MANN: And I drew a swimsuit on it with my lipstick! Ha ha! That will spoil his little game! Or it would have done...

DARLENE WITHERS: Arrest her Inspector.

ADORA MANN: But I haven't done anything. Kill someone? Never! Never!

INSPECTOR: Commendable.

ADORA MANN: Thank you. I was very annoyed with Bunt... um... Mr Steinburger, but I could never do a thing like that. It doesn't seem right, even for a girl from my shadowy background. Basically I'm a good girl...

DARLENE WITHERS: Huh!

ADORA MANN: And upright.

(Darlene Withers looks at her)

ADORA MANN: Most of the time.

INSPECTOR: I know. (He looks round) Reverend Acorn, was it difficult to enter the orangery at the very time Miss Adora Mann had come to look for you? In short... was it difficult to stab Mr Steinburger... in the back?

ADORA MANN: Oh my goodness. How dreadful. How could you possibly suggest...

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: But he was not...

INSPECTOR: Yes?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Nothing.

INSPECTOR: Let me finish your sentence Mr Rechts... wotsit. He wasn't stabbed in the back. Is that what you were going to say? You were absolutely right. Otto Steinburger was stabbed only three times in the front... but fatally.

ADORA MANN: Heavens.

(Silence)

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: I was not going to say that. It was the Reverend chappie.

INSPECTOR: Come On, admit it. It was you who stabbed the famous film producer Otto Steinburger to death. Wasn't it?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: This worser idea than some of my special effects.

INSPECTOR: Not at all. Steinburger was stabbed by you and I can prove it. You - you mad special effects person.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Ya! Righto Inspector. Right as always. Right again. How irritating it must be for your wife. I am first in line for admitting thereof that one stole the silly sod's ideas for ein clever visual trickery thingy. I think I can say here and now - Yes I can say here and now - that I was going to own up. Play the jolly game hey what old boy slap back what. Going to admit to it at film premiere. Admit to the entire lump of plagiarism. Or maybe I wasn't. Who knows? Now where was I? Oh ya.

I was with him in old Vienna one time showing him an ancient tomb for a possible film location. He say "What does that foreign notice say?" And I quickly answer, "It says you must pay anyone you know called Wolf a lot of money or you will die by the curse of the tomb." It actually said 'Public lavatory.' Good wheeze eh? Didn't work though, so I killed him. It seemed easier. Just getting in a little practice what with the growing uneasiness in Europe and all that. I'll get away with it (He grabs gun and Darlene Withers) Yes! I killed old Stinker. I hate accusations - especially when they're true. I will get away. Vienna here I'm coming. I will change my name and become a scientist fellow. Let me go or it's curtains closing for the Mrs Withers lady person.

DARLENE WITHERS: Take your hands off me, you half-crazed foreigner. Go where the hell you like, but unhand me at once.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Quiet you bag. I have killed once tonight. The second will only give my conscience a little prick. Clear the way. Osterreich here I come! The Farterland. Tally ho schweinhunts. Remove yourselves or Mrs Withers won't be 'with us' for long. Ha ha!

(Sergeant enters, there is a struggle and Wolf Rechtschreibung is overpowered)

ADORA MANN GUILTY:

INSPECTOR: On our arrival at the scene of the crime, the Sergeant and I made a modest search of the house, and I am proud and happy to announce that we have established the location of the murder, how Otto Steinburger was murdered, and by who.

DARLENE WITHERS: Whom.

INSPECTOR: (ignores correction) I'll tell you that later.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: No!

INSPECTOR: Yes. Wolf Rech... thingy, am I right in thinking that you were in the study tonight?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Who? Me, old friendship?

DARLENE WITHERS: Yes you. Of course he was Inspector. Probably copying a brand new idea of somebody's.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Nonsensicalness.

INSPECTOR: So you weren't in the study?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Of course I was. Spent a long time reading through files and notebooks. The world of films Inspector. The very world of films.

INSPECTOR: Of course. Did you leave the room at all? For any reason?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: What? Disturb the flow? In the field of film special effects invention one needs peace. Any disturbance can be ruinous. Steinburger being murdered hasn't helped at all. Most inconsiderate.

MRS TRAVESTY: What a nasty thing to say, you ungrateful pig. After he invited you into his house and was so kind.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Kind?

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Kind?

INSPECTOR: So you Never left the study, and yet... the murder was committed there.

ADORA MANN: No!

INSPECTOR: Yes. It was in the study that Otto Steinburger was stabbed to death.

DARLENE WITHERS: Good gracious.

REVEREND ACORN: Murder Inspector?

INSPECTOR: I think it's safe to assume so Reverend. Suicides don't happen like that.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: Astute fella.

INSPECTOR: Thank you.

ADORA MANN: In that case Inspector, can we all go home? You're making me feel sick with all your grizzly tales - and I have a long drive. Arrest this Wolf person, he is obviously guilty. The study. The dagger. It all fits. Cold blooded naughty special effects person. Arrest him now, before he disappears without trace apart from a pair of dark glasses hovering in the air. Arrest him before he blows us all up. We knew who did it, didn't we Mrs Withers?

DARLENE WITHERS: We? It was I who said all along that the stupid man was guilty. Stands to reason. He's a foreigner.

ADORA MANN: Caught Wolfy baby. Your dagger gave it away. I know we all had daggers but yours looked far more... daggery.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: I kept it for a very good reason. You know that.

DARLENE WITHERS: Rats?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Precisely. And you think I'm mad! Mad! Mad! Huh!

DARLENE WITHERS: Be quiet.

INSPECTOR: Mrs Withers. Miss Mann. Shouldn't we let Mr Rightberk say a few words?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Well I...

ADORA MANN: Lies.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: But...

ADORA MANN: How long are you going to keep a murderer on the loose Inspector? He must be taken to another place and hanged a lot.

DARLENE WITHERS: Why don't you stop interfering?

ADORA MANN: I thought you would be impressed. Anyway Wolf, I saw you leave the study. You were heading for the kitchen to see Mrs Travesty.

MRS TRAVESTY: You're right. He did come to see me. Mince pies wasn't it?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Correct.

MRS TRAVESTY: That's right! But they weren't ready, were they?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: No.

MRS TRAVESTY: He's as bad as the Reverend. Always eating! You've got a soft spot for my mince pies, haven't you Reverend? Do you remember at the Christmas Bazaar...

REVEREND ACORN: Shut up.

MRS TRAVESTY: Oh.

INSPECTOR: Can we proceed? Miss Adora Mann, how did you know that Wolf Rechy-wotsit left the study?

ADORA MANN: Because I saw him.

INSPECTOR: So you saw him entering the study?

ADORA MANN: No. leaving. I just said that.

INSPECTOR: Mr Steinburger left the study?

ADORA MANN: I saw it.

INSPECTOR: Mr Steinburger?

ADORA MANN: Yes. I mean no. It was Wolf Rightbungle I saw.

INSPECTOR: Entering?

ADORA MANN: Leaving.

INSPECTOR: Rightbung?

ADORA MANN: No. Bunty... I mean Steinbur... I mean...

DARLENE WITHERS: Arrest her Inspector.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: If you want to get away with this, you've got to concentrate.

MRS TRAVESTY: 'Ere, hang on a tick. At that time Mr Steinburger was on the telephone. He was talking urgently. Probably to one of his sleezy friends.

INSPECTOR: He was talking to me.

MRS TRAVESTY: Oh, beg your pardon. Anyway, right after that the lights all fused and there was a mighty rumpus, people all shouting... and (mysteriously) a dragging noise... and...

INSPECTOR: Yes?

MRS TRAVESTY: ...and Nothing.

INSPECTOR: So Miss Adora Mann, Otto Steinburger wasn't in the study.

ADORA MANN: I don't know. I was too busy rehearsing my steps in the orangery.

INSPECTOR: In the dark?

(Pause)

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: If it wasn't for that idiot Steinburger none of this would have happened. I could have stayed in Regent Strasse London West One. But he wanted me returning to the rural nonsense and stinking sheep and grass everywhere and mud on the nice shiny shoe. And then he made me feel uncomfortable. Unwelcomeness. Accused me of stealing his ideas, and said he wanted ownerships of my life's work. It's called...

EVERYONE: (loudly) Project X.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Not so loud! (Looks around and whispers) Yes, he wanted Project X to be his. He suggested that my last triumph, for which I was going to get an award, and a small statuette with my name on it, was all his own work.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: It was, wasn't it?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Well Yes - but you don't want to be reminded of things like that when you're the guest of honour.

MRS TRAVESTY: I was the guest of honour.

ADORA MANN: I thought I was.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: God, how I hated him. Hate hate hate! It's wonderful to know that that foul overbearing untalented schweinhunt has met his gruesome end. Ha ha!

INSPECTOR: So you didn't like him?

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Never! Had to teach him a lesson he wouldn't forget.

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: He'd soon forget if he was dead.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: I had to get revenge.

INSPECTOR: By killing him?

(Long pause)

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Oh no. All I did was change an X to a Y in the workings out on his blackboard. Got him! He he! (Pause) Oh, did you think I killed him Inspector? Major? Reverend? Tarty bit? No no no - that wouldn't do at all. I didn't do it.

INSPECTOR: I know.

ADORA MANN: He's your man Inspector. That was a confession if I ever heard one - and I've heard a few. A friend of mine once confessed to being in love with a llama...

EVERYONE: Eh?

ADORA MANN: I said no need for ala..

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Silence. I hated Stinking Steinburger. Pat on back. Jolly fellow. Bent on ruining my reputation - and I simply couldn't have that. After all, what's the point of being eccentric if you haven't got an overriding ability which can be used, by others, as an excuse for your strange behaviour? Then you're just an idiot, instead of an amiable and vague genius. Steinburger was about to prove that I was... in fact... just...

DARLENE WITHERS: An idiot.

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Precisely.

INSPECTOR: Mr um... Wolf... I know you didn't kill Otto Steinburger. (He looks round) Mrs Travesty...

MRS TRAVESTY: Eh?

INSPECTOR: Mrs Travesty, was it easy to enter the study, while the Wolf person was looking for you? Was it a pleasure to get rid of the man you hated? The man who deprived you of a decent living, and ruined your life, stole your contentment... and condemned you to live forever on no money, on top of a smelly butcher's shop? Was it difficult to stab Mr Steinburger seven times in his stomach?

MRS TRAVESTY: Ooh er. I didn't do nothing. Tell him Vicar. Major...

ADORA MANN: But he wasn't...

INSPECTOR: Yes?

ADORA MANN: Nothing.

INSPECTOR: Let me finish your sentence Miss Mann. He wasn't stabbed seven times in the stomach. Is that what you were going to say? You were right.

ADORA MANN: How could you put words into my mouth? I was going to say...

INSPECTOR: No Miss Adora Mann, you were right the first time. He wasn't stabbed seven times in the stomach. He was stabbed in the back with this... (holds up Adora Mann's dagger)

WOLF RECHTSCHREIBUNG: Bloody blimey.

(Silence)

ADORA MANN: Yes, alright I did it! Everyone wanted to, but I did it. I was being blackmailed by Otto stinking Steinburger. He knew secrets from my seedy past, and had photographs to prove it. He would have exposed me, possibly more than the photographs did. I didn't let him have his wicked way with me, but it was a narrow escape I can tell you. I would have had to go through with it for the sake of my career - for the sake of art - but I wouldn't have enjoyed it one little bit. I hated him. His clawing hands and nasty innuendos. He threatened to end my career on the silver screen. I couldn't let it

happen Inspector. I had too much to lose. A rare talent such as mine, undermined by a mere world famous film producer. Huh!

Life for an artiste is all. No one can stand in the way of art. It was to be my big break. In my specially written part I had to mumble 'Ooh all right then...' and dance up the stairs. It's nearly Shakespeare innit? And the dance! Ah the dance!

But I'll get away with it, you'll see. (She grabs Major Pongo Brown and the gun) let me go Inspector. Back to my London haunts where I will rebuild my career. You are all invited to the premiere! It will be fun! A reunion! We can talk about when we all performed together in the film of life! Ah the dance! Tonight... tonight only! The lovely and talented Miss Adora Mann!

MAJOR PONGO BROWN: (humours her) Yes Yes. We'll all be together. You'll be a star! Twinkle twinkle little...

ADORA MANN: Shut up or I'll blow your brains out. Clear the way. London's calling. The lights. The smells. The roar of traffic. I'll be there! Be there!

(Sergeant enters. There is a struggle and finally Adora Mann is overpowered)

END SECTION:

(Sergeant, murderer and Inspector stand at front of stage)

MURDERER: My God Inspector. How did you establish that? I thought I had committed the perfect crime.

(All the others laugh)

INSPECTOR: The moment I arrived here tonight I knew something was wrong. It was the way I found Mr Steinburger's body hanging out of the cupboard. A quick search of the rooms established where Steinburger had been killed, and a quick examination of the impressive range of daggers told me which one had been used to deflate the unfortunate man. Simple so far, don't you agree? All we needed was the murderer - often a difficult task for the force. But I did it (cough from Sergeant) We did it. Call it policeman's intuition. Call it a hunch.

DARLENE WITHERS: Call it a miracle.

INSPECTOR: Quite. But the envelopes were the key to the crime. It was my idea. My trained eyes watched your reactions to finding what amounted to a signed accusation from Otto Steinburger. I would like you to open the six envelopes - all will reveal innocence, apart from none other than... (The murderer)

MURDERER: But you couldn't have known what was in the envelopes.

INSPECTOR: I didn't. That would have spoilt the fun.

(The five innocent envelopes are opened, the contents unfolded. Each says 'Innocent.' Finally, the holder of the 'Guilty' envelope opens it. In large letters it says 'Guilty')

INSPECTOR: And what's more... (he goes to the cupboard, opens it, and the murderer's initials are scrawled there, in blood)

EVERYONE: Ooooh...

SERGEANT: Very impressive sir. So Steinburger just had time to scrawl those letters, with his own blood, before he proceeded in an orderly fashion to meet his maker?

INSPECTOR: That sort of thing. Thank you Sergeant. I think that just about ties the whole thing up.

SERGEANT: Don't we have something to ask the murderer, sir?

INSPECTOR: Oh, Yes.

SERGEANT: And That is...?

INSPECTOR: You say it.

SERGEANT: No, after you. You're the oldest.

INSPECTOR: Very Well. Why did you kill Otto Steinburger?

SERGEANT: Right. Why did you kill him? Tell us at once you fiend.

INSPECTOR: Quite.

SERGEANT: You despicable person.

INSPECTOR: Quite.

SERGEANT: You scum...

INSPECTOR: Sergeant.

SERGEANT: Sorry sir.

MURDERER: I killed Otto Steinburger because he was standing in my way. Because I hated him. Because his sort do not deserve to live. Because I couldn't stand the ground he walked on. Because he was...

INSPECTOR: Fine. That will do for now. Right Sergeant, take the murderer away.

SERGEANT: Very good sir. (Stops at door) Why don't they ever learn?

INSPECTOR: I was going to say that!

SERGEANT: Sorry sir. (Exits with murderer. The Inspector picks up the gun)

INSPECTOR: Well it's time for me to say cheerio. You've been marvellous suspects, and I would like to thank each and every one of you for coming along tonight. After all, where would I be without you? Safely home, sweet dreams and may tomorrow bring just a little of what you've always promised yourselves. (Turns to audience) And that applies to you too. See you all next time and, just for that nice lady in row 21... 'ello 'ello 'ello!
Goodnight... and thank you.

(As he bows to the suspects, the gun goes off and the plant springs up. Blackout)

CURTAIN