

ACCUSED!

By Patricia Milton
Developed in the Central Works' Writers Workshop

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Katie Smalls, an American expat in London, a determined detective, bi-racial, American regional Southern accent (Virginia), 30's-40's

Valeria Hunter, Owner of Hunter's Lodging House for Actresses, 60's, nervous disposition, standard English accent

Loveday Fortescue, Valeria's sister, a detective, dramatic, irritatingly always right, 40's-50's, standard English accent

Allison Tinglepenny, 30's, an anarchist afraid for her life, standard English accent

Inspector Mary Perkins, 30's, Tough demeanor, wears an eyepatch. Member of the Special Branch of the Metropolitan police, focused on anarchist activity, lower class English accent*

Deacon **Morris Manley**, 40's, a leader of the Muscular Christians, standard English accent**

Lord Philip Ian Albert, 40's, plummy English accent**

Monsieur Henri Blancmange, smarmy and a Francophile, French accent**

*played by same actor

**played by same actor

Total of five actors: 4 women, 1 man

"The aims and purposes of both terrorists and the government coincide dangerously, and they often seem to be playing a double-handed game between themselves." ~ Simon Webb, "Dynamite, Treason, and Plot"

"The poor have sometimes objected to being governed badly; the rich have always objected to being governed at all."

— G.K. Chesterton

"We started off trying to set up a small anarchist community, but people wouldn't obey the rules." ~Alan Bennett

All scenes take place in the Hunter Lodging House parlor. The parlor features an armchair UR, fireplace hung with a boat oar UC, upholstered bench DC, large armoire/cupboard UL, coatrack and sideboard DL, and carpet. On the mantel stand a small handcrafted sheep, and a number of books.

VALERIA, aproned, and LORD ALBERT.

VALERIA

Lord Albert. Your politics are distasteful, and your head is swollen shut with self-adulation. These traits alone disqualify you.

ALBERT

Neither savoury politics nor an air of humility are requirements to join the London Horticulture Society.

VALERIA

I say, they are. We all know you've been urging the House of Lords to expand police powers. You are a disgrace.

ALBERT

You sympathise with the dynamiters?

VALERIA

I stand against illegitimate government power.

ALBERT

You needn't worry, unless you are an anarchist bomber.

VALERIA

Aggressive police dominance spreads like ivy, with the same damaging results. Would you be happy to have a constable search your home without a warrant?

ALBERT

I make the law. It won't apply to me.

VALERIA

Your proposal would allow the constabulary to legally invade the homes of ordinary people.

ALBERT

Surely giving up a few rights is preferable to being dead.

VALERIA

Those are not the only available choices.

ALBERT

I thank heaven daily that women cannot vote. (beat) Does this mean you refuse to sponsor me to the Horticulture Society?

VALERIA

I will actively oppose your admission. Your recent stunt in the House of Lords makes me ask: to what other lows may you stoop?

ALBERT

"Stunt!?" Oh, never mind. The Frenchman will vouch for me.

VALERIA

I will make Monsieur Blancmange aware of your vicious anti-immigrant position.

ALBERT

I am unperturbed.

VALERIA

Your cat has been spending a penny in the Frenchman's flower beds as well as mine.

ALBERT

Pardon me?

VALERIA

Your cat. Urinating in our gardens. I daresay the Frenchman will join me in refusing to sponsor you.

ALBERT

Fine. Then I imagine the Society may be interested in your role in the death of your husband, Nigel.

VALERIA

Nigel was borne away by the dark waters of the Thames. The coroner dismissed it as "death by misadventure" years ago.

ALBERT

The coroner has been convinced before to reopen cases. Particularly when there is pressure from one of the peerage.

VALERIA

(uncertain) You wouldn't dare.

ALBERT

I, for one, would be chuffed to see you locked up. Nigel was my dear friend.

VALERIA

You two would drink together till you were squizzed, and then tour the brothels.

ALBERT

As I said: Dear friends. Your husband confided in me: for example, he told me he intended to put you in an asylum.

VALERIA

I was ... I am not mad!

ALBERT

Nigel's "vanishing" saved you from the madhouse. (beat) You need only be my sponsor to avoid being clapped into irons. Have you observed my topiary? My privet is ravishing.

VALERIA

The clippings from your topiary extend to our edge of the street. The Horticulture Society is dedicated to beautifying London, not cluttering its roadways.

ALBERT

(tries to think of a quip, cannot) I have beseeched enough. I will seek the Frenchman.

He makes for the door.

VALERIA

If the Frenchman does sponsor you, do you seriously imagine you can top my aspidistra? (ass-puh-diss-trah)

ALBERT

My dear Missus Hunter, I pooh-pooh your aspidistra!

VALERIA

And I sneer at your taxus baccata!

ALBERT

My taxus baccata is the third oldest of its kind in London!

VALERIA

Its decrepitude is evident, as is yours.

ALBERT

Good day. (at the door, he stops, swivels.) I say, Missus Hunter. What is that I smell?

VALERIA

(puzzled) I am baking scones. Is it somehow prohibited?

ALBERT

Not at all. The fact is, it is already half-nine and I have not yet had my breakfast. (fawning) My dear lady, can you forgive me?

VALERIA

What?

ALBERT

I take it all back: every hostile remark, every snarling monition, every insult to your garden. I would never smear your good name to the Horticulture Society.

VALERIA

(beat) No, you may not have a scone.

ALBERT

Missus Hunter. You would deny an unwell man? One who recently collapsed on the floor of Parliament?

VALERIA

You play-acted a swoon when your fellow Lords began to jeer at your speech.

ALBERT

My doctor swears I am bilious!

VALERIA

One can but hope, m'lord. Please leave directly ... and see to it you don't steal anything on your way out.

ALBERT exits DSL, VALERIA after him.

KATIE and LOVEDAY enter USL.
LOVEDAY is perusing The Gazette.

LOVEDAY

"In fifty years, every London street will be buried under nine feet of horse manure."

KATIE

Well, what are you and I s'posed to do about it?

LOVEDAY

(turns a page) They offer no solution.

KATIE

I'll tell you what: I believe this tall tale is a pile of horse dung itself. Made up to sell more gazettes.

LOVEDAY

We will have to wait until nineteen-hundred-and-thirty to ascertain whether a fully nine-foot stack of night soil is inevitable. In the meantime, I find it quite fortunate that I have relocated my study to the uppermost storey.

VALERIA bustles in holding a tray of scones. Sets down the scones. LOVEDAY continues to read the paper.

KATIE

Mornin'. Horse feces is gonna be sky high in a few decades.

VALERIA

The front page is devoted to horse plop? Is there no news of the Russian flu epidemic? What of the anarchists?

LOVEDAY

(reads and summarises) Another anarchist plot has been disrupted. The late French bomber, Bourdin, will receive a public funeral. As for the influenza epidemic, (turns page) the inclination in each country has been to charge another country with generating the disease.

KATIE

Everybody's got to accuse somebody else. It figures.

LOVEDAY

(looking up) Sister. I observe you have donned an apron. This kitchen garment, worn by you, never fails to terrify us.

VALERIA

I have made delicious hot scones: nothing to joke about.

LOVEDAY

Indeed. I have begun to think of our breakfast table as one of Dante's circles of Hell.

VALERIA

You don't believe in Hell.

LOVEDAY

Your scones have opened my mind to the possibility.

KATIE

The last scones you made, even the mice left alone.

VALERIA

As I have explained, salt and sugar look remarkably alike. Both are white, and granular.

LOVEDAY

So is crushed limestone. I don't wish to eat it. And Clarissa makes us such lovely muffins.

VALERIA

Well, Clarissa has packed up her muffin pan and moved to Fingering-On-Sea.

LOVEDAY

Why would anyone move to Fingering-on-Sea?

KATIE

The name?

VALERIA

Loveday, you decline to set foot in the kitchen, and Katie/

KATIE

I use spices. It's not a sin.

LOVEDAY

Spices fly in the face of English gastronomical tradition.

VALERIA

I am therefore forced to prepare breakfast myself.

LOVEDAY

Your logic is tediously irrefutable.

VALERIA

You cannot expect me to be an accomplished baker. I am self-taught.

KATIE

I don't need tasty, but is edible outta the question?

LOVEDAY

We would prefer to avoid further intestinal trauma, Valeria.

A door bell sounds.

VALERIA

If that is Lord Albert again, he shall not enter!

VALERIA grabs and brandishes an umbrella.

KATIE

Valeria! Stand easy. You haven't been trained, and you've got no natural skills.

VALERIA replaces the umbrella.

VALERIA

I suppose I shall have to strangle him, then. Do go on, try a scone. You'll be surprised.

VALERIA exits. All eyes on scones.

KATIE

Last week I caught her addin' castoreum to the bread pudding. (LOVEDAY is quizzical) Castoreum. It tastes just like vanilla, but it comes outta the backside of a beaver.

LOVEDAY

Then you go first. I hate surprises.

KATIE

I live for surprises, but not ones like that.

ALLISON and VALERIA enter. ALLISON has a handbasket holding boxes.

VALERIA

It's Miss Tinglepenny, from the Freedom Print Shop. For you, Katie.

KATIE

Good mornin.'

ALLISON

I've nearly finished up the booklets for the Horticulture Society, Missus Hunter. I loved learning about the types of trees, just by assembling the pages! My favorite is the oak.

VALERIA

I will stop by later, to pick up my order.

KATIE

(to ALLISON) This is Miss Loveday Fortescue.

ALLISON

Allison Tinglepenny.

LOVEDAY

Pleased to meet you, Miss Tinglepenny.

VALERIA

I will be busy in the garden. Lord Albert is determined to upstage my aspidistra with his awful topiary balls.

LOVEDAY

But, Valeria, what will we do for breakfast?

VALERIA

Help yourself to a scone.

VALERIA exits.

ALLISON

Miss Smalls, I have here your smashing calling cards.

KATIE

(taking from ALLISON a small box of cards) Thank you. How much do I owe you?

ALLISON

Five shillings.

LOVEDAY

Are they encrusted with diamonds?

KATIE

They're deluxe. And you're jealous.

ALLISON

Do not pay me now. I note from your card that you are a consulting detective. I have gotten myself into difficulty, and I should like to hire you.

KATIE puts the box of cards on the sideboard, pockets a few.

ALLISON

I'll come directly to the point. My dear friend, Miss Jane Jones, the manager of the Freedom print shop, has disappeared.

KATIE

And you want us to find her.

ALLISON

I'm afraid it is too late for that. Do not judge me, but the fact is: we got mixed up with the dynamiters. Oh, Jane's murder has me shaken!

KATIE

Murder!

ALLISON

Yes, I am sure the anarchists have murdered her!

LOVEDAY

I am so sorry. And why would you approach us instead of the Metropolitan Police?

KATIE

Loveday, she can't go to the police.

ALLISON

With my dark complexion, and Jane's, as well --- the police would be indifferent to our peril. And I do not wish to be jailed for being an dynamiter.

LOVEDAY

Are you a dynamiter?

ALLISON

No.

KATIE

But you said you "got in" with them. And we talked about the anarchists when you wrote up my order. You said you agree with their philosophy.

ALLISON

The hardships of so many, when seen alongside the wealth of a very few, is clearly unfair. The idea of tearing it all down, and creating a more just society, is appealing.

LOVEDAY

Demolition, then the dream! We agree, wholeheartedly.

KATIE

We're not wholehearted 'bout the bomb plots. Or murder.

ALLISON

Jane and I delighted in discussing all manner of political issues. These men allow women to join their ranks, which is refreshing! We were happy to print their pamphlets about labour organising. But once they began talking of exploding buildings: We were absolutely appalled!

KATIE

The name "dynamiters" didn't give you a hint?

ALLISON

Until recently, these men sat upon their chairs and talked. They boasted and bragged, and did nothing at all.

LOVEDAY

As is commonplace with men.

ALLISON

Jane and I told them we would no longer print their pamphlets ... the ones calling for violence. Soon after, we received threatening missives, declaring that assassinating the both of us was not out of the question.

LOVEDAY

Then the culprit is one of your boasting comrades.

ALLISON

But they are all in prison.

KATIE

"I was in prison" is a good strong alibi.

ALLISON

Locked up weeks ago for planning a bookshop bombing. Well, not all of them. The two police agents who actually suggested the bombing won't see the inside of a jail.

KATIE

Okay, it's somebody else. Tell us why you think Jane has been murdered.

ALLISON

We made plans to flee the city, to protect ourselves. But this morning I received a final letter, addressed only to me. "Your friend is dead, and you are next."

KATIE

If you've got the letters, they may help us catch her killer.

ALLISON

I kept the last. I will leave it with you.

ALLISON takes a letter from her basket, gives it to KATIE, who opens it.

ALLISON

Oh, no! Do not let me see it again! The letter is stained with blood.

ALLISON faints. LOVEDAY runs to her. KATIE drops the letter and fans ALLISON vigorously, while LOVEDAY rubs ALLISON's hands.

KATIE

(yikes) That's ... her friend's blood?

LOVEDAY

Do you have smelling salts?

KATIE

Have you been drinkin'? I don't faint. Look. She's comin' around.

ALLISON recovers.

ALLISON

For heaven's sake, look at the letter after I have departed! I'm not embarrassed to admit that I swoon at the sight of blood, Miss Fortescue.

KATIE puts the letter on the sideboard.

LOVEDAY

A burdensome attribute in a revolutionary. Was your friend married, or otherwise involved with a man? A preponderance of murders are committed by husbands / and

ALLISON

She is. Was. Betrothed. But I don't believe her fiancée killed her.

KATIE

Humor us.

ALLISON

Her betrothed is a cleric: Deacon Morris Manley. A rumbumptious chap with an authoritarian bent. His spiritual beliefs have convinced him he is a gift from God, and he spreads prayer and pugilism about the city of London.

KATIE

Prayer and ... pugilism?

ALLISON

Boxing, but for believers in Christ. You will understand should you have the misfortune to meet him. Honestly, if we ladies scrutinized men's true natures, we might stay unmarried.

LOVEDAY

Surely this scrappy fiancée may have murdered Jane!

ALLISON

I'm not sure. She was quite useful to him: she enhanced his public show of noxious masculinity. And I don't know why he would want me dead.

KATIE

Is he an anarchist?

ALLISON

(thinks) How can one tell?

LOVEDAY

That is the quandary. Anarchists often keep their identities a secret. But to be successful, we must narrow the field of suspects.

KATIE

To fewer than "everybody in London." What was Miss Jones doin', on the day of her disappearance?

ALLISON

Thursday last. She was making the deliveries: Fancy perfume labels to Mister Blancmange. Proofs of the "Great Britain Annual Stud Book" to Lord Albert, who lives across from you.

KATIE

"Stud book?" Lord Albert checkin' to make sure he's listed?

LOVEDAY

That book concerns racehorses, Katie. Lord Albert is a former dragoon, or military horseman, and has been charged with researching bloodlines.

ALLISON

Jane's other delivery that day was boxing posters, to Deacon Manley. She left in the morning, and I never saw her again.

KATIE

So, that's three suspects, at least to start. Mister Blancmange, Lord Albert, and Jane's fiancée, Deacon Manley.

ALLISON

I have something else. (takes a box from her basket.)

LOVEDAY

Miss Tinglepenny, it is unsettling that a person associated with anarchists has carried a sealed box into our home.

ALLISON

I am not a bomber.

KATIE

Then what's in there?

ALLISON

Upon Jane's disappearance, I found this box left in my private office at the print shop. It contains three items. I believe these hints point to her killer.

ALLISON opens the box. The women look inside. KATIE takes the box.

ALLISON

We are both avid readers of the penny dreadfuls. Tales of murders solved by enigmatic clues are ... were her favourite. (chokes up) I am sure Jane never dreamed such a story as "Sweeney Todd," would happen to her.

KATIE

You're sayin' she's been made into a pie?

LOVEDAY

(quickly) We are so sorry, Miss Tinglepenny. It must be devastating for you.

ALLISON

(recovering) The letter, and the clue box, should help you discover the culprit. Please, find her murderer, before he finds me!

KATIE

Did Jane tell you anything? With, you know, words? Sentences?

ALLISON

These ruthless radicals are willing to sacrifice human lives to their ideals. To protect me, Jane would not speak her suspicions. I could not voice mine, either: Altogether too dangerous. Jane must have believed that if I were caught with this box, the murderer would simply be puzzled.

KATIE

So that's all you've got. The box.

ALLISON

There is a short note inside. In Jane's hand.

KATIE

Oh, good.

ALLISON

Which makes no sense. The case is now in your capable guardianship.

LOVEDAY

What will you do about your own safety?

ALLISON

That is my concern. These hints, and finding her killer, are yours. You may find me at Freedom Printers.

ALLISON moves to exit. Turns.

ALLISON

One more question. A rug was delivered to our shop last night, and/

KATIE

(looks at LOVEDAY) A rug? Is that pertinent to the case?

ALLISON

I'm afraid I don't know. I can venture that Jane purchased a large carpet for the shop, to dampen the noise of the printing press. But where on earth did she get the money?

The ladies are puzzled.

ALLISON

I will see if I can find a receipt. Good day.

KATIE

Wait! As professional detectives, Miss Tinglepenny, we do this for a living.

ALLISON

(beat) I will not charge you for printing the calling cards. (silence) They are ever so swank.

LOVEDAY and KATIE exchange glances.

LOVEDAY

We would love to accept the case, as we have tremendous sympathy for you.

ALLISON

Oh, thank you!

KATIE

But we need to eat.

ALLISON

(pleading) What about a scone?

LOVEDAY

Our fee is two quid per day.

KATIE

Miss Tinglepenny, we've acted in theaters all over London.

ALLISON

I don't understand.

KATIE

Meanin': nowadays, we make sure to get paid in advance.

ALLISON

(thinks) Ladies. Have you ever feared, really feared, for your life?

KATIE

(obviously) We are women.

ALLISON

Then, please believe me, and take my solemn word that I will return, today, with your fee.

The ladies nod agreement.

ALLISON

Thank you. Good morning.

ALLISON exits. They look after her.

LOVEDAY

There is a dismaying lack of legal due process within criminal organizations. Shall we involve Valeria?

KATIE

She's retired from detectin'. You saw: She flew outta here faster 'n a hairpiece in a hurricane.

LOVEDAY

But we have a box full of clues: It may tempt her back.

KATIE

I don't know she's temptable, Loveday. She's covered the yard with ceramic gnomes. It's the newest fashion from Germany.

LOVEDAY

I simply don't understand the appeal of gardening. It's housework, only worse, as one must do it outdoors. Plunging one's hands into filthy dirt; everything feeling so ... moist. A veritable nightmare.

KATIE

On the other hand, it cuts back on the horse manure in the street. I hope these clues will lead us to the anarchists! I'd love to beat the Special Branch Police at findin' em.

LOVEDAY

We must not fly too far towards the sun, lest we end up like Icarus. Let's stick to our poor, murdered Miss Jones.

They open the box, and take out the items one at a time. First, a tiny pocket-sized bible.

LOVEDAY

A bible.

KATIE

I guessed that. I've seen one before.

LOVEDAY

A bible for a very tiny, miniature Christian person.

KATIE

Maybe it's for convertin' garden gnomes.

KATIE sets the bible back and pulls a pocket watch out of the box.

KATIE

There's no clue in that. Unless the time somehow means somethin'.

LOVEDAY

Dashed if I know. It appears to be an ordinary pocket watch, with no engraving. It is stopped at eleven o'clock.

KATIE

A stopped watch means... let's see. When a person dies, time stands still for them. Maybe that's Jane. What about the number eleven?

LOVEDAY

The Frenchman, who is a suspect: his house number is eleven!

KATIE

Is that Mister Blancmange? The perfume maker?

LOVEDAY

He moved in a few weeks ago. Two doors away, in Anerley Manor.

KATIE

Why didn't you tell me right away? I'd like to meet a cultured Frenchman who knows how to treat a lady.

LOVEDAY

There is no such thing.

KATIE

Says you.

LOVEDAY

The French believe regular bathing is a conspiracy to bankrupt their perfume industry.

KATIE

I wasn't plannin' on givin' him a bath.

LOVEDAY

The timepiece might indicate the Frenchman. At Number 11.

KATIE

Where's the-? Here. A note. (reads) "Look at the clues, and at what is missin.'" Not helpful, Miss Jones.

LOVEDAY

"Missing?" I cannot make heads or tails of it.

KATIE

We've got enough to start. We've got our three suspects. Miss Jones' fiancée is a Deacon. As God's gift to London ...

LOVEDAY

Without question, dear Katie. The bible may very well refer to Deacon Manley. Our first step is clear. We must send for the Deacon to see if he's mislaid his pocket watch. Let us find a ragamuffin to summon him.

KATIE grabs her handbag from the sideboard; exits. LOVEDAY looks about, hides the box.

SCENE II. A half-hour later.

VALERIA enters with Inspector MARY PERKINS of Special Branch, Metropolitan Police. MARY wears an eyepatch and a skirt suit (not a police uniform) and speaks with a soft lower-class English accent. Throughout the scene, MARY prowls the room, handling and inspecting everything.

VALERIA
(genuinely impressed) A police inspector!

MARY
With the bizzies, mum. That's "police" to you. Special Branch. We're after them wot's plannin' to dynamite the city.

VALERIA
The anarchist's division, then? Please, have a seat, Inspector.

MARY
You've been followin' the radicals? In that case, I'm sure my visit will not be untoward-like. I'm charged to warn you that this street, your street, is to be the target of a dynamiter's bomb ... in accordance with certain on-the-quiet information as we've got.

LOVEDAY and KATIE enter.

VALERIA
This is Miss Loveday Fortescue, my sister, and Miss Katie Smalls. Scone?

KATIE and LOVEDAY signal "Don't!"

MARY
'ello, ladies. Inspector Mary Perkins, Special Branch. (noting the hand signals) Thank ye, Mum, that's right kind, but I've 'ad me breakfast.

LOVEDAY
Special Branch! Excellent. We are concerned about the possibility of bombings. It's been reported in the newspapers that your investigators are baffled.

MARY
Codswallop. Bafflement don't apply to us down at Special Branch.

LOVEDAY

So you have knowledge of these dynamiters: their identities?

KATIE

The place and time of their attacks?

MARY

No. But don't you worry, we'll 'ave all the details we need, miss, soon enough.

VALERIA

I don't understand why, Inspector, you insist our street is alleged to be a target. For example, this house is ladies, exclusively, most of whom live a spare existence.

MARY brings out a notebook in which she has drawn a map of their street. She makes a note.

MARY

An 'ouse of ill repute, then? A bawdyhouse?

VALERIA

I run a respectable lodging house.

LOVEDAY

The occupants are actresses, who toil under spotlights, not under ... the customers.

MARY

You don't say. From the looks of ye, respectability is a bit outside yer purview.

KATIE

You think we're anarchists?

MARY

There's anarchists wot are ladies. (to VALERIA) You, yer the one whose 'usband disappeared under the Thames, aren't you? Bleedin' unusual, don't you agree?

VALERIA

I was cleared at the inquest.

MARY

(gives her a hard look) Anarchists come in all shapes and sizes. Wear skirts and trousers alike.

LOVEDAY

(pointing to the map) What about that posh baron, living directly across the way? Lord Albert.

KATIE

Lord Phillip Ian Albert.

VALERIA

He is a disrespectful sod who doesn't know his angel's trumpet from a sticky willy.

MARY

I'm gonna pretend that comment never came outta yer mouth. (to all) Anarchists don't come from yer toff class, as a rule. It's the presence of excitable foreigners wot makes us wary. You see, there's a couple'a 'ot-'eaded immigrants along this street. (to KATIE) You an immigrant, Miss?

KATIE

I think of myself as a world traveler.

MARY

As you like. You 'igh-strung? Lotsa nerves? Strong sense a' justice?

KATIE

Nothin' wrong with wantin' justice.

LOVEDAY

Inspector, you must understand it may take disorder to bring about real change. As a long-time instructor of history/ I

VALERIA

You tutored children. You were a governess.

MARY

A radical sympathiser, eh?

LOVEDAY

I do not support bombers, as I do not support haphazardly blaming immigrants. (to MARY,) Where are you from?

MARY

You're lookin' at a proud Englishwoman, mum. Born right in Merseyside, raised by me English mam and dar. I worked 'ard to be put in Special Branch. If I were an immigrant, let's just say no amount of 'ard work would'a been enough. I've 'ad to earn respect ev'ry step o' the way.

MARY

Don't I get it all the time: "Wot might you be? Bermudan? West Indian? Egyptian?" Do I sound Egyptian?

LOVEDAY

I regret my error. I must say I am not familiar with seeing women such as yourself allied with the constabulary.

VALERIA

It is out of the ordinary: a woman inspector.

MARY

I'm wot you might call a test case, dear. I worked as a double agent for a time. Me former 'usband were a dynamiter, and I acquired a lotta 'is knowledge. 'ad two eyes, I did, till I got in with those blokes. But Sean's been gone three years, now. Departed, I'm afraid, to the land of saints and scholars.

KATIE

I'm so sorry. He died?

MARY

Returned to Ireland, mum.

VALERIA

Well, Miss Smalls is from America.

LOVEDAY

She is law-abiding, and no dynamiter.

MARY

Prepare yerselves, ladies. Ye've been warned. Special Branch uncovered a criminal conspiracy to blow up the Anarchists Bookshop, just two weeks ago.

KATIE

Wait. You're sayin' the radicals were plannin' to blow up their own bookstore? Wasn't that the police's /plot

MARY

T'were a proper doddle, wot we nipped in the bud!

VALERIA

Why would they blow up their own bookshop?

MARY

To distract suspicion away from themselves.

KATIE

Have you thought about that motive for more than a minute?
It's cattywampus.

LOVEDAY

It's preposterous! What do you suspect they will blow up
next: their own printing press? (points to Mary's map)
Because that is on the riverbank, and no danger to this
street.

MARY

As I said, we 'ave our insider information.

KATIE

Comin' from a reliable source?

MARY

No, mum, we went straightaway to an unreliable source. Give
yer chin a rest.

VALERIA

I believe we have the right / to question

MARY

Where's yer gratitude? Yer the ones wot we're tryin' to
protect!

LOVEDAY points on the map.

LOVEDAY

This pile of old stones is Lord Albert's residence.

MARY

(pointing) 'oo lives in this 'ouse: Number eleven?

VALERIA

That's Anerley Manor. There's a Frenchman, moved in recently.
Monsieur Henri Blancmange.

MARY

Frenchman, eh? Chances are 'e's guilty of somethin.' Likely
sev'ral things. I will be callin' on 'im, I promise you.
(tucks the map away.) Now. Smalls. Wot's yer thoughts on
these radical types?

KATIE

The law favors the powerful.

MARY

Does it now? D'ya mind terribly if I search yer 'andbag?

KATIE

My handbag?

LOVEDAY

I must register my objection. As I stated earlier, this lady is no bomber. Whilst I am pleased to see Special Branch has hired a woman, your reasoning disappoints me. Painting all non-English as hot-headed criminals is a fool's game.

MARY

Don't get peevish. I see yer standin' there wearin' gloves. Any partic'lar reason, Miss?

LOVEDAY

Huh! My hands ... are scarred. By fire.

MARY

Some kinda explosion?

LOVEDAY

A theatrical accident, Inspector.

KATIE

Why would I let you search my handbag?

MARY

To show yer cooperation, miss. To avoid takin' a ride down to 'eadquarters in me wagon.

KATIE reluctantly gives Mary her bag. MARY looks.

MARY

No cosmetics? Nothin' beautifyin' for yer face?

KATIE

They don't make face powder to flatter my skin. Besides, if this face gets any more beautiful, men'd be riotin' all over London.

MARY

Hmph. Unlikely. No smellin' salts?

KATIE

I'd sooner wear chain mail than a corset. You won't catch me fallin' over while I holler for the salts.

MARY

Tough one, eh? Fiddlesticks. I'm a bizzie in a cartload a' men wot thinks women are rubbish. Well, well, look 'ere.

A right nice 'and mirror. (She zuzzes her hair, adjusts her collar in the mirror.) I am commanderin' this, Miss Smalls.

KATIE

It's mine!

MARY

It's bein' confiscated as a material witness. To me beauty. (chuckles, pockets the hand mirror) Wot's this? (pulls it out) This 'ere's an anarchist pamphlet.

KATIE

I was curious.

VALERIA

She is a very nosey person.

MARY

(Reads from the pamphlet) "Equality is the key to liberty, justice and 'armony." That's extremist stuff, Miss!

KATIE

(puzzled) It is?

MARY

I'll just 'ang onto it. (gives back the bag, pockets the pamphlet) We 'ave information that you, Miss Katie Smalls, paid a visit to the Freedom Printin' Press Friday last.

VALERIA

There are no laws against visiting a local shop.

MARY

We know that establishment to be a den of anarchists wot publishes radical pamphlets. We're visitin' anybody who frequents that printers.

KATIE

I ordered some callin' cards. Once. By the by, they print hymn sheets for local churches, perfume labels, and theater playbills, too.

KATIE hands a calling card to MARY.

MARY

Callin' card, eh?

LOVEDAY

We are consulting detectives.

MARY

(reading a card, to KATIE) "Expert in murder?" Is there money in that, Miss... Murderin' people?

LOVEDAY

We find murderers who murder people, Inspector.

KATIE

(indicates LOVEDAY) We could help you investigate the anarchists. We could develop, you know, more intelligent theories of the case.

MARY

Wot ... Now yer sayin' I'm a pillock?

KATIE

No. Maybe. I don't know what that is. If it means you don't have the brains God gave a squirrel, then / yes.

LOVEDAY

Miss Smalls is merely pointing out / that

MARY

She could start a row in a empty 'ouse. Don't you lot get shirty with me.

LOVEDAY

Her brain fairly sizzles with theories, and I possess acute observation skills.

MARY

You observed me to be an immigrant, despite me accent. And the one with the pipin' 'ot brain carries anarchist leaflets in 'er 'handbag!

KATIE

If you're fixin' to arrest us, you're gonna need better evidence than that.

MARY

Stick a cork in it, and stay close to 'ome today. We'll be keepin' our eyes on the street. And on you.

VALERIA

Thank you, Inspector. May I show you out?

MARY

I can deduce me own way out the door. Good day.

MARY exits.

KATIE

Who ate the cream center outta her candy?

VALERIA

I believe Inspector Perkins suspects you, Katie.

LOVEDAY

She has got something to prove, I suppose, to the men of Special Branch. We women always must prove ourselves competent twice over ... and poor Mary, probably thrice.

KATIE

What she wants to prove is that I'm an anarchist. But for that she needs evidence, and what's she got? A leaflet that says "equality is good."

VALERIA

A reckless and possibly unlawful idea, in today's world. (beat) Well. I will be in the garden ... which is, after all, close to home.

LOVEDAY

Oh, don't go, sister!

KATIE

Hold up. We've got ourselves some clues.

VALERIA

I am not interested.

LOVEDAY

All this absorption in gardening makes me think you have an interest in the gentleman gardener across the way. You're buzzing 'round him like a bee 'round a jam pot.

KATIE

You sweet on Lord Albert? Want him to irrigate your hedgerow?

VALERIA

What a grotesque insinuation! I decline to spread my legs for a man who won't let me spread my wings.

KATIE

That makes for a ... confusing mental picture. But I support it, as an inspirational motto.

LOVEDAY

Which you will never say out loud again. Valeria, do you not languish for yesteryear's joys of amorous congress?

VALERIA

On the contrary. My experience in that regard is limited to Nigel, who was a perfect scobberlotcher.

LOVEDAY

(off KATIE's "huh?") Refused to finish the job.

VALERIA

Lord Albert has promised to reopen the investigation into my husband's death. He, like Nigel, wants me locked up. Or worse: dangling from the gallows.

LOVEDAY

Perhaps he wasn't serious. Sister, I know enduring his provocations is a trial/ but

VALERIA

I wish you wouldn't say, "trial!" Now, if you will excuse me, I really must go and propagate my masterwort!

KATIE and LOVEDAY are taken aback.

KATIE

Don't hurt yourself.

VALERIA

I want those scones eaten before I return.

VALERIA exits.

KATIE

We shouldn't tease her, Loveday, she's strung tighter than a fiddle peg.

LOVEDAY

Her disposition has been quicksilver since she abandoned the laudanum. I sometimes shiver that she might ... Well, I am uncertain what she might do.

MANLEY enters with handbills. The women startle.

MANLEY

A blessed morning, ladies!

LOVEDAY

I have grave doubts about that. How did you get into our house?

KATIE

Who are you? What do you want?

MANLEY

I walked in as a woman of some sort was just leaving; she held the door for me.

LOVEDAY

I will talk to Valeria about these incautious lodgers.

MANLEY

A street urchin urged me to pay you a visit. The urchin refused baptism, so, there's the lad damned for all eternity.

LOVEDAY

A street urchin? Oh! You mean a ragamuffin. Then you must be Deacon Morris Manley. I am Loveday Fortescue, and this is Miss Katie Smalls.

MANLEY

Glorious to meet you.

Awkward silence.

LOVEDAY

Right! We summoned you. As we are massively curious about your church.

MANLEY

We will host an uplifting service Sunday, in the Boxing Club on Holywell Street. You are most welcome to attend.

KATIE

A Sunday service. In a Boxing Club. (looks at LOVEDAY) On Holywell Street.

LOVEDAY

That street is a hotbed of radicals and spies, as well as printers who turn out tracts of blasphemy and obscenity.

KATIE

Ooooooh! Let me see.

KATIE grabs one of MANLEY's handbills, reads.

KATIE

Sunday worship, one hour long. With a sermon on "muscular righteousness." (hands it back) Kinda disappointin'.

MANLEY

Bare-knuckle boxing matches follow, at half one! My Church is affiliated with the boxing club, you see: The Church of the Sacred Sinews.

LOVEDAY

"Sacred Sinews," you say.

KATIE

Please tell us all about those.

MANLEY

Where there is church, there is civilization! And where there is a gymnasium, there are strong men to carry God's word... and ... other ... heavy items. Our church combines scriptural teachings with a concentration on physical fitness.

KATIE

The YMCA is a step ahead of you in that combination.

MANLEY

The YMCA stole the idea from us!

LOVEDAY

A bold accusation.

KATIE

I don't understand how scripture and bare knuckles got somehow linked together.

MANLEY

There is abundant moral and religious value in sport. And the Anglican Church has become all too soft, and weak. Manliness is next to godliness.

KATIE

Who told you that?

MANLEY

God. All three of Him share this view. (firm) One Corinthians: "Act like men, be strong." One Timothy: "Women, be quiet."

LOVEDAY

So, in your view, women are too ... what?

KATIE

(sotto voce) Eve. Apple.

MANLEY

Women are the root o' men's problems, to be sure.

LOVEDAY

In my own reading of scripture, I have identified a series of inconsistencies, which has led me to the disturbing conclusion: Some parts of the Bible may not be entirely true.

MANLEY

Baseless blasphemy! But since you have read your Bible (ahem), you have read that men, especially brawny men, such as Adam, have been given ultimate authority over everything on His Earth. Includin' and especially, women.

KATIE

Is there anybody alive who can testify Adam was "brawny?"

MANLEY

My dear lady. There is a sculpture of Adam's magnificent torso in the British Museum. A thrilling combination of tension and energy. A sublimely vacant expression on the face. The young man's serene beauty lies in the balanced arrangement of his gently muscled limbs, his large hands, his taut torso, ... (catches himself) and so forth.

LOVEDAY

I read about a curious incident with that statue of Adam and a ... was it a vicar? This was in the Gazette. Some unprintable deviance was performed upon the statuary.

MANLEY

No charges were brought! (quickly) I read about that, too.

KATIE

It's a fine marble torso. But we don't know it's even close to accurate. Adam mighta had scrawny legs. Accordin' to the bible, he didn't even have the right number of ribs.

MANLEY

What a b- (scans the garden) Beautiful garden! Your gladioli are as tall as church steeples. It calls to mind, Eden. One can almost see Adam, himself, striding about in his tiny fig leaf.

The women peek out the garden door.

LOVEDAY

(abruptly, to MANLEY) Do you know a Miss Jane Jones?

MANLEY

Jane! Do you know Jane? Have you spoken with her? Is that why you sent for me?

KATIE

She has not called on us, no. Why would she?

MANLEY

Jane is the one who writes up Sunday sermons, as I pace, and the words flow to my ear from God's own mouth. But she did not report today to do so.

KATIE

So, she has left you.

MANLEY

Jane has no reason to leave me! Jane and I are quite in love. With each other. See here, why these questions about Jane?

LOVEDAY

Jane's friend, Allison Tinglepenny, is worried for her.

MANLEY

Tinglepenny is an shameless tea tattler. This supposed friend has been spreading false and slanderous rumours about my relationship with Jane!

LOVEDAY

What exactly is your relationship with Miss Jones?

MANLEY

We are betrothed. Very happily. A man must choose for a wife a woman who can lift a good load of washing. Jane is such a lady.

KATIE

And you two are ...

MANLEY

Chaste and pure, I assure you. We never touch, never. We have been betrothed for a year, and have not yet brushed lips. That Miss Tinglepenny believes me to be an inappropriate match for her friend is difficult to comprehend.

KATIE

Hmmmm. Maybe it's the never kissin' part.

MANLEY

When we are together, Jane is chaperoned by her brother, Jerome. A fine, morally erect young man. I admit, it can be most challenging to hold back one's animal passions.

LOVEDAY

Ah. And have you set the date for your nuptials?

MANLEY

More questions! You're a prying one, aren't you?

KATIE

We're detectives, Deacon Manley. We're s'posed to snoop.

MANLEY

(an outburst) It's cursedly annoying! When Jane is nowhere to be found! And her detestable friend Miss Tinglepenny has been telling lies about me, poisoning her mind, and everyone else's! How in damnation am I to have my sermon completed by Sunday?

KATIE

Have you thought of seekin' Miss Jones at Freedom Printers?

MANLEY

You are the ones who summoned me! To what purpose? Not to learn about my church ... you are unbelievers.

LOVEDAY

Deacon, is it possible we ... have met before?

MANLEY

Cheese and rice! I've never seen you in all my life. What the devil do you want from me?

LOVEDAY

Can you tell us when the Freedom print shop opens?

KATIE

Yes! (quickly) And what time is it now?

MANLEY

You women are impossible to satisfy! (looks for his pocket watch, pats his pockets) Odd... I thought I ...

KATIE

The time, Deacon Manley?

MANLEY

Well, I, uh, I seem to have misplaced my timepiece.

KATIE

Fancy that.

LOVEDAY

Deacon Manley, I cannot shake the feeling that I know you from somewhere.

MANLEY

That is altogether implausible. Perhaps you have seen me walking about Battersea with my leaflets urging Saintliness in Sport. Meanwhile, you have not answered my questions about your own motives in questioning me!

LOVEDAY

I believe we have conversed before, in the past. It must have been before you became a deacon. I am not in the habit of befriending clergymen, on purpose.

There is a loud, offstage boom. All freeze.

KATIE

That sounded like an explosion!

KATIE runs outside to the garden.

LOVEDAY

An anarchist attack!

MANLEY

You believe it's the dynamiters?

MANLEY runs out the DL door. [QUICK CHANGE for MANLEY.] VALERIA hurries in from the garden.

VALERIA

Did you hear that loud blast?

LOVEDAY

(they hug) I did detect a certain thunderous, ear-splitting, earthshaking explosion, Valeria; thank you for asking.

VALERIA

It was not on our street!

LOVEDAY

It came from the direction of the river, did it not?

VALERIA

Yes, (indicates) that way!

LOVEDAY

Then it may be Freedom Printing press, after all. As Inspector Perkins agreed might happen.

VALERIA

I do not like it when the police are correct in their speculations.

LOVEDAY

Luckily, that occurs quite seldom. (looks around) Has Deacon Manley fled? Katie and I were interviewing him when the explosion occurred.

VALERIA

Deacon who?

LOVEDAY

Deacon Manley. Affianced to our client's murdered friend, Miss Jane Jones. There is, alas, no real love there, I infer.

VALERIA

Did he murder her?

LOVEDAY

Not likely. His manner of being in love, or, rather, whom he would love ... is a crime under our tremendously unreasonable British law. Miss Jones was his protection against scandal.

VALERIA

So theirs would have been a lavender marriage.

LOVEDAY

Exactly. Now, we cannot know if his betrothed gave a fig that Manley never touched her. Perhaps they had an understanding. Chastity may have been her to her liking.

VALERIA

There are greater inconveniences.

LOVEDAY

At any rate, the bible-believing boxer has got no pocket watch, and now he's run off. I must investigate further.

VALERIA

We were told to stay close to home.

MSSR. BLANCMANGE enters.

BLANCMANGE

Hallooh!?

VALERIA

Monsieur Blancmange!? How did you get in?

BLANCMANGE

Errrrrrrr....

LOVEDAY

Sister, he speaks only Francais. Let me. (to BLANCMANGE) How did you get in? Is the street damaged? Are you all right?

NOTE: BLANCMANGE's lines, spoken in English with a French accent, are not understood by any character except LOVEDAY, whose "French" is also spoken in English with a French accent.

BLANCMANGE

There was a BOOM! And I came to see if the ladies needed my assistance. A man was running into the street, praying loudly. I slipped past him to enter. Our street is untouched.

VALERIA

(to LOVEDAY) What does he say? Besides "Boom!" I mean.

LOVEDAY

The street is intact, and Deacon Manley let him in. Why do we bother to have a front door at all?

VALERIA

Stop whingeing. I cannot deal with our front door every minute of the day: not when I am baking and gardening. Now, tell him the police will be coming for him, as he is an immigrant. And French.

LOVEDAY

Monsieur Blancmange, the Special Branch believes that there is a universal profile of the anarchist bomber, and that the culprit is invariably an immigrant. Probably French.

BLANCMANGE

Merde!

LOVEDAY

He declares that to be rubbish.

VALERIA

That is not what he said.

BLANCMANGE

These English are afraid of their own sleeves. I am an aroma merchant, not an anarchist.

LOVEDAY

Perhaps if your countryman Monsieur Bourdin had not sought to blow up the Greenwich Observatory, French emigres to London would not be seen as a threat.

BLANCMANGE

Bourdin! That clumsy bungler. Dynamited himself, and harmed the Observatory but little. Such incompetence drives mustard up my nose! Bourdin did not put one small scratch on that wretched English clock.

LOVEDAY

(to VALERIA) The French are huffy about our Greenwich clock. It means the world is forced to march to Britain's mean time. ("in French," to BLANCMANGE) I apologize for England, for designating the Prime Meridian. I know it should, by rights, travel through Paris. Take comfort in the fact that your Napoleon invented the magnificent metric system.

BLANCMANGE

(admiring, he tries to take LOVEDAY by the elbow) Miss Fortescue, you understand me so deeply, and I delight to see you are unharmed from projectiles. I have admired you since I moved to this street.

LOVEDAY

("in French") Your admiration is altogether unwelcome, sir.

VALERIA

What did he say?

LOVEDAY

(extricates herself) He does not think highly of Bourdin.

VALERIA

And what else? I believe he has taken a fancy to you.

LOVEDAY

If you put it in a petticoat, he would take a fancy to a lamppost.

BLANCMANGE

Eh? "Petticoat?"

VALERIA

You must warn him, Lord Albert is seeking admittance into the Horticulture Society.

LOVEDAY

That is hardly the most desperate crisis we face.

VALERIA

It is dire, nonetheless.

LOVEDAY

Honestly. (to BLANCMANGE) Monsieur, please do not sponsor Lord Albert into the ... that garden club.

BLANCMANGE

And what sweet favour will you grant me if I oblige? I admit, I feel a lightning bolt for you, Miss Fortescue.

LOVEDAY

I beg you, stop this. I will grant you no favours. You insist on embodying every last cliché about Frenchmen.

BLANCMANGE

But I can cook!

LOVEDAY

I regret to inform you that is yet another cliché. Please, Monsieur, can you give me the time?

BLANCMANGE

(takes out a pocket watch affixed to a chain) Come over here and sit by me, to see the hour more closely. I do not use your "official" English time.

LOVEDAY

Despite my polite request, and the unfavourable expression on my face, you remain aggravatingly forward. (re his pocket watch) That pocket watch looks brand new.

BLANCMANGE

It is! I am proud as a pappa with a new baby.

VALERIA

Did you ask him about the Society?

LOVEDAY

Stop mithering, Valeria! You and your Horticulture, your trellises, and your row with Lord Albert, that absolute fuddling moon-calf! These are of no importance! Not when we are trying to keep the anarchists from killing Allison Tinglepenny, our client!

Enter a solemn MARY. MARY is gloved
and carries a linen bag.

VALERIA

Inspector Perkins.

LOVEDAY

(to VALERIA) Have you distributed our door key to the general population?

MARY

The door was wide open. I closed it.

LOVEDAY

For pity's sake! (beat) Can you please tell us what's happened?

MARY

The dynamiters have struck.

LOVEDAY

That could not be more obvious. But they did not strike on this street, as you warned us.

MARY

They struck where you, Miss Fortescue, predicted they might: at Freedom Printers. Care to say what led you to that idea?

LOVEDAY

I was making a joke.

MARY

Not funny, is it?

VALERIA

Are you still on about the anarchists blowing up their own shops?

BLANCMANGE steps up to MARY and attempts to kiss her hand.

BLANCMANGE

Bonjour. Suddenly I am up to my derriere in English roses!

MARY

Get away from me, Crapaud, and don't touch the bag!

BLANCMANGE

Stupid roast bif!

MARY

A bit aggressive, inn' 'e?

LOVEDAY

You did start the name calling.

VALERIA

This is Monsieur Blancmange, of Anerley Manor.

LOVEDAY

He doesn't speak English.

MARY

(loudly) French bloke, eh? I've 'eard about you.

LOVEDAY

I will translate, Inspector. I once played Catherine de Valois in Henry the Fifth! I am magniloquent in French.

MARY

Wot's that mean? "Overly theatrical?"

VALERIA

The exact definition.

MARY

Very well, then. But keep the drama to a minimum.

LOVEDAY

(to BLANCMANGE, in "French") Inspector Mary Perkins. From Special Branch. (to MARY) He appeared at our door moments after the explosion occurred. He cannot be the bomber.

MARY

Yer Fenians use time bombs. This man's innocence is far from proved.

VALERIA

I can't swear to his innocence. I can say without fear of error that he isn't a Fenian, nor any kind of Irish. Besides, the Fenians haven't bombed anything for a decade.

BLANCMANGE

What is the lady saying?

LOVEDAY

This lady says that you are not Irish. This other lady, the inspector, says you exploded the Freedom Print Shop.

BLANCMANGE

Impossible! They were making dinner party invitations for me!

LOVEDAY

(to MARY) He is unhappy. They were his printers, and now his dinner invitations are shredded to oblivion.

BLANCMANGE

I have a waterproof alibi!

LOVEDAY

Monsieur Blancmange claims to have an alibi.

BLANCMANGE pulls up his cuff.

BLANCMANGE

See this? A fresh burn. It still stings me!

LOVEDAY

Uh. And how did you receive this ... fresh burn?

BLANCMANGE

I was making a bombe with my Russian comrade. He will vouch for me.

LOVEDAY

(stares) Would you please say that again?

BLANCMANGE

I was making a fancy dessert. With my friend, Alexi Popov. A chocolate bombe.

MARY

Tell 'im that "I were poppin' off a bomb with a Russian bloke" is a terrible alibi. What's next? "I were at home with me ma?"

LOVEDAY

A bombe is a dessert, Inspector.

MARY

Don't piss on me boots and tell me it's Scotch mist. Ask 'im what's 'e think of 'er majesty? Wot's 'is politics?

LOVEDAY

You cannot ask him that; it is not a crime to disrespect the Queen. (MARY stares.) All right, Monsieur, do you uh, hold Queen Victoria in high regard?

BLANCMANGE

I cannot bear queens and kings. We French got rid of those people, (guillotine gesture). We are better off.

MARY

I'll take that as disrespectin' 'er majesty. 'e should know this is not just a bomb enquiry. We're investigatin' the murder of a Miss Allison Tinglepenny.

LOVEDAY

(horrified) Miss Tinglepenny? Allison Tinglepenny!

VALERIA

MARY takes a scarf from the bag.

MARY

Found at the scene: 'er scarf. Sorta flash and cheap, but who am I to judge others' taste in ugly garments?

VALERIA

How can you be sure it belongs to Miss Tinglepenny?

MARY

It was discovered under the rubble at 'er place of work. (looks into the bag) Then there's 'er thumb. No, it's not pretty to look at, and it seems sad and lonely-like, all by itself. But don't it tell a story!

*

LOVEDAY looks in the bag, shudders.

LOVEDAY

Inspector, Miss Tinglepenny visited us this morning. She and Miss Jane Jones, both, received disturbing correspondence. To wit: threatening letters, from the anarchists.

VALERIA

She did not wear a scarf. I cannot speak to the, uh, thumb.

MARY

You never mentioned- Hmmm. Maybe anarchists exploded the shop to make good on their threats. You, there, Jay-Queez.

LOVEDAY

I'll translate.

MARY

(sigh) If there's no other way. Do ye deny ye bombed the print shop?

LOVEDAY

(in "French") Monsieur, are you a bomber?

BLANCMANGE shakes his head
vigorously.

LOVEDAY
He is shaking his head. In French, this signifies "no."

MARY
What in the 'ell? So he does NOT deny 'e's a bleedin' bomber?

LOVEDAY
Oh, wait! I may have mistranslated.

MARY
Tell 'im I'll be takin' 'im over to the crime scene, to
survey the damage. And don't tell 'im: I'll be watchin' 'is
face wot likely will be glowin' in glee at an explosion job
well done.

LOVEDAY
(To BLANCMANGE) She wants you to accompany her.

BLANCMANGE
Of course, if you say so, Miss Fortescue!

LOVEDAY
He'll go along.

MARY
Move yer bum, then.

MARY and BLANCMANGE cross to the
door. She slaps his hand away,
pauses, turns.

LOVEDAY
Yes, Inspector?

MARY
Where's that American? The one with the radical pamphlet? Not
'ere, is she?

VALERIA and LOVEDAY exchange looks.

LOVEDAY
I'm not certain.

VALERIA
In her room, Inspector. She wasn't feeling well.

LOVEDAY

She was upset by the explosion, and ran upstairs.

MARY

I'll need to interview 'er. Tell 'er so.

BLANCMANGE and MARY exit. [QUICK
CHANGE for MARY.]

LOVEDAY

Why is Katie in her room?

VALERIA

I don't know that she is. It seemed a safe lie to tell Perkins.

LOVEDAY

You are deceiving the police, Valeria? Again?

VALERIA

My lying to the police has been rather successful so far.

LOVEDAY

It is a bad idea ... If the Inspector learns we are lying about Katie, it will only increase her suspicions.

VALERIA

Katie ran past me and out the garden gate when the bomb blast occurred. I could not say "she's run away!" Not when Inspector Perkins is set on arresting a foreigner, no matter their innocence.

LOVEDAY

I wonder about the warning that our street would be attacked.

VALERIA

Some other street was the target, it appears.

LOVEDAY

Who benefits from such an attack? I mean, not the anarchists! (silence) My answer is: An attack like this is certain to keep Special Branch in business, well-staffed, and well-funded.

VALERIA

Perkins wouldn't blow up a building.

LOVEDAY

But think: The ambitions of the government and those of the anarchists are exactly aligned.

They both seek to create fear. Shakespeare wrote, "Gives not the hawthorn bush a sweeter shade / To shepherds, looking on their silly sheep, / Than doth a rich embroidered canopy / To kings that fear their subjects' treachery?"

VALERIA

What in the name of all that is comprehensible does that mean? (silence) Please go on.

LOVEDAY

Special Branch uses fear of the anarchists' bombs to make the populace obedient. Meanwhile, anarchists use fear of government overreach to urge ordinary people to rebel. Two sides, same coin. And since the Fenians were routed years ago, the authorities must manufacture both attacks and plots to keep all of us in fear, and in check.

VALERIA

So you believe the attacks on the print shop and the anarchists book store are false flags?

LOVEDAY

I am sure of it.

KATIE and ALLISON enter from the garden. ALLISON, clutching her throat, leans on KATIE.

VALERIA

Allison Tinglepenny?

LOVEDAY

It's not possible! She was exploded.

KATIE

Help us!

They scramble to lay ALLISON on the bench. She drops her bag.

LOVEDAY

(staying by ALLISON) Loosen her collar! What happened? Was she injured in the blast?

KATIE

I found her outside, in the street. Poisoned, looks like.

VALERIA

Don't be so hasty. The Inspector said she was exploded.

LOVEDAY

Do you mark it? She's got both her thumbs.

KATIE

She's fightin' for her very breath, and there is no way she ran over from the bombin' site.

VALERIA

It may be natural causes. The cholera, perhaps. Or a nasty case of dysentery.

KATIE

She and Jane Jones both got threats to their lives: It's the anarchists!

ALLISON rallies for a moment.

KATIE

Miss Tinglepenny?

ALLISON

He's got ... her ... handbasket.

ALLISON beckons to KATIE, and in a stage whisper chokes out:

ALLISON

You ... You ...

She coughs, trembles, and dies.
Tableau. END OF ACT ONE.

ACT TWO. SCENE ONE. The three Ladies onstage, alone. No body in sight. KATIE, focused, anticipating imminent arrest, practices her fan attacks.

LOVEDAY

Let us first review the facts. The police believe Allison, our client, has been dynamited. Terribly careless of Special Branch to accept a scarf and a thumb as definitive proof of her death. But ...fortunate for us.

VALERIA

We had nothing to do with her death, and I don't wish to be implicated.

LOVEDAY

I don't, either. Nevertheless, a dead woman stashed in our wardrobe may be viewed as "implicating us."

VALERIA

A corpse in my lodging house: it is discomfiting. You two have dragged me into a sorry situation!

LOVEDAY

To play the victim in this particular circumstance is unseemly: You are thoroughly alive, and poor Allison is not.

VALERIA

We must rid ourselves of the body before the inspector returns. (thinks) I have a wheelbarrow in the garden. We can bring her to the cat's meat man!

LOVEDAY

Cat's meat was a fine solution for the body of the killer constable. However, if we bring the man another dead body, he'll think it has become a habit.

They watch KATIE wield her fan.

LOVEDAY

Please stop that, Katie. We need time to think. The noise may attract attention.

KATIE

I am ready to resist arrest!

LOVEDAY

You do understand if we do not solve the murder immediately, we are in a predicament.

VALERIA

In her last words, she whispered to Katie. She said "You. You."

KATIE

Because, as my client, she was givin' me a clue! A mystifyin' clue about her murderer.

LOVEDAY

What clue?

KATIE

I just said it was mystifyin'! She also said, "He has her handbasket." "He," not she. Not me. Meanin' the murderer kept a hold of Jane Jones's delivery basket. (beat) If you two believe I killed poor Miss Tinglepenny, I'm leavin'!

LOVEDAY

I absolutely do not.

VALERIA

I do wonder: why would she say "you?"

KATIE

She was tryin' to say, "You gotta catch him," or "You failed me." Or, "You better be careful or he'll kill you next." I thought you were my friends!

LOVEDAY

Your innocence is a given.

VALERIA

Not to the police. Someone should play Devil's advocate.

LOVEDAY

I don't believe in the devil.

KATIE

That's right, and what are you doin' advocatin' for him?

VALERIA

I am not accusing you. But to ask the question is both sane and sensible.

KATIE

Your sanity has fled the scene, and you passed "sensible" a dozen garden gnomes ago.

LOVEDAY

We must determine how to proceed. Ah! We could send Katie to Spain to evade the authorities, / and

KATIE

I didn't do anything!

VALERIA

I should like to go to Spain.

LOVEDAY

Ladies! Forget about Spain. We must concentrate on solving the murder.

VALERIA

I must concentrate on ... foiling Lord Albert.

LOVEDAY

Blinking hell! (to Katie) Where did you find Allison?

KATIE

She stood in the middle of our road, doubled over. She was shaking like a sobbin' child, yet never made a sound. I led her here through the garden. You saw what happened next.

VALERIA

(standing) I will leave you to it.

LOVEDAY

Please stay, Valeria.

VALERIA

I observe that not one scone has been touched.

KATIE

Somebody died! Nobody's hungry!

LOVEDAY

Sister, we must address murder, not unconsumed scones!

VALERIA begins to exit UL. Turns.

VALERIA

Berries. I believe berries are the vital missing ingredient.

VALERIA exits.

LOVEDAY

Katie! There has been a rupture in the fundament of the universe!

KATIE

I know it. Valeria won't stop makin' scones.

LOVEDAY

No. Against all mathematical laws of probability, Valeria has said something helpful. (KATIE is expectant) The notion of a missing ingredient.

KATIE

We talkin' about ... berries?

LOVEDAY

Where is our box of clues?

KATIE

Maybe she's talkin' about herself. We prolly need all three of us to figure this out.

KATIE gets the box from the fireplace.

KATIE

There are two solid clues. They shout, "Deacon Manley." But these are clues to Miss Jones's disappearance, not Allison's poisoning.

LOVEDAY

That is what I wonder. I feel a gratifying itch of suspicion, which I must scratch.

Opens the box, takes out the nota, hands it to KATIE.

KATIE

(quietly) Thank you for believin' I'm innocent.

LOVEDAY

Don't be silly. You are no more murderer than I am. Or Valeria.

They look at each other, recalling the Constable. And Nigel.

KATIE

So. (thinks) Miss Jane Jones, R.I.P., leaves a box of clues for her friend.

LOVEDAY

Including a scrawled note: "Look at what is missing."

KATIE

How can we look at what's missin'? That's the definition of missin': you can't look at it.

LOVEDAY

We are detectives, not sorcerers. There must be something missing, that we can see, in the box.

KATIE

"Look at what is missing." So Jane removed somethin'... (light bulb) from the clues themselves! From the bible and the watch. And those clues likely point to a second villain, not the Deacon, or why would she go to the trouble?

LOVEDAY

Excellent, Katie. I believe that's correct.

VALERIA enters DL with a pail.
Crosses and exits into the garden.
KATIE watches her.

LOVEDAY

The Bible. What is left out?

KATIE

I don't know.

She flips through the Bible pages.

KATIE

It's the New Testament. Could be part of a set.

LOVEDAY

Ah. "Set," Katie, "Set!" That is how I know Manley! He was employed at the Hope Mill Theater when I appeared in "Much Ado About Nothing." (thinks) He called himself "Elijah Stanley." (remembering) He was beefier then, and bewhiskered.

KATIE

He does seem kinda fraudulent.

LOVEDAY

He was somewhat skilled at building flats. He was something of a hanger-on, and lasted but a season. He became infuriated with one of the management.

KATIE

That happens all the time, durin' every show, at every theater.

LOVEDAY

Yes, but Elijah stole the weekend's ticket revenue from the till and went into hiding. He also was the subject of all sorts of rumours.

KATIE

I never pay attention to rumors. (beat) Well, what were they?

LOVEDAY

That he was involved in other petty thefts, and would stoop to crime if his means were scarce. I can assure you, at that time, Elijah could not tell Jesus of Nazareth from Tess of the d'Urbervilles.

VALERIA enters with the pail, exits
DL. KATIE watches her.

LOVEDAY

Look here. "Ephesians" and then ... "Colossians."

KATIE

They are letters, from Paul.

LOVEDAY

It jumps from page 351 to page 358. What is missing is seven pages. Where is a bible? Would one of the lodgers keep one?

LORD ALBERT bursts in. He has a
bandage on his non-dominant hand.
KATIE wields her fan. LOVEDAY slams
the box.

KATIE

Lord Albert! You sneaked up on us.

ALBERT

Excuse me. I'm looking for ... Have you seen- (thinking,
changes tack) Have either of you seen the Frenchman?

LOVEDAY

How did you get in?

ALBERT

The front door was open.

LOVEDAY

Blasted Perkins! This house enjoys freer access than the public library.

ALBERT

I have a pressing inquiry for Monsieur Blancmange about joining the London Horticulture Society. Is he about?

KATIE

Did you try his house?

ALBERT

His front door is locked.

LOVEDAY

It is lovely someone's is.

ALBERT

Where could he have disappeared to? (to LOVEDAY, advancing on the armoire) I will wait. Will you kindly put away my hat?

ALBERT advances on the armoire.
LOVEDAY takes his hat, turns, puts
it on the sideboard.

ALBERT

(to KATIE) What about you? Didn't I note you struggling with a woman in the street? You were roughing up the poor thing.

KATIE

You must be seein' things. I don't struggle.

ALBERT

(re the armoire) Wasn't there a desk here, in the past?

LOVEDAY

I moved it. What happened to your hand, Lord Albert?

ALBERT

Oh! My cat gave me a tiny scratch. It's nothing. Now, regarding the Frenchman /

KATIE

Monsieur Blancmange left with Inspector Perkins.

ALBERT

With a Police Inspector? Has Blancmange been arrested?

LOVEDAY

We don't know. She suspects / him of planting a bomb at Freedom Printers.

ALBERT

/ "She!"

LOVEDAY

(ignores him) But the shop was printing invitations for him, so Monsieur Blancmange's detonating the place seems unlikely.

KATIE

(to ALBERT) Seein' as he's not English, I s'pose you suspect him, too. Scapegoatin' him would be right up your alley.

ALBERT

Right up my what?

KATIE

(beat) Don't tempt me, Lord Albert.

ALBERT

The man is a foreigner, as are you, and thus must be viewed with extreme mistrust. Meanwhile, I must direct you to display an attitude of deference.

KATIE

I curtsy for no man.

LOVEDAY

Miss Smalls' reputation in the curtsy resistance is firmly established.

ALBERT

You women posture like you are single malt scotch, when in reality you are soured milk. Surely, even you can understand that these anarchists must be caught, and hanged.

KATIE

I'm not defendin' mob violence. But people wantin' things to change for the better is only natural.

ALBERT

On the contrary: complacency is the natural state of human nature. Those who reject complacency must get the noose.

KATIE

Tell us which anarchists, exactly, are you fixin' to hang?

ALBERT

All of them, preferably! If a few innocents swing, what's the bloody harm? We don't have the luxury of determining who is guilty and who is not.

LOVEDAY

Presumption of innocence is not a luxury. This is an utter abandonment of the law.

ALBERT

I make the law, Miss. If necessary, I change the law.

ALBERT runs his hand along the
armoire.

ALBERT

This is a most aesthetically-pleasing cupboard. Chippendale?

LOVEDAY

Miss Eileen Grey. A woman. Self-taught. Irish. (Disgusted, ALBERT leaves the armoire. beat) Why would you change the law to remove the principle of presumption of innocence?

ALBERT

Because Britain must remain a land of harmony and peace.

LOVEDAY

Excuse me. British military conquests around the world are achieved with, what: gentlemanly handshakes? No: With munitions. Gunpowder. Deaths by the thousands.

ALBERT

That is for the purpose of the civilisation of uncivilised foreigners. You are English. Where is your patriotism?

LOVEDAY

English patriotism hasn't turned me into a bloodthirsty jackwagon. Perhaps I am an exception?

ALBERT

As a decorated dragoon, I am quite aware you women wouldn't understand.

KATIE

You cut the ears off Burmese soldiers, as trophies. Is that civilized?

ALBERT

(ignores LOVEDAY) Burma is under British rule, now, and at peace. I have the medals to prove it.

LOVEDAY

So, you blow up people for the purpose of subjugation, and for that you are decorated. Ironic, that.

KATIE

"Land of harmony and peace," my Aunt Fanny.

ALBERT

Anarchists claim to respect no law. I say: give them what they want. Send the judges home and fetch the executioner!

LOVEDAY

I would try to change your mind. But it would be like changing a baby's nappy: far too messy for an all-too-temporary result.

ALBERT

You would insult a Lord, and an ailing one at that?

LOVEDAY

"Ailing?" Ah, that's right, you crumpled in the House of Lords after they ridiculed your debating skills. I suspect that was not illness, but cowardice.

ALBERT

Slander! My doctor says I am bilious.

KATIE

I'm not gettin' in the middle of this. (to ALBERT) Don't you ever talk to me about hangin' innocent people. (to LOVEDAY) I'm gonna go hunt for a bible.

KATIE exits UL.

ALBERT

Your insolence is matter-of-course, given your sister. But I must find the Frenchman. I am sure he will agree to be my sponsor.

LOVEDAY

How refreshing to see your prejudices do not extend to those who can grant you favours.

ALBERT

The American ... what do you know about her? I will swear to you I saw her dragging another woman through our street.

LOVEDAY

You're mistaken.

VALERIA enters downstage.

VALERIA

There is now a lovely batch of berry scones in the oven.

ALBERT

Good afternoon. "Scones," you say?

VALERIA

Lord Albert. You've turned up again, like a bad ha'penny.

ALBERT

My dear lady. I am contrite for my contrariness this morning.

VALERIA

You threatened me!

ALBERT

Surely you must welcome a new enquiry into Nigel's disappearance ... so that all these nasty, lingering doubts may be cleared up.

LOVEDAY

You are the one casting doubts, where there are none.

ALBERT

I am so sorry if I have offended, in the most terribly sincere way. A thousand apologies, again.

VALERIA

It's like hearing "I love you" from one's husband. After a while it loses all meaning.

ALBERT

You will come to regret treating me with such casual rudeness. I will seek the Frenchman elsewhere.

ALBERT heads for the door. Turns.

ALBERT

I believe I know how to "persuade" the coroner to reopen an investigation into Nigel Hunter's case.

ALBERT displays two fifty-pound notes.

ALBERT

He may even be convinced to uncover an eyewitness to the murder. Good day, ladies.

LOVEDAY

("in French") Bugger off, you stinking goat turd!

ALBERT

(at the door) What did you say?

LOVEDAY

("in French") Bugger off, you stinking goat turd! (in English) It means "Hello there, honorable sir!" in French. Call it out to Monsieur Blancmange. He will befriend you, straightaway.

ALBERT

("in French," practicing) Bugger off, you stinking goat turd! (beat) How kind. Thank you very much!

ALBERT sniffs at VALERIA, exits.

LOVEDAY

You might consider sponsoring him. You would benefit.

VALERIA

I'd sooner poke my face into a beehive. That man deserves what is coming to him. (oops) He will be shunned by the Horticulture Society. I will return when my scones are ready.

VALERIA heads for the garden.

LOVEDAY

Valeria! Valeria, wait. Please sit down, dear sister.

VALERIA

I must deadhead the rhododendrons.

LOVEDAY

Your rhododendrons can sod off. Now. You have, of late, lost your customary cheery sunniness. (silence at this ridiculous comment) Tell me: whatever is the matter with you?

A moment, while VALERIA feels the weight of the world.

VALERIA

What is the bloody use?

LOVEDAY
The bloody use of what?

VALERIA
Of ... anything.

LOVEDAY
Valeria.

VALERIA
That rubbish fire of a lord is going to re-open Nigel's inquiry. You heard him: He will bribe some ruffians to testify that they saw me swipe Nigel with an oar!

LOVEDAY
There is no body. Oar swipe or no, you are in the clear.

VALERIA
You misunderstand: my concerns are far-flung. Two of my Needlework Society friends have succumbed to the Russian influenza. Parliament is embracing lawlessness. Our severe winter froze the River Thames.

LOVEDAY
I know the state of the Thames worries you, as Nigel's remains are missing therein. But it has thawed, and nothing was found amiss.

VALERIA
Do you not see that the world is in utter collapse?

A moment.

LOVEDAY
Have you been reading the Daily Mail again, Valeria?
(silence) I warned you about obsessively reading that rag.

VALERIA
I never listen to you.

LOVEDAY
You cannot confront the ill condition of the world by doing needlework, and puttering about in your kitchen and garden. You must solve Allison's murder, with us.

VALERIA
(head up) My hobbies are therapeutical.

LOVEDAY

Do not wield that stubborn chin against me, sister. The daily avalanche of distressing news, over which we are powerless, is a fact of modern life. But you must resist the pull of the tabloid papers. You must seize control of your own life, as, as... as a vicious tiger seizes a helpless baby!

VALERIA

Who am I in this scenario? The baby?

LOVEDAY

No. I simply mean: take decisive action.

VALERIA

I am taking decisive action!

LOVEDAY

I see nothing but fribbling and dithering.

VALERIA

And I hear nothing but your tut-tutting.

LOVEDAY

My apologies. What you can do, right now, is help Katie and me solve Miss Tinglepenny's murder. Please join us. Please. It will prove a more satisfying form of comfort than collecting garden gnomes.

VALERIA

You ... may be right.

They hug.

LOVEDAY

Of course I'm right.

VALERIA

Don't be insufferable.

LOVEDAY

Above all, there is something vital we must do. (nods toward the cupboard) Sister, we must empty the cupboard. Immediately.

VALERIA

(beat) I will fetch my wheelbarrow. We will move the poor woman's body into ... the garden shed.

VALERIA exits out the garden.
LOVEDAY looks after her. Wants to
cry. Strengthens. Blackout.

Scene Two. A half hour later. The
Victorian Ladies are gathered
around the clue box. KATIE has
Allison's handbag and a normal-
sized Bible.

KATIE

I've been thinkin'. That Frenchman bottles perfume. Perfumes
can be made from all kinds of poison plants and flowers, like
belladonna, lily of the valley, oh! And wisteria.

LOVEDAY

Quite right, Katie, we must keep that in mind. However, Lord
Albert's garden can surely yield deadly substances, and any
of these men has access to common rat poison. For now, let's
turn our minds to what is missing.

VALERIA

That was my idea.

LOVEDAY

Granted.

KATIE

You're assumin' the two ladies' fates are intertwined?

LOVEDAY

The threatening letter indicates as much. But it is
typewritten, and points to no single suspect.

VALERIA

Hmm. This clue box escapade is remarkably convoluted.

KATIE

Right in line with the hobby these ladies loved: readin'
lurid stories.

LOVEDAY

The missing clues somehow signify, not Deacon Manley, but
someone else. Yes. That is what my intuition tells me.

KATIE

That's what I told you.

LOVEDAY

If you like.

VALERIA

Loveday, you do not believe in women's intuition.

LOVEDAY

Of course, yes, an intuition must be borne out by the facts.
And the facts are, / that these women ...

The garden door opens. In stumbles
MANLEY, handcuffed with hands
behind his back, roughly held by
MARY PERKINS. MANLEY is ticking
softly.

MANLEY

Get out of my way! Get away from me! Let me go!

MARY

Grab 'im! Grab 'im, you lot! 'e's blown up the print shop!

KATIE readies her fan, and LOVEDAY
grabs and wields an umbrella.

LOVEDAY

Bar the doors! Oh, never mind.

VALERIA

Who is this?

MANLEY

You have no right to detain a man of the cloth. I claim
sanctuary in this house!

VALERIA

What was this man doing in my garden? I must ensure no harm
has come to my garden gnomes.

VALERIA exits the garden door.

MARY

'e were 'idin' in the gladioli. (grabbing his collar) You're
good and got, Manley. You can stop tryin' to escape.

MANLEY

You would lay your hands on a Deacon of the Sacred Sinews?

KATIE

You're no clergyman. You're / a fraud!

LOVEDAY

You're a stagehand! And a thief!

MARY

'e's an anarchist bomber!

KATIE

(beat) What's that noise?

They listen, silent. Ticking continues.

KATIE

That ticking sound.

LOVEDAY

An incendiary device. It's activated!

MARY

Impossible. I patted 'im down.

KATIE

He stuffed it where you failed to pat, Inspector. Let me rummage. I'll ransack him.

MANLEY

You may not! It is unchaste! It flies against the laws of God and society for a woman to plunge her hand into my hallowed trousers! May hellfire rain-

KATIE approaches him, ready to stick her hand in his trousers.

MANLEY

The sinfulness!

LOVEDAY

(admiring) The cheek.

VALERIA enters, a gardening fork behind her back. She inches into position. KATIE reaches into MANLEY's trousers and produces a time bomb.

KATIE

(retrieving a small device) The bomb!

The ticking becomes louder.

LOVEDAY

Katie, dismantle that immediately!

KATIE

Me!!?

MANLEY

How dare you display such a lack of civility! I am appalled:
To come after my underthings; you will be damned forever to
the lake of fire!

KATIE tries to give the bomb to
MARY, who evades her.

KATIE

You arrested him, and you missed it! Take it!

MARY

(to KATIE) Yer the anarchist! Ye can disarm it!

MANLEY

She's an anarchist?

VALERIA

She isn't!

KATIE

(to MANLEY) I'm not!

LOVEDAY

Under no conditions would Katie build a bomb!

MANLEY

I never blew up that print shop. I never killed anybody!

KATIE

(to MANLEY) How do I dismantle it? Tell me. Do you wanna get
blown to bits?

VALERIA has brought in a weeding
fork, with which she threatens
MANLEY.

MANLEY

Away from me, she-devil!

VALERIA

Tell her how to disarm it! Now.

LOVEDAY

She'll pierce you with her (not sure) garden weapon, unless
you tell us, straight away, how to switch off the device!

VALERIA

You will bleed out slowly, as we flee, and fragments of the
building rain down about you!

MANLEY

What harridans live here? The crown! Pull out the crown!

KATIE is puzzled. VALERIA wields
the weeding fork.

KATIE

The crown? What is that? Where is it?

LOVEDAY

It's the winder. (why-nder)

MANLEY

Damnably witch! The wind-y thing on top of the timing device.

KATIE pulls on the crown. The
ticking stops. Everyone exhales.

LOVEDAY

Take him out of our house, Inspector. You should never have
dragged him into our parlor in the first place.

MARY

What were 'e doin' in yer garden? 'e a friend a' yers?

KATIE

You saw him hidin' in the gladioli: He was trespassin'.

LOVEDAY

He is no friend of ours. He's not even a real deacon. And
it's not our fault he sneaked in!

VALERIA

Oh, my. I fear I neglected to latch the gate.

LOVEDAY

Valeria! This is your home, and it could not be any more
permeable.

MARY takes MANLEY by the elbow.

MANLEY

Inspector, there is a perfectly reasonable explanation for my
having that device down my drawers.

MARY

(shakes her head) You'd best 'ope so. The judges are in a
'angin' mood, your Deaconship. (To KATIE) Once I get this one
situated, I'll be back for a thorough interrogation. Good
work, ladies.

MANLEY

(re KATIE) But you said she was an anarchist!

MARY

She 'andled the bomb right expertly. But if she don't know wot a "crown" is, it seems unlikely she's in on the plot. Come along with that device, Miss. I'll take it back to Scotland Yard. For the moment, I've got me 'ands full.

MARY gestures for KATIE to bring the bomb along.

MANLEY

I am a man of the Church!

MARY

Yer a bleedin' dynamiter, and a murderer, to boot. Move yer arse. There's a wagon out front.

KATIE

(holding the bomb gingerly, to MARY) I'll just be a minute.

MANLEY

(as he exits) I am both innocent, and blameless! God will smite you! You watch! You'll all be smitten!

MARY and MANLEY exit, MANLEY protesting his innocence.

KATIE

This is very strange.

VALERIA

It is an explosive device; they are all very strange.

LOVEDAY

You mustn't simply stand there, Katie.

KATIE pulls out one wire, then another.

LOVEDAY

Stop that forthwith!

KATIE

This: right here. Ladies, this is no bomb.

VALERIA

What do you mean?

KATIE

(she starts tossing and catching it) It's a fake.

KATIE further examines the "bomb."

LOVEDAY

How do ... how did you know?

KATIE

Ask yourself: Why was Deacon Manley scared of a weedin' fork, yet cool-headed about a live bomb stuck down his britches? He was more scared that my fingers might brush his god-like manliness, than that he might be blown to bits.

VALERIA

So your "Deacon Manley" is a fraudulent bomber?

LOVEDAY

It explains his nonchalance in the face of imminent smithereens. (to KATIE) You'd best go: Inspector Perkins will be waiting for you.

KATIE crosses to the door.

KATIE

Should I tell Perkins? That the bomb's not real? (Off their shrugs) I'll let her reason it out for herself.

KATIE exits with the "bomb."

VALERIA

If you have no objections, I should like to go back to brooding now.

LOVEDAY

This entire plot smells of week-old codfish, sister. How could the police warn us of a fake scheme ahead of time?

VALERIA

Who gives a toss? It is all stuff and nonsense.

LOVEDAY

If the police indeed learned our street would be destroyed, they would evacuate, if only to preserve their reputation. So, they must have known the attack was a ruse, in advance.

VALERIA

A ruse, to what end?

LOVEDAY

I have told you, sister. To guarantee their own funding.

VALERIA

You are galloping very far afield. A Special Branch conspiracy?

LOVEDAY

Yes. And to terrify the populace. To show us the authorities are doing their job.

VALERIA

Seems outlandish. And somewhat foolish, even for police.

LOVEDAY

Bourdain, the Greenwich Observatory bomber: It has been revealed his brother-in-law was in the employ of the police. And that pair arrested last spring for plotting an attack ... The case dissolved, because /

VALERIA

Because undercover police suggested the bombing. Still/

LOVEDAY

What if a government informant - an agent provocateur, if you will - conceived and staged the anarchist attack here in our home? (she lays it out) Special Branch pretends to uncover a plot, Manley is paid to hide in our garden, and all the while, there is no real danger.

VALERIA

Did you not observe him? Manley is an empty-headed addlepat!

LOVEDAY

One needn't be a genius to be a police agent. (VALERIA is skeptical) You are welcome to devise your own theory, sister. Pray do not peck at mine like a sort of aggravated seagull.

VALERIA

Sorry. Why select my garden?

LOVEDAY

We are now three damsels in distress, who witnessed a show of police heroism. Papers will print, "Special Branch saves from harm a houseful of innocent ladies." Not "Bumbling London authorities muck about with nothing to show for it."

VALERIA

I can't believe Inspector Perkins would agree to such a hoax.

LOVEDAY

She would be kept in the dark about the false nature of the attack. Men never trust women to keep a secret.

VALERIA

But today, a real explosion occurred, and at least one blameless woman's body is buried beneath rubble!

LOVEDAY

I acknowledge that. And I do not yet know how that came to be. But Allison Tinglepenny did not perish in the print shop blast. If the police do not know this already, they will discover it soon enough.

VALERIA

I don't wish to have survived a bomb threat, only to be hanged for murder.

LOVEDAY

Then let's puzzle out Miss Tinglepenny's case!

LOVEDAY retrieves the regular-sized Bible, leafs through. VALERIA takes the pocket watch and examines it.
KATIE enters.

LOVEDAY

Welcome back, Katie. We are so close! I am reading what lies between "Ephesians" and "Colossians." The missing text.

VALERIA

And I am deciphering what is lacking from the pocket watch.

KATIE

(looks over LOVEDAY's shoulder) Don't worry about the text. Look: the missing chapter is "Phillipians." The clue is in the title, not the text!

LOVEDAY

I don't know what you mean.

VALERIA

(with focus on the watch) This pocket watch is intact.

KATIE
Phillipians. "Phillip ... Ians."

LOVEDAY
"Phillip Ian!"

VALERIA
(still with focus on the watch) If I was to guess what was missing, I would say the chain. You know, the Albert.

KATIE
The what?!

VALERIA
The Albert. It is a style of watch chain, one that Nigel always wore. It is the type Prince Albert favored.

LOVEDAY
Phillip. Ian. Albert! The straightforward clues Miss Jones left indicate Deacon Manley. But she removed the chapter and the Albert chain ... to show us it was a conspiracy of two men. Oh, Miss Allison Tinglepenny, I am so sorry we were too late to save you.

BLANCMANGE enters.

BLANCMANGE
Miss Fortescue!

KATIE
Uh-oh. He's plumb vibratin' with excitement about somethin'!

LOVEDAY
(re the door) Why are multitudes of people just ... meandering into our home?

BLANCMANGE
(to LOVEDAY) I am no longer a suspect in the bombing! They have captured another man: A cleric. They discovered a gladiola, and fifty-pound notes in his flat. My good name has been cleared!

LOVEDAY
Monsieur Blancmange says the police found incriminating evidence at Deacon Manley's flat. (thinking) Fifty-pound notes, and ... a gladiola.

VALERIA
That is not as incriminating as the evidence in our garden shed.

KATIE

Ask him if he witnessed anyone in the street while he was gettin' hauled off to the printers.

LOVEDAY

(to BLANCMANGE, in French) Did you note anyone, on your way to the print shop?

BLANCMANGE

A little cat. So adorable!

LOVEDAY

I meant humans. Or, perhaps, a single human?

BLANCMANGE

This one. (re KATIE) She was peeping in the window of Lord Albert's house. Lord Albert emerged and gestured wildly at her.

*

LOVEDAY

He says he saw you, Katie, peeking in Lord Albert's house.

KATIE

What?

BLANCMANGE

These two spoke, excitedly, and Lord Albert removed his bandage, and (indicates KATIE) she fainted.

LOVEDAY

He describes you as fainting.

KATIE

That was Allison Tinglepenny, who swooned at the sight of blood. Damn fool thinks we look alike. What else did he see?

BLANCMANGE

Lord Albert took from his jacket a ... a ... (can't think of the word).

BLANCMANGE kneels down and waves
his hand back and forth over the
carpet. The women "play charades."

VALERIA

(guessing) Oh! He wiped up some horse manure!

KATIE

(dubious) He scrubbed the roadway? Wait: He drew with chalk!

BLANCMANGE imitates the victim sniffing.

KATIE

Wait. Cocaine? (to LOVEDAY) We can't play pantomime all day: Get him to say it!

LOVEDAY

Ladies, I believe ... Miss Allison Tinglepenny called upon Lord Albert, and she fainted when he revealed his bloody cat scratch.

KATIE

(indicates BLANCMANGE's gesture, guessing) And then he gave her smellin' salts!

LOVEDAY

(to BLANCMANGE, in French) Smelling salts?

BLANCMANGE scrambles up.

BLANCMANGE

Yes, yes. He gave her the smelling salts.

LOVEDAY

(to KATIE) Indeed.

VALERIA

That was not an attempt to help her.

KATIE

That was him puttin' poison up her nose.

KATIE gets and rummages in ALLISON's handbag.

LOVEDAY

(to BLANCMANGE) And then?

BLANCMANGE

Lord Albert returned to his home, and drew the curtains. I was taken away, down the road, out of sight.

KATIE

(looking) No salts in Miss Tinglepenny's handbag.

VALERIA

What did he tell you?

LOVEDAY

The villain re-entered his house, and closed the drapes.

KATIE

Allison must have glimpsed Jane's delivery basket through Lord Albert's front window.

BLANCMANGE

Miss Fortescue! You must speak in Francais into my ear. Whisper to me in Francais. When you speak the language of love, you make fireworks explode in my heart.

LOVEDAY

("in French") Please contain yourself, Monsieur, and refrain from using the verb "explode."

VALERIA crosses to the door.

VALERIA

Sister, get rid of Monsieur Blancmange.

LOVEDAY

With relish! (in "French") Monsieur, please. Go home.

BLANCMANGE

You will accompany me?

LOVEDAY

No. But... Please know that I will find exquisite, intense delight in our separation.

BLANCMANGE

You believe I am the fool, the dolt, but you are wrong. I am instead the sleeping volcano. One day, without fail, I will have the love eruption. Until then, my dear Miss Fortescue!

BLANCMANGE exits.

KATIE

I didn't understand that, but I know how you could get yourself some free perfume samples. (beat) We need more proof against Lord Albert. *

LOVEDAY

The lord is a titled gentleman, honored by the Queen. If it's true, do you believe the authorities would ever charge him? *

KATIE

No. He's in the Crown's good graces with that bill he wrote.

VALERIA

Exactly. Besides, Allison's body is in our shed.

KATIE

He's plannin' on accusin' me. (thinks) I have an idea. You ladies ready to help me in misleadin' Lord Albert?

LOVEDAY

How will you do that?

KATIE

I'll get him over here, and then get him to show his true colors by spinnin' a yarn about his cat.

VALERIA

Please act with due caution, Katie. I shall return shortly. With my berry scones.

VALERIA exits DL. KATIE is pensive.

LOVEDAY

I simply adore deception!

KATIE

Loveday. Is Missus Hunter ...

LOVEDAY

Obstinate? Aggravating? Peevish?

KATIE

Yes, all of that, but she has somethin' big on her mind.

LOVEDAY

I have had a talk with her. I advised her to take drastic action to overcome her moodiness.

KATIE

And exactly what drastic action do you s'pose she'll take?

LOVEDAY

She's helping us solve the case. She's been quite useful.

KATIE

She's gone and made more scones!

LOVEDAY

Like London weather. Predictable. If unpleasant.

KATIE

Loveday, you ever hear of the Furies? Greek goddesses of vengeance, goin' after murderers?

LOVEDAY

Of course. I played the role of Queen Clytemnestra at the Lyceum. My celebrated monologue / was

KATIE

I know that. (beat) So. The last man who tried to lock up Valeria, disappeared.

LOVEDAY

Fell out of her boat. Your point?

KATIE

We agreed there's poison in all kinds of plants, and she's got a great big garden. She left, and came back in, with a pail of somethin.' Then, she got to bakin'.

LOVEDAY

What does any of this have to do with the Furies?

KATIE

I know you love your sister. But are you even a detective? You need to consider, when next we see Lord Albert... Valeria means to scone him to death!

LOVEDAY

You mean ... poison him? With her ghastly scones? She would murder a man to avoid standing trial for the murder of another man?

KATIE

I never said she thought it all the way through.

LOVEDAY

Lord Albert will not be murdered. Certainly not without my permission, or participation. Katie, we must stop her.

LORD ALBERT enters. KATIE wields her fan.

LOVEDAY

Bollocks! Close the door, it locks. By itself! It could not be any less complicated!

ALBERT

Calm down.

LOVEDAY

Did you never notice, Lord Albert: men directing women to "calm down" has the exact opposite effect?

ALBERT

No. I am seeking Missus Hunter.

KATIE

We were just sayin' that Valeria has taken a fancy to you. And here you are.

ALBERT

(Unhappy) Her husband vanished. A woman like that is something to be avoided, like a damp seat on a railway car.

KATIE

Unless she might get you into the Horticultural Society.

ALBERT

Like the rest of you, Missus Hunter refuses to show me a proper degree of respect, the argumentative / slag heap.

He cuts off as VALERIA enters with a tray of scones.

ALBERT

My dear Missus Hunter! Look at those scones. I am famished.

KATIE

And you're gonna stay famished.

LOVEDAY

The scones are not for you.

VALERIA

(confused) Please, ladies! Why so inhospitable?

She sets down the tray of scones.
KATIE and LOVEDAY guard them.

ALBERT

I am looking for the Inspector. I must report that I saw this one (indicates KATIE) scuffling with another female outside.

ALBERT

This street fight may have some bearing upon the anarchist bombing case.

KATIE

You never saw me fightin' anybody in the street.

LOVEDAY

Perhaps it was simple hijinks.

ALBERT

It was not jinks of any altitude! This house is a refuge for two murderers, who have so far evaded punishment.

LOVEDAY

You have no evidence of murder.

ALBERT

(to VALERIA) If I receive your recommendation, I may show mercy. (beat) A scone might sway me.

LOVEDAY whisks away the scones.
KATIE confronts ALBERT.

KATIE

About the lady in the street. The Frenchman saw Miss Allison Tinglepenny callin' on you this mornin'.

LOVEDAY

Monsieur Blancmange espied her outside your front door. Arguing. With you.

ALBERT

That's absurd. (to KATIE) You are trying to subvert the conversation! It was Miss Tinglepenny with whom you were tussling in the street.

LOVEDAY

(beat) You know Allison Tinglepenny?

ALBERT

I- (thinks) I ... have encountered her, in her print shop. A reckless woman. Obvious anarchist.

VALERIA

Deacon Morris Manley crept into our garden, with a bomb.

ALBERT

I know nothing of that incident. Although anyone could hide behind that pest-infested gladioli.

LOVEDAY

You paid the Deacon to do so, in crisp fifty-pound notes.

KATIE

Pretty suspicious. Who around here has fifty-pound notes, but you?

ALBERT

You are a trio of lunatics.

ALBERT snatches a scone. KATIE
wields her fan. He drops it.

KATIE

No scones, ever, for you, Lord Albert.

LOVEDAY

It is impudence to try to snatch a scone without invitation.

ALBERT

Impudence is my birthright. As are pastries.

VALERIA

Let him have it! You won't eat them.

LOVEDAY confronts ALBERT. KATIE
picks up the scone, guards the
tray.

LOVEDAY

Lord Albert: that unverified cat-scratch on your hand. It's a
gunpowder wound, isn't it?

ALBERT

Gunpowder. Of what are you accusing me?

KATIE

Let's see it, Lord Albert.

ALBERT

(to LOVEDAY) Stay away!

LOVEDAY

I believe it to be a burnt, bloody trauma, received as you
ignited the blast at Freedom Printers. You stood too close to
the site, and were struck with a flying bit of explosive.

ALBERT

Ludicrous conjecture. You stupid cows will not smear a lord!

LOVEDAY

The police will investigate it soon enough.

KATIE

You paid Manley to stage a bomb threat. To convince
Parliament to expand police powers.

LOVEDAY

But you could not resist applying your own explosives expertise to set off a real bomb.

ALBERT

Preposterous nonsense!

VALERIA

Oh, do let his lordship have a scone.

KATIE

Nope.

KATIE dumps the scones in the cupboard, and closes the door.

LOVEDAY

You grew weary of anarchist plots being discovered before anything blew up. You wanted action!

KATIE

The way you had it in the Royal Army.

ALBERT

The Queen elevated me to the peerage. She was delighted with my service. Why would I blow up a print shop?

LOVEDAY

There might be a particular reason you wanted that shop destroyed. To spoil evidence of a crime, for example.

ALBERT crosses to the DL door.

KATIE

Wait! Before you go: Just a few minutes ago, I saw your little cat playin' in the street with a glass tube of somethin'. Poor kitty looked very sick.

ALBERT

(concerned) Mister ... Fuzziwig? My cat: taken ill?

KATIE

The one with the striped tail. He was rollin' in the leaves, battin' around a pretty glass vial. Looked like, maybe, smellin' salts.

ALBERT grabs his jacket pocket, pulls out a glass vial of smelling salts. Immediately puts it back.

ALBERT

Liar! You are trying to make me appear guilty, when, in fact, you are to blame!

VALERIA
Guilty of /

ALBERT
Guilty of murdering Miss
Tinglepenny!

MARY PERKINS enters.

ALBERT

(whirls on her) Are you Inspector Perkins?

VALERIA

Your timing is faultless.

MARY

I'm Perkins, all right. You ladies ought'a make a habit a lockin' yer door.

LOVEDAY

Beyond question.

MARY gets out her notebook, flips through, situates herself as if she is an all-knowing detective who will now reveal the solution.

MARY

I've been down to the Yard, interrogatin' this Deacon. 'e's given us a lotta interestin' tit bits. 'e told us 'is wife-to-be, wot got knee-deep in with the radicals, / was

ALBERT

I am Lord Phillip Ian Albert. This woman, this American immigrant, has murdered Miss Allison Tinglepenny!

MARY

Yer barmy; Tinglepenny died in the Freedom Printers blast.

ALBERT

No, she- she didn't! I saw them: Smalls, and Tinglepenny, both women, on this street. After the blast!

MARY

There's but two people workin' at that shop: Tinglepenny and ... let's see. T'other one were Manley's ... betrothed.

She flips through her notebook. She won't let anyone else solve this.

KATIE

His fiancée. You're thinkin' of Miss Jane Jones.

LOVEDAY

Jane Jones.

VALERIA

Do you mean Miss Jane Jones?

MARY

Ah! 'ere it is. It were ... Miss Jane Jones. Deacon Manley were sayin' that 'e got coerced by a gentleman. This gentleman paid Manley to 'ide in yer gladioli with a bomb. "I were paid by a dragoon," Manley says. And this Miss Jones, she caught on! She learned that the Deacon were a radical for 'ire, and employed by said dragoon.

LOVEDAY

(to KATIE) Poor Jane. She "caught on" to the plot.

MARY

And then, for wot'ever reason, she disappeared-like. This Deacon were whisperin', like it's a secret/

ALBERT

(worried) Like what is a secret?

MARY

(reads) 'e says this same dragoon also paid Deacon Manley to 'elp him carry a biggish, rolled-up carpet from 'is 'ome into the Freedom Print Shop. This were (consults her notebook) yesterday evenin'. Now. I come straight over 'ere to speak t'you, Lord Albert, to yer face. To enquire die-rectly ...

ALBERT

(not looking well) Me? Enquire of me?

MARY confronts ALBERT.

LOVEDAY

(sotto voce) At last.

MARY

Do ye know of any fella dragoons wot might've went radical?

ALBERT shakes his head with relief.

LOVEDAY

Buggeration.

MARY

Don't bother yerself. We'll pummel all the details outta the deacon. Matter a time. 'e'll be singin' like a pippit.

LOVEDAY

(thinks) "A biggish, rolled-up carpet." Oh. Oh, dear. (to KATIE) Allison enquired about the carpet, trying to understand how one came to be delivered to the print shop. I believe it was poor Miss Jones, wrapped up within.

KATIE

Her body, you mean. Exploded when the print shop went up.

ALBERT

An absurd notion. Like something in a salacious magazine.

MARY

Slow up, ladies! Yer sayin' Miss Jones got blown to bits? After she was dead? Knock me sideways, then it's Jones'es thumb wot we found? 'ow do ye 'ave that information?

KATIE

We are detectives, Inspector.

MARY

Stay on yer own cart path; ye need to let the expert solve this. Now. 'ere's the funny thing. Did ye ladies see: this 'ere Lord went bug-eyed when I mentioned "dragoon?"

LOVEDAY

Yes! I noticed the very same.

ALBERT

I- I- I- did not!

MARY

Why would 'e do that, I wonder?

KATIE

He's a dragoon. He knows of no other dragoons who are radicals. It follows ...

ALBERT

It was her! She killed Allison Tinglepenny! (points at KATIE)

LORD ALBERT staggers. Sits.

MARY

Smalls 'ere, an anarchist? Smalls, a horse-sittin' dragoon? Yer starkers. Smalls stopped a bombin' right 'ere where we're standin.' Why would ye be tryin' to accuse Smalls?

ALBERT

(to KATIE) I saw you! (to MARY) They were grappling ... She must be sent to the gibbet!

LORD ALBERT takes out a handkerchief and wipes his brow.

MARY

Ye takin' sick, yer excellence?

ALBERT

I am in fine f- fettle!

MARY

(shaking her head) Perpetratin' lies on Miss Smalls 'ere. (to KATIE) 'e does look right peaky.

VALERIA

It may be that the injury on his hand is infected.

ALBERT

A mere c-cat scratch.

MARY

Lemme see. (She rips his bandage) This is by no means a cat scratch. And I should know, 'avin' seven cats me own self. This is a burn, from fire, or an explosion. Sittin' right there on the 'and ... of a bloody dragoon!

ALBERT

I- I-

MARY

Why would ye lie and say yer cat did it? It's a low fella'd blame 'is cat.

LOVEDAY

Excellent detection, Inspector.

MARY

'e's tryin' to cast aspersion elsewhere, when 'e's the bloke wot blew up the Freedom Print Shop.

VALERIA

You've solved it, Inspector. Well done, you.

MARY

Blimey, yer lookin' like death warmed up, m'lord. Wotever is wrong with yer grace? 'e's swooned!

MARY

Now 'ow am I gonna interrogate 'im? (silence) Does anybody 'ere 'ave smellin' salts?

The Ladies freeze. A moment.

VALERIA

Lord Albert ... may have salts on his person, / Inspector.

KATIE

Top left pocket.

MARY pulls out the salts.

MARY

Isn't that 'andy? I did 'ear about 'im faintin' in Parliament. Let's get m'lord set right. 'ere we go.

LOVEDAY

(breaking down) Inspector? Before you... You should know that Lord Albert used those very smelling salts to poison Miss Tinglepenny to death. In all probability, Miss Jones, as well. Two women: both of a working class, and quite similar to you.

MARY

These smellin' salts: He poisoned 'em? Used 'em on women? Ye don't say.

LOVEDAY

An eyewitness has sworn to it.

KATIE

We just hope and pray Lord Albert receives justice. But ... with his title, land, and money, he'll prolly escape a reckoning.

VALERIA

For wealthy men, justice is a mere theoretical construct.

MARY

Don't I see it, all the time? (to ALBERT) But you wouldn't poison anybody, would ya, m'lord? And since yer exceedingly innocent, these salts'll ease yer difficulties straight away.

ALBERT

(whispers) No! No!

MARY

Don't lay a brick. Let's show these ladies yer fully innocent. (waves the salts) Breeeeathe, now, deep-like. There ya go. (more) Hmm. These salts seem to be makin' 'im worse.

LOVEDAY

As I feel certain I mentioned, they are poisoned salts.

MARY

(she waves more vigorously) Ain't that a bleedin' shame? For a posh rotter to get a taste of 'is own medicine? 'oist on 'is own pee-tard, I'd say. The devil 'imself wouldn't go blamin' 'is little cat. (She stops, rises.) That's 'im, sorted. Lemme fetch the wagon; we'll ride 'im down to 'eadquarters, the murderin' sod.

ALBERT looks at KATIE, who stands with the mantle sheep behind her.

ALBERT

You!

LORD ALBERT collapses and loses consciousness. He may twitch or moan occasionally during the scene.

MARY

"You?" Wot's 'e on about: "You"?

LOVEDAY

(takes the sheep from the mantle) I believe his outcry was prompted by this figure of a sheep, Inspector. If one views the underside, it is plainly a "ewe," not a ram.

MARY uses KATIE's hand mirror to check ALBERT is alive, rises.

MARY

Coulda fooled me. Woulda thought 'e was confessin' 'is Crime. Callin' out that yew tree in 'is front garden. Third oldest yew tree in London, so I've 'eard.

KATIE

The clipped one, in Lord Albert's yard? It's called a yew?

VALERIA

I know that tree by its Latin name: taxus baccata.

MARY

Poisonous as a snake, the yew tree. Leaves, bark, berries. Every bitta it.

LOVEDAY

Its berries are deadly?

KATIE

(to LOVEDAY) What did I tell you?

MARY

Righty oh. Lemme bring in some men for 'is Grace's transport.

VALERIA

There is no hurry, Inspector.

KATIE

(to PERKINS) What if they interrogate you: what'll you say?

MARY crosses to exit, turns.

MARY

I'm not worried. I got three witnesses wot saw me try and revive 'is Lordship. (beat) I'll be blowed, what a mornin'.

MARY exits.

VALERIA

Lord Albert is an expert gardener. He would know that the taxus baccata's leaves, ground up, suspended in salts, and inhaled by his victim, would kill her.

They look at ALBERT. He twitches.

LOVEDAY

Sister ... you are an expert gardener.

KATIE

And Satan's own baker.

VALERIA

I have no idea what you're talking about.

KATIE

I'm talkin' about attempted murder.

VALERIA

Evidently, Inspector Perkins has hidden depths.

LOVEDAY

Not Perkins! You and your yewberry scones, sister! You cannot simply do away with men you find vexatious.

VALERIA

Are you implying I tried to poison him? This double murderer?

KATIE

I am. You did.

VALERIA

Don't be silly.

KATIE

Eat one of those scones, then.

KATIE points to the cupboard.

VALERIA

I ... I am not hungry.

LOVEDAY

I understand his own smelling salts have brought Lord Albert low ... but how did he come to fall ill in the first place? Perhaps he really is bilious?

KATIE

No, it's the clap. Just thinkin' out loud.

VALERIA

I have read about this. It is a condition of the guilty conscience. Lord Albert's wrongdoing likely produced a serious inflammation of his stomach. You know, his tum. An ailment of the ... canal.

KATIE

What canal?

LOVEDAY

Alimentary, my dear Katie.

LORD ALBERT groans.

KATIE

There's one more thing, ladies. C'mon, Valeria. We're goin' outside to the garden shed.

KATIE pulls a scissors from VALERIA's knitting bag, snips a button from LORD ALBERT's coat.

KATIE

We go into the shed, and we come across Allison's body. We find her clutchin' Lord Albert's suit button: bearin' witness to exactly who killed her. We scream, and the police come runnin.'

VALERIA

But isn't that planting evidence?

KATIE

We're not gonna let Allison disappear! She was murdered, and that needs to be seen, and acknowledged. She deserves a memorial service, and a burial.

LOVEDAY

(as if to the police) "Inspector, she must have come over from Lord Albert's place after he poisoned her. Our garden gate was left ajar all day."

KATIE

If he survives the salts ...

They look at him. LORD ALBERT slumps over and dies.

KATIE

Never mind.

The doorbell rings.

LOVEDAY

Thank the stars! Someone remembered to lock the front door.

KATIE gives a nod to LOVEDAY, who crosses to the DL door, stands ready to let in PERKINS. VALERIA, LOVEDAY, and KATIE regard each other, and LORD ALBERT. VALERIA hurries out to the garden, followed by KATIE with the button. Blackout. End of Play.