

# Murder in a Place Called Christmas Time

By Margie Pignataro

## **CHARACTERS**

Mr. Simonon Fleming Allingham (Simon)

Mrs. Agatha Allingham Amla

Mrs. Dorothy Christie Allingham (Dottie)

Dr. Denagamage Praboth Mahela de Silva Jayawardene Amla (Amla)

Ms Lucille Higashino

Detective Inspector Campion

Coroner

Sergeant

N.B. The events take place during a hurricane level storm on a small island off the British coast.

12/17/2018

A few months ago, I had a book accepted for publication. Not long after, that company went out of business. But they passed me onto another company they respected and trusted. Not long after, that company went out of business. Rather than continue looking for another publisher, I fucked off. I don't know how else to put it. I stopped writing and read a book on quantum gravity and time: *The Order of Time* by Carlo Rovelli. I became obsessed with time. Then I began *Your Brain is a Time Machine* by Dean Buonomano. I haven't finished it yet. I haven't yet finished this play.

I'm obsessed with murder mysteries, but not just any murder mysteries. I prefer British Golden Age murders, of which Agatha Christie is the queen. Essentially, murders that aren't trying to make strong statements about the world or push emotions to a terrible edge. These books were written between and during the world wars. The British had enough tragedy and trauma to deal with. They needed and deserved escape. They needed murder to be punished and murderers convicted and executed. When one's innocent neighbor gets bombed to a pile of rubble and pieces of bodies, by an anonymous pilot who gets away, one must feel a great need for someone to be held responsible.

I don't like contemporary American mystery writers at all. I'm tired of reading about women getting butchered in succession, psychotic nihilistic serial killers who kill for private, meaningless rituals begun when they were sexually abused by their harsh, fundamentalist and obsessively Christian mothers. I'm especially tired of rape and hacked up corpses being so common to consume, it has the feel of ordering a Big Mac and fries at McDonalds.

I prefer PD James, heralded as Britain's best contemporary mystery writer, on the screen rather than the page. Her prose is highly pyrotechnical in vocabulary, the dialogue reads like lectures from an Oxford master, and she attempts to bring emotional realism to a very absurdly unrealistic setting. By the end of *The Private Patient*, I wondered exactly what I'd been through.

I do admire Japanese (Kiego Higashino) and Icelandic (Arnaldur Indridason) mysteries. They're restrained and painful in a different way. They're intellectual and horrifying. The landscapes and cultures offer fascinating obstacles and high stakes. I can't quite describe what it is that appeals so much to me. Perhaps it's because the language is translated. Translated texts have always appealed to me because of their tend toward simpler language, their occasional foreign reference, and phrases that don't quite translate well. There is no melodrama, no villain, and no wildly insane serial killer.

I like the intellectual challenge of a mystery. I think many writers overburden their stories with layers upon layers of red herrings, creating a complex web that looks like something a spider would spin high on LSD.

Poirot is right: think it through. With these books I've learned how to think things through. Most of all, look for details, listen to what people say, and watch what they do.

What does this have to do with time? A murder mystery, in its dark black heart, is a story about trauma. Someone is dead. Someone has killed that person. Others are suffering loss. Sometimes, the killer continues killing to cover their tracks or continuing to exact just revenge. Everyone is going through something traumatic; everyone should end up with severe PTSD.

Having PTSD myself, I know that time has become a very fucked up thing. Flashbacks warp moments, even extend moments. People from the past intrude. I forget what month or day it is. I think it's spring and it's actually winter. During all of this, I'm in the present, and the future is a cliff I must fall off one day in the form of death. Sometimes I spend too much time staring transfixed staring off the edge of that cliff into its nothingness. Its simple ending. It's ending of time and awareness.

A murder mystery has a very simple, recognizable, and reliable structure. Murder, investigation, solution. It's as mathematical as an Elizabethan sonnet. What better structure, involving trauma and death, to play with concepts of time than a murder mystery.

So far, I've learned that time exists in a few places, and our brains are not built to comprehend time in the same way as we can comprehend space (Buonomano). Time exists in physical change: entropy to be exact. We see a beginning and an end. Heat leaves and then there is cold. This is the core of cause and effect, which our imaginations have gone completely mental over. Time exists also in our minds, mostly in our minds. Memories create a past; the past cannot exist in the present. Artifacts are not the past; they are present objects. Imagination creates the future. Sometimes too much, as Rovelli writes, and there is no benefit in being able to imagine so far into the future that we contemplate our death.

To make things even more complicated, Rovelli explains that there are no moments. In the time it takes us to comprehend that we are experiencing a moment, it is gone. We cannot see it because it moves too quickly. Moves? Perhaps a poor metaphor.

Now for the really crazy, possible shit: researchers have theorized that on the quantum level, there is no time. There is no distinction between the past and the future. And even more of a

mindfuck, it is possible to predict the movement of a particle in the past, which is impossible in our reality. Essentially, and oversimplifying it, the future can influence the past.

For me, this makes total sense. Look at our memories and how we make them good or bad, depending how we wish to endure them. Or block them out altogether.

Look at how history evolves. We have changed dinosaurs and given them feathers when a couple of decades ago, they looked like giant lizards. This shit happens.

A murder mystery is a search for evidence that will establish a truth. It's an old fashioned philosophy, that the world can be understood empirically and that there is a truth, as well as justice or resolution. Good triumphs over evil.

So what happens when we combine the bizarre structure of time with a firm structure of investigation? Mad fuckery. We begin with seeing the murder take place, and now, at this point of the play, 37 pages in, both the murderer and victim are unknown, and the one piece of evidence that could identify the killer has changed.

12/19/2019

I finished the first draft yesterday and it's only 50ish pages. I'm not satisfied. I don't think I've explored time enough.

Last night at Cracker Barrel with my husband, I worried about the social value of my plays if they never get performed. Is it a waste of time to write plays for my own personal entertainment and mental health? I'll put them online, but is that enough?

At this stage, I push all the philosophical baggage back on the baggage carousel and decide to deal with it later. I'll get coffee first, a chocolate croissant, and continue.

I really felt fucked by the play. My head was spinning and rattling as if pieces had broken off. An audience will struggle with this the more they try to think about it. We always need to find time in everything. We need cause and effect because that creates passage of time.

The play needs more repetition. After all, isn't that what memory is?

So titles have been coming to me. I realized last night that I hadn't been thinking of one at all. I'd prefer something pulpy and I came up with two: *Murder in a Place called Time* and *It's*

*Christmas Time for Murder*. Perhaps *Murder in a Place called Christmas Time* should be the way to go.

12/22/2018

I type the date, and know it's two days before Christmas. Yet when I look away or do something else, when my mind is otherwise occupied, I think Christmas is two weeks away. I've been doing this for two weeks. And two weeks ago, it was a month away.

Perhaps this is my fascination with time. My inner clock is warped, for whatever reason. It could be too much distraction. But think of how fragile the inner clock must be to be disrupted so easily.

12/24/2019

Christmas Eve. In Las Vegas, it's sunny and cloudy. This is what I experienced growing up in Southern California. Sunny, beautiful Christmases that resembled nothing like what a "traditional" Christmas should look like. No fireplace, no snow, no happy family gathering.

In British Christmas murder mysteries, the set up is ideal in a country house and a gathering of family. The family isn't too fond of one another. There's a patriarch or matriarch who is rich and parsimonious. There is urgency amongst the family to get money, for whatever vile reason. It's more like a noir in that no one is truly innocent. Everyone has a motive. No one is really likeable. There are politicians who believe the police are their servants to take orders. There are annoying, boring women who talk and talk and talk about nothing. And, of course, the beautiful daughter or niece who is most likely guilty of nothing.

Committing a murder at Christmas is a comfortable fit because everyone is confined with family they dislike, pressured into the civility which British etiquette demands, and each person is worried about the preservation of their lives. Paying off a bookie or blackmailer, that sort of thing. Questions are who will inherit, when will the old guy or girl finally die, are there any secret heirs?

There is the inevitable snow storm that buries the house for days. There's a member of Scotland Yard or Hercule Poirot, a convenient bastion of charm, order, and logic. Part organizer, part wrangler of these aristocratic children, they discover all the dirty secrets and the most obscure clues: the rubber ring of a balloon, a library book, backwards footprints in the snow.

In the worst cases, they discover the murder isn't a murder, but a handgun going off due to over exposure to freezing temperature.

Sometimes, the solution is too clean. No one has committed a crime. And it is also disappointing because no one has committed a crime.

12/27/2018

I took boxing day off to watch soccer and think. I figured out how to end this. I'm cutting the last two scenes and taking everything in a wacky, strange direction without any explanation. It's almost farce. Perhaps it is. Perhaps murder mysteries at the heart are farce. No one ever reacts in a real way. They're not supposed to: the books promote calmness (true British stiff upper lip) in the face of chaos and violence. We can all make it through if we simply make some tea and get on with it.

12/29/2018

It's 2:06 AM. I'm not usually writing at this time of night anymore. I used to in high school, but it was my drug.

The ending fucks with my mind. I don't know what to do. It's too late to think it through. I should go to bed.

The ending: a cacophony of dead people existing in the present, always present, always events and eventing in a chaos that has no time.

1/8/2019

I added a cracker joke into the last scene. I've taken it from a MSM article about a weird Sainsbury Christmas cracker joke. It can be found here:

<https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/newsliverpool/this-is-why-sainsburys-customers-were-baffled-by-weird-christmas-cracker-joke/ar-BBRtvpq>

I realize that I always forget the storm that occurs continually throughout the play. I forget characters mentioning it, reacting to it, wanting to leave.

Maybe because they don't have time to want to leave. If the events of the play take place over any kind of timeline, they occur Christmas Eve night and Christmas Day. Though even that is debatable, because of the autopsies and interviews---could they all be done in one day? It doesn't matter. I certainly didn't give a shit what day was what. It was liberating to let go of time and simply write. The only thing I use at all as a signpost are the Christmas bells. I think if I didn't have that, I'd really get lost.

At first, I thought Agatha would become the central character. I thought Lucy's presence would be larger. I thought Dottie would be flat and the stereotypical snooty rich British wife who you want to be guilty, but is only cheating on her husband. Surprisingly, Dottie came center stage, Lucy is inactive, and Agatha is wildly changing from victim to murderer to unsympathetic, to sympathetic, and ultimately to a tragic figure.

Dottie thinks. Dottie questions life. Dottie has a philosophy. Dottie understands her husband and her choices and has spent much time meditating on the choices she has made. I worry though that her conversation with Campion, in which they discuss time, is too obvious. Perhaps the audience needs this to clarify what's going on, but it occurs about the middle of the play. I don't know.

Campion is the typical British detective: even when they display a bit of character, they really don't have any. It's what I call the Alice in Wonderland Syndrome: the character centralizes the action, but rarely hasn't much going on for them. They're essential, but they work as a bland foil to the other characters, who are much more interesting. Poirot, of course, and Miss Marple, are exceptions to this syndrome. But that's also because Christie's other characters have all the psychological complexity of a marionette. But falling for Dottie, and in one piece even meeting up with her *before* any crime has taken place, makes him interesting to me.

Amla is the heart throb, the ingenue, the intellectual heavy weight that all the women swoon over. Agatha, in many timelines, has grafted herself into him. The other women have affairs with him. And he is the other. Not British, not white, he is a sudden Asian in an England that does not trust foreigners. Something compelled me to write Amla this way, all personal reasons. I couldn't stop myself. I watched myself construct him.

The same with Simon and the relationship Agatha has with him when she kills him. I wrote that scene through taking dictation. The constant return to the violence between them was also compulsive.

I spent the most time working on Dottie, and I want to work on her more. I need to step away from the play at this point and let it become a stranger. I need to meet it fresh.



Perhaps I keep Lucy on the side because she is the most painful for me. The woman who has killed herself (maybe, it's never clarified), and cannot leave Simon. She's the part of us who live perpetually in love with someone who is blatantly abusive. That she's in a wheelchair made me realize I need more characters in wheelchairs.

Simon is a monster. And he is the most British of all of them.

I don't care about accents, period costumes, authentic sets. This isn't a museum piece. It's an anti-museum piece. Like all murder mysteries, I don't have to be in the period to understand them. In fact, I cannot do so. I will always read from my perspective and my place in time. I never hear British accents when I read Agatha Christie. Everyone is American. Why has no one figured this out?

## Scene One

SCENE: Pier, middle of the night.

AT RISE: AGATHA and SIMON. Occasional thunder and lightning, the storm slowly moving closer.

SIMON

We have no time to talk out here:  
A storm is coming.  
Possibly a hurricane.

AGATHA

England doesn't get hurricanes.  
Don't you want to talk to me?

SIMON

(sound of bells)  
It's midnight.  
Oh, we're in Christmas Day.  
Happy Christmas.  
Now let's get back to the hotel.

AGATHA

We can only speak out here.

SIMON

Dottie may wake up.  
Lucy may wake up.  
What will they think if they learn we're out here alone?

AGATHA

You tell me what Dottie and Lucy could think.

SIMON

I'm going back.

AGATHA

Amla.

SIMON

What?

AGATHA

Amla. Please tell me you haven't forgotten--

That you remember

That you have memories of us

And he's still present.

We're still in boarding school

And still, at Christmas,

Throw snowballs at each other

As Mother and Father scream at us to behave like proper children of the upper class.

Please, say you do know Amla.

SIMON

I will never forget Amla.

Amla is dead and Amla is very much alive.

We don't have to come out to the pier,

To talk about Amla

in the middle of the fucking night---

AGATHA

I want to talk about Amla in private.

I want to talk about you.

I want to talk about me and us.

And what is happening. And why Amla

Never, ever talks to me.

SIMON

Dottie and Lucy

Know Amla as well as you.

You can talk to them about him--

AGATHA

No, not Dottie,

Or Lucy,

Talk to that woman you call a wife,

And the mistress, you bring your mistress to Christmas.  
Those women who presume to comfort me  
When they can't see and own their own  
discomfort.  
Dottie is such a...  
She'd just tell me I'm being absurd and need to move on.

SIMON

Maybe it's true.  
You do need to move on.  
Are we done?

AGATHA

I want to know what is happening.  
What is *really* happening with Amla?  
How is he *really* dying?

SIMON

Amla.

AGATHA

Always, no matter when, always Amla.

SIMON

He falls off the bridge in a jogging accident.  
He is pushed by a vagrant who steals his shoes.  
He jumps because a train is coming and the bones in his legs push up into his torso.  
We assume.  
We don't really know what is happening,  
only that he is dying over and over.  
You do need to get over this and move on.  
You are paralyzed in the muck of that moment.

AGATHA

We never, ever move on.  
We never leave our landscape.  
Amla will always be our country of residence.  
I have a copy of his death certificate.  
The anonymous, factory machine-like bureaucrats at the county public records department

Are only too joyous to tell me the truth.  
Their generosity, and respect for my wish to become enlightened,  
Is awe inspiring.

SIMON

What the fuck is the matter with you?  
I'm having you committed.  
You've never been sane.  
Mother and Father baby you.  
They give you laudanum and let you sleep it off like the flu.  
He is *my best friend*, not yours.  
It is *my loss*, not yours!  
It will always be *MY LOSS* and you will always have lost *NOTHING*.  
I decide the times when we discuss him, *NOT YOU*.

AGATHA

I have the death certificate with me.  
Look at it.

SIMON

I don't want to look at it.  
It's the past. It's over.  
It's forgotten.

AGATHA

Nothing is ever past and over.  
I haven't forgotten him  
And neither will you.  
I will live in Amla forever.  
We can't go back, but we can live it right now and now and now  
And in the bits in between,  
Of which we have no consciousness,  
Amla thrives.  
Those moments change it, and him.  
He becomes an accident.  
He becomes a rare form of cancer,  
And that's why I become a doctor.  
His parents are proud of his few accomplishments.  
He is an inspiration to me.

I speak of him in my valedictorian speech.  
He is the bright star in the sky that swells to the brightness of the moon.  
And when we think it will guide us all to the promised land,  
It disappears.

SIMON  
That's rot, Agatha.

(tears up the document and tosses it off the pier)

AGATHA  
You know that doesn't change anything.  
That is only a copy.

SIMON  
It no longer exists!

AGATHA  
It will exist!  
(AMLA enters)  
Amla exists and always will.

SIMON  
Not for me.

AGATHA  
*It is suicide!*

AMLA  
I take an overdose of morphine.  
I go out to the bridge,  
take the morphine, and fall easily and naturally.  
I don't want my family to find my body.

SIMON  
I have no idea.  
I have some idea.  
I suspect.  
I...I couldn't...at fifteen?

AGATHA

You are his best friend.

SIMON

That's an enormous amount of responsibility  
To force onto the shoulders of a fucking fifteen year old.

AGATHA

He must talk to you---

SIMON

No.

Yes.

Sometimes.

No.

We aren't speaking at the end.

AGATHA

Don't you suspect anything?!

*You are his best friend!*

Who else could he trust?

Who else could he go to?!

AMLA

My parents only speak to me when my grades come out.

My priest works to strip my peaceful religion and replace it with fire and brimstone.

AGATHA

Me?

Never in all the history of time would he have come to me.

AMLA

According to you,

Agatha is your dirty, disgusting, annoying, attention seeking, mentally unstable sister.

Who is in love with me.

AGATHA

If he doesn't seek you out,

AMLA

It's because you're a cold, unfeeling, self-absorbed, child.

Confiding in you would have been as comforting as confiding in ancient ruins.

Why in the world do you want to keep me from your sister?

She's beautiful and brilliant.

I never have the chance to know her.

AGATHA

You make my life miserable, Simon.

You torment me, ridicule me, bully me, call me names, rip off my clothes, force yourself in the bathroom when I'm in there.

SIMON

I'm glad you finally have had the courage to be honest with me.

AGATHA

I've always fucking hated you.

I've always loved you.

As Amla must...

You must make his life miserable, too.

You must torment him---

SIMON

No---

AGATHA

You must make him feel beneath you, worthless, inferior, no better than a servant!

He's worth more than you!

You should be the one who dies!

(AGATHA stabs him to death)

END OF SCENE



## Scene Two

SCENE: Pier. Daytime.

AT RISE: Detective CAMPION with a CORONER examining the body.

CAMPION

Where was the time of death?

CORONER

It's still happening.

I need to examine the body further for something specific.

CAMPION

What can you tell me?

CORONER

A sharp object, probably a knife,

Possibly a dagger,

Punctures his chest multiple times,

Left bicep, the left cheek, throat, right eye.

And just once,

Right in the heart.

The murderer is left handed.

Death is instantaneous, and he suffers.

CAMPION

Possible suicide?

CORONER

It's difficult to say right now.

Maybe in the lab we can pinpoint the moment and see his intention.

CAMPION

It couldn't be suicide.

There's no murder weapon.

The murderer tosses it in the water,

Takes it with them?

We'll get the divers out here.

CORONER

In this weather? On Christmas day?

CAMPION

The murderer doesn't take Christmas off.  
What else?

CORONER

There are multiple deep cuts on his hands,  
Indicative of defense wounds.

CAMPION

This is a frenzied attack with incredible planning.

CORONER

Why would you say *incredible planning*?

CAMPION

Because it's still occurring,  
And will go on.  
It's been going on for years, if not longer.  
Hatred and rage aren't moments;  
They go on for so long,  
They cease to go on,  
And just become perpetually themselves.

CORONER

A suicide could act out of rage at themselves.

CAMPION

Suicides act out of love.  
They want to spare their loved ones.  
They see themselves as a burden,  
A useless eater of time.  
A corrupting poison,  
Killing those they love.  
An ugly thread needing to be pulled.  
But there's no amount of pulling.

There's no way to remove.  
They make themselves more indelible.  
I see that in the slow movement of your wife.

CORONER  
I possess nothing to look at her.

CAMPION  
Anything else?

CORONER  
This underneath the body.

CAMPION  
This looks like a piece from some sort of government document.

CORONER  
A death certificate. That much I know.  
See the name there.  
I go to university with him and still do.  
He's a terrible human being, but a fine coroner. That's his signature.  
Send your Sergeant over to my office. I'll let him go through the records.  
Now I need to go and see what this fella has to tell me.  
Unless there is anything else you need, Inspector Campion.

CAMPION  
No, he's yours.  
If you find any other pieces, save them for me.

CORONER  
The rest are probably in the ocean, but I'll keep an eye out.  
Don't stay out here too long. That storm is going to be a bloody terror.

(CORONER exits)

CAMPION  
Why would someone tear up a death certificate?

END OF SCENE

Scene Three

SCENE: Hotel room.

AT RISE: AGATHA and DOTTIE playing cribbage.

AGATHA

Fifteen two,  
Fifteen four,  
Pair is six,  
Pair is eight.

(moves her peg on the board)

DOTTIE

Fifteen two.  
You know there's no skill in this game.  
It's all luck, the cards you get dealt.

AGATHA

You only say that because you're losing.

DOTTIE

What skill do you need?  
To be able to move the pegs on the board?

AGATHA

To count.  
If you don't count up your points correctly,  
If you don't see what you have,  
I'm not required to help you.

DOTTIE

I haven't been seeing things correctly?

AGATHA

Your deal.  
Can we order tea? I'm famished.

DOTTIE

You order it.

I don't want to be disrupted by the complexity of ordering tea.

(sound of bells)

DOTTIE

It's Christmas Day.

AGATHA

(On the phone)

Can we have tea for two,

With sandwiches and croissants.

And cake.

Room 305.

Thank you.

(hangs up)

What now?

DOTTIE

It's officially Christmas Day.

(they hug, for a very long time, longer than what would be considered normal)

AGATHA

Cribbage. I'm winning.

(they break apart and sit)

AGATHA

Fifteen two, fifteen four, fifteen six, fifteen eight.

DOTTIE

I have nothing.

I am truly going nowhere.

END OF SCENE

Scene Four

SCENE: Hotel room. Next morning.

AT RISE: AGATHA, CAMPION.

AGATHA

Murder?!

Oh, god, I feel sick!

CAMPION

I'll get you some water.

AGATHA

Murder?!

You're sure someone is doing this to him?!

It isn't suicide?

CAMPION

That's a very interesting question.

Why would you think it is suicide?

AGATHA

My brother is not stable.

There are attempts.

And right now,

He slits his wrists in the tub,

The tap turned as hot as possible.

CAMPION

It is unlikely your brother takes his own life.

When do you see him last?

AGATHA

At dinner.

I go to bed early. I'm still asleep.

He is in a good mood when he leaves.

CAMPION

Do you see him go up to his room?

AGATHA

No, but my husband might.  
They are playing pool,  
Perhaps cards, as well,  
Talking cricket and football.

CAMPION

Where is your husband?

AGATHA

He goes for a swim every morning.  
He should be here by now.  
Do you think---

CAMPION

Think what?

AGATHA

Is something happening to him?

(SERGEANT knocks and enters)

SERGEANT

Inspector, there's a man claiming he's her husband.

AGATHA

It is my husband. Let him in.

SERGEANT

But, Inspector...

CAMPION

What?

If the man says he's her husband, let him in.

SERGEANT

As you say.

(Goes out; AMLA enters; AGATHA runs to him and hugs him)

AGATHA

The most absurd thing is happening.

Simon's dead!

It has to be suicide, but this inspector insists--

CAMPION

May I have your name, sir.

AMLA

White people have difficulty with my name.

My mother is Sri Lankan and my father is South African and of Pakistani descent.

CAMPION

That's all very well, sir, but I will need your full name for my report.

AMLA

Dr. Denagamage Praboth Mahela de Silva Jayawardene Amla.

Would you like me to spell it for you?

CAMPION

I'd be so grateful.

(AGATHA spells it out)

AMLA

Everyone calls me Amla.

CAMPION

Your name may be difficult for westerners to say and spell,

But it tells a story.

And your name, Mrs. Amla?

AGATHA

Agatha Allingham Amla.

AMLA



Would you like me to spell it for you?

CAMPION

No, thank you. This I can manage.

You are with Simon last night, Mr. Amla?

AMLA

Yes, playing pool and drinking.

CAMPION

Do you see him go up to bed?

AMLA

No, he goes for a walk.

He says he needs to sober up before going up.

AGATHA

His wife disapproves.

She drinks to excess,

And disapproves of his drinking.

She is very shrill about it.

Are you speaking to Dottie?

CAMPION

She's in no state to speak to anyone, unfortunately.

AGATHA

Drink, I'm sure.

AMLA

Darling, who could blame her?

CAMPION

Did Simon say where he is going?

AMLA

Along the boardwalk.

AGATHA

That's where he usually walks.  
Out on the pier as well.  
Sometimes around the island.  
You can see him now, staring at the sparkling blue water.  
He can never be far from water.  
He has a fear of land, you see.  
He has a fear of being trapped.  
He lives by the water so he can always swim away.

AMLA

He is an excellent swimmer.  
We were on the swim team together in college.  
I can never beat him.

CAMPION

He goes out, even in this weather?  
The storm is terrible last night.

AMLA

He doesn't care.  
He does things his own way.

AGATHA

He's supremely stubborn.

CAMPION

Does your brother say if he is going to meet someone?

AGATHA

Um.  
He never discusses her with me.

CAMPION

I'm sorry?

AGATHA

Amla?

AMLA

We suspect---

AGATHA

We know.

AMLA

We know

AGATHA

And will always know

AMLA

There is another woman.

AGATHA

It's none of my business,  
Though I always feel guilty not telling his wife.  
I could tell her now,  
Because in this moment,  
Where we are and what she will see of the landscape,  
Knowing her husband fucked around is a pond of guppies,  
In comparison,  
To the bloody ocean of sharks of his suicide.

CAMPION

He is stabbed to death multiple times,  
And once,  
Yet the angle of the blade makes it impossible,  
To self-inflict.

AGATHA

I'm sorry, Detective, but I will never believe it is murder.  
Simon is stupid and selfish and self-loathing.  
Emotionally, he is worse than a murderer.  
No one could murder him except himself.  
No one is killing him more than himself.  
I understand if you need *something* to put in your report---

AMLA

Agatha, please.

CAMPION

Mr. Amla, what do you do after Simon leaves?

AMLA

I go up to bed.

CAMPION

And you, Mrs. Amla?

AGATHA

I'm in bed already.

I remember Amla coming in.

I remember him coming and coming and coming in.

He still is coming in.

CAMPION

And after, Mr. Amla, you are coming to bed,

Where is it you finally fell asleep?

AGATHA

Around midnight. I remember hearing the chimes from the clock downstairs.

AMLA

The church, as well.

The bells go every hour.

AGATHA

That's where midnight was,

Chimes and tolling bells.

And we together.

AMLA

We wished each other a Happy Christmas.

CAMPION

Neither of you are getting up during the night,

Waking up,

Hearing noises,  
People talking outside,  
Is there anything going on that you notice?

AGATHA  
Amla woke me, carrying me to about three AM,  
But I hear nothing.

AMLA  
Neither do I.

CAMPION  
Why do you wake at three, Mr. Amla?

AMLA  
I always arrive at 3 AM.  
I don't know how I get there,  
But there I am.  
Agatha always wants to go with me.

AGATHA  
I don't want him to get there alone.

CAMPION  
Do either of you know anyone who would want to murder your brother?

AMLA  
Should I say?

AGATHA  
My brother isn't a nice person,  
He isn't a terrible person.  
He's simply not a person,  
And people do not know how to be around him.

AMLA  
Agatha, I feel I should say.

AGATHA

You have no proof of anything.

CAMPION

Anything would be helpful.

You have no idea what you may know

That will help us.

The odds are you know his killer.

AGATHA

I know his killer.

He is still killing himself.

I don't understand why that's impossible to believe.

CAMPION

Mr. Amla? You were saying.

AMLA

He is my best friend in high school,

But we are drifting apart.

Marrying Agatha,

That seems to make the process,

I don't know,

Difficult.

AGATHA

Ugly.

He loathes our marriage.

AMLA

There are other reasons though.

Certain points, particular places

Things he sets fire to, things he burns

With impunity.

CAMPION

I'm lost.

Where are you going with this?

AMLA

Three women in his life die in strange circumstances.

AGATHA

They are still dying.

And still living.

But not living without dying.

CAMPION

What do you mean by “strange circumstances”?

AMLA

Accidents, mostly.

Radio falling in the tub.

AGATHA

Accidentally sprinkling rat poison in tea.

AMLA

A jogging accident. Jumping off a bridge to avoid a train.

CAMPION

Are you implying that your brother has something to do with these accidents?

AGATHA

He is, as we speak.

AMLA

It's must be more than a coincidence,

Three women in one's life,

Dying horribly and so young.

So strangely.

And Simon the only linking factor.

CAMPION

I assure you,

These three women may be caught in complex web

Of connections,

Billions of which we can't see

Or imagine.  
Simon is only the most obvious,  
But he may be the most innocent.  
What are their names?

AMLA  
Lucy Higashino.  
Marjorie Sayers.  
Dorothy Fletcher.

CAMPION  
Could it be *Lucille* Higashino?

AMLA  
Yes.

AGATHA  
She's jumping off the bridge.  
Or whatever is happening. I can't see it clearly anymore, but she is very memorable.  
Why?

CAMPION  
There's a Lucille Higashino staying at this hotel.

AMLA  
Yes, that's her. It's not a coincidence she's here.

AGATHA  
Lucy is..  
Well,

AMLA  
Lucy is Simon's mistress.

AGATHA  
It would seem that he finds her more interesting *after* her suicide  
Than before.  
Perhaps her display of adolescent insanity touches him.  
No.



No, Simon sees her jump from the bridge a display of the deepest devotion.

CAMPION

One last question:

Do you know if your brother has a death certificate with him?

AMLA

Why would he bring a death certificate to a Christmas holiday?

AGATHA

It might be Lucy's. That's a guess, though.

Ask her about it.

END OF SCENE

Scene Five

SCENE: Hotel room.

AT RISE: LUCY Higashino and CAMPION. LUCY is in a wheelchair.

LUCY

I'm running on the bridge.

Trains rarely cross it and I know the schedule.

I stop at the edge.

I'm tired.

I'm so out of breath, I can't breathe.

I don't remember what happened.

The moment doesn't exist anymore.

I'm in the hospital and I can't move.

Everyone ignores me.

No one sees me.

Not that people ever do:

you know how boarding schools are.

Simon still sees me.

(SIMON enters)

SIMON

I see you when my eyes are closed and when they're open.

LUCY

I'm sixteen. I hurt for him.

I hate him.

I want to make him hurt.

I want to cripple him,

CAMPION

Why?

LUCY

Don't misunderstand: I love him deeply.

I can't hate without love.

Just as you can't have evil without goodness.

CAMPION

What is your relationship with Simon?

LUCY

Lovers, of course.

Still and always.

We never completely disengage.

His marriage is an inevitability.

I even love his wife.

She's charming and sees me as a distant, enchanting place,

Just over the horizon.

I am the Mystical Orient.

Simon and I laugh at her.

She sees me as nothing but a geisha.

Simon sees me as much, much more.

CAMPION

Where are you on Christmas Eve?

LUCY

Inspector, do you really believe I'm capable of killing someone?

Especially Simon.

CAMPION

Yes, actually.

People usually murder loved ones at Christmas, especially if they are all confined in a hotel on an isolated island off the coast of England during a storm threatening to grow into a hurricane.

Where are you on Christmas Eve?

LUCY

Playing cribbage with Dottie, his wife.

We're hoping he returns to us,

But not too late.

Once Simon is out at night,

He's like a cat.

He doesn't return until...

CAMPION

Until?

LUCY

He kills and eats.

If he's in a good mood, we know he's found an especially fat mouse.

He likes his mice fat.

CAMPION

Does he mention any mice he has eaten lately?

LUCY

Inspector, that would be crass.

He is, above all, a gentleman.

CAMPION

When do you and Mrs. Allingham stop playing?

LUCY

I think we arrive at three.

Agatha owes me three pounds thirty.

I have the chit on the table over there.

CAMPION

Does Simon tell you anything?

That night, is he telling you where he's going?

Anything, no matter how insignificant?

LUCY

No, nothing.

[...]

No, that's not true.

He's unusually gentle with me.

Slow and takes his time,

As if he doesn't want to leave.

Then he does.

And Dottie arrives and we play cribbage.

I have nothing else to tell you.

CAMPION

One more thing:  
Is there any reason he has a death certificate with him?

LUCY  
No...

CAMPION  
Not yours?  
Or the two other girls---

LUCY  
The girls who die and are so completely absent from his life, they aren't even here.  
But I am.  
There's no reason to want our death certificates.  
But far away, really so far away I can barely make out the figures,  
He mentions an interest in obtaining a *birth certificate*.  
I don't remember whose.  
I'm sorry.

(phone rings; LUCY answers)

LUCY  
For you, Inspector.

CAMPION  
Yes...  
Yes...  
Good, I'll be right there.  
(hangs up)  
That was the coroner and I need to go.  
My sergeant will take a formal statement from you.  
Please don't leave the hotel or the island for the next few days.

LUCY  
Am I allowed to go down to the pier?  
I want to see his blood.  
I want to see him bleed.

CAMPION

That statement could be interpreted as illustrating a murderous grudge.

LUCY

No.

It's only an act of intimacy.

There's nothing more intimate than sharing the privacy of one's body.

Especially in their death.

END OF SCENE

Scene Six

AT RISE: Hotel room.

AT RISE: DOTTIE and LUCY playing cribbage.

LUCY

Fifteen two,  
Fifteen four,  
Pair is six,  
Pair is eight.

(moves her peg on the board)

DOTTIE

Fifteen two.  
You know there's no skill in this game.  
It's all luck, the cards you get dealt.

LUCY

You only say that because you're losing.

DOTTIE

What skill do you need?  
To be able to move the pegs on the board?

LUCY

To count.  
If you don't count up your points correctly,  
If you don't see what you have,  
I'm not required to help you.

DOTTIE

I haven't been seeing things correctly?

LUCY

Is Amla cheating on Agatha?  
Your deal.  
Can we order tea? I'm famished.

DOTTIE

You order it.

I don't want to be disrupted by the complexity of ordering tea.

(sound of bells)

DOTTIE

It's Christmas Day.

LUCY

(On the phone)

Can we have tea for two,

With sandwiches and croissants.

And cake.

Room 305.

Thank you.

(hangs up)

Is he?

DOTTIE

It's officially Christmas Day.

LUCY

Are you sorry you can't celebrate it with Amla?

DOTTIE

It is more cheerful, considering Amla doesn't try to kill me.

I'm sorry. That's crude.

But Simon is rough with me,

And Amla is, well, reverential.

LUCY

Fifteen two, fifteen four, fifteen six, fifteen eight.

Do you mind very much? About Simon and myself?

DOTTIE

Mind?

You are *merely* sixteen.



I worry about your emotional stability and your compulsion to jump off that bridge over and over.

LUCY

One might simply say, No.

DOTTIE

He will never leave me, you know.

He's comfortable.

There's no better reason for a man to stay with his wife  
Than the perpetual promise of comfort.

Men are not leaving their wives.

LUCY

Even Amla.

DOTTIE

Especially Amla.

Agatha is his comfort,

Beyond a bed with clean sheets,

And warm, excellent meals.

LUCY

Count your cards.

DOTTIE

I have nothing.

I am truly going nowhere.

END OF SCENE

## Scene Seven

SCENE: Coroner's office.

AT RISE: SIMON on a table, completely covered with a sheet. The CORONER is making notations and CAMPION enters.

CAMPION

What have you found out?

CORONER

More than I thought I would.

Every body tells a story,

And this one is rather interesting.

(SIMON sits up on the table, swings his legs over, and stretches; he can be either nude under the sheet and bearing the Y incision and stab wounds, or in his clothes with the bloody stab tears)

CORONER

I've been able to pinpoint the time of death to the night of the killing.

SIMON

Midnight,

A little before,

A little after,

And caught in an irretrievable moment.

CORONER

The murder weapon

SIMON

A boot dagger. Designed for easy concealment in, of obviously places, a boot.

A purse or coat works well.

The blade is three inches in length and is forged from 1084 high carbon steel.

It's engraved with my initials.

It is a present from my wife.

I joke that she has given me the means of a quick, clean divorce.

She responds by committing actions which cannot be discussed in the presence of strangers.

CORONER

The punctures the blade makes are shallow,  
Almost too shallow to kill,  
But there's a lucky one  
In the throat,  
And it causes him to bleed out.

CAMPION

Why would you call it lucky?

CORONER

There's no distinct pattern to the wounds.  
The punctures are everywhere,  
As if the killer wants the victim to suffer,  
And not necessarily die.  
Torture almost.

CAMPION

The knife isn't turning up.

CORONER

A shame. It must be a beautiful specimen.  
There are thirteen stab wounds of varying depth and intensity.

SIMON

Some less than an inch deep,  
Others plunging to the handle.  
It's agonizing, a deep burning,  
A frantic loss of control.

CORONER

Everybody has a story, and this one is quite the page turner.

SIMON

How so?

CORONER

Scars for one.

SIMON

Two bullet holes in the right thigh.  
Typical war wound.

CORONER

Also, on his neck and hands.

SIMON

Evidence of a slit throat and cuts between fingers.

CORONER

Those are common with prisoners of war.

CAMPION

A slit throat?  
Is it fatal?

CORONER

There are suture marks,  
So I doubt it.  
It's not complete.  
It's probably intend to frighten, not kill.  
There's more though.  
Much older scars.

SIMON

Puncture wound through both hands,  
The perfect diameter of a pen.

CORONER

There are dozens of small old scars like this.

SIMON

Dated from childhood.

CAMPION

Interesting.

SIMON

Rather Freudian, wouldn't you say?

CAMPION

I'm looking for facts, not psychoanalysis.

SIMON

I thought you might enjoy a motive.

CAMPION

Anything else?

(SERGEANT enters)

SIMON

Brain tumor.

CORONER

I consulted with a colleague on this one as I wanted to give you accurate information.

SIMON

The placement of the tumor causes extremely painful headaches and dizziness, as well as disorientation and lost time.

The tumor also results in a distinct character change toward violent tendencies and anger.

CORONER

Stabbing him is utterly useless.

He's already dead.

CAMPION

The murderer doesn't know about it.

CORONER

Someone must know about it.

His wife,, at least. The symptoms are too obvious not to see a doctor.

CAMPION

I'm speaking to her next.

What are your findings, Sergeant?

SERGEANT

Sir, the doctor on the birth certificate works at the hospital for twenty-four years.  
He delivers hundreds of babies.  
I'm going through each certificate one by one,  
Fitting the piece on each one  
And time has stopped for me---

CAMPION

I'll get you some help.  
You have all the time in the world  
And you don't.  
Try going backwards.  
And look at recent requests, going back six months.  
Maybe a name pops up.

SERGEANT

I'm going to city hall.

(SERGEANT exits)

CORONER

You feel it's that important?

CAMPION

It is the only thing we have.  
We have no memories,  
Either of what happened,  
Or what will happen.  
It's just damned bizarre, ripping up a birth certificate.

CORONER

Perhaps this will help:

SIMON

It was a damp night and my palms are sweating. I have ink all over them.  
I am tearing up the birth certificate.

END OF SCENE

## Scene Eight

SCENE: Hotel.

AT RISE: SIMON, CAMPION, and AGATHA.

CAMPION

Tell me about your brother's scars.

SIMON

Yes, Agatha, tell him about my scars.

AGATHA

During the war,

He's stationed in the Pacific.

He's taken prisoner.

The Japanese torture him, without pause,

Until Nagasaki.

SIMON

Now tell him about my childhood scars.

AGATHA

He's a poisonous child.

He artfully knows provocation.

He knows how to push someone

Just enough

For the other person to lash out.

He doesn't get into trouble,

But he causes other children to be beaten by their parents.

SIMON

What do you do to him?

AGATHA

It is terrible.

What I can do as a child.

What I enjoy doing to him.

SIMON

Tell him, Baggy Naggy Saggy Aggy.

Tell him what your favorite things are to do to me.

AGATHA

I stab him through both hands with a fountain pen.

It is surprisingly easy.

After the first goes in,

He's paralyzed with shock.

It's easy to stab his other hand.

Then his thighs.

It's so easy.

You are so sweet actually,

The way you look at me.

The vulnerability,

The intimacy.

I feel so close to you,

And I almost love you.

CAMPION

What does he do to deserve this?

SIMON

In retrospect,

Seeing the situation unfold,

It is an act of cruelty.

AGATHA

He puts dead baby bunnies in my underwear drawer.

Not only dead, but half eaten by their mother.

SIMON

I explained it's for their own good.

They're probably sick with mutations.

They are not strong and the mother puts them out of their misery.

AGATHA

Just like me.



And mom will do the same to me.  
I stab him and realize I can protect myself.

END OF SCENE

Scene Nine

SCENE: Hotel room.

AT RISE: CAMPION and DOTTIE.

CAMPION

Your full name, please.

DOTTIE

Dorothy Christie Allingham.

Or Dottie.

CAMPION

May I express my sincerest condolences, Mrs. Allingham.

DOTTIE

Thank you, but it's not unexpected.

I see Simon's murder the day I meet him.

CAMPION

How?

DOTTIE

Some people are born to be murdered.

That's in a movie somewhere,

I can hear it, but I can't see it.

It's of no consequence.

CAMPION

*The Third Man.*

DOTTIE

Joseph Cotton. Orson Welles.

CAMPION

And unending zither music.

DOTTIE

Based on the novel by Graham Greene.

CAMPION

Why do you think your husband is a born murder victim?

DOTTIE

This place reeks of his piss.

CAMPION

I'm sorry.

DOTTIE

He couldn't enter a room without pissing on the furniture and staking a claim.

It's what he does to me.

I need to figure out how to get the stains out.

How to keep myself from reeking of his piss.

You speak to his sister.

CAMPION

Yes.

DOTTIE

Does she tell you about him?

CAMPION

She tells me

You and your husband

Spend Christmas here,

At this hotel, every year

With her and her husband.

DOTTIE

That's the only time we see her.

There's a reason for that.

If you look at her hard enough,

You'll see the past and the future.

Just as I see Simon as a murder victim.

I know, I know, there's no such thing as the past or the future.

I believe there is. There has to be.

Life is torture without it.  
Why should we relive over and over and over...  
I'm a psychic, you see.  
I help people see the past and future,  
And how to let it go.  
It's very difficult.  
I myself fail more often than not.  
Especially when someone we love dies.  
We want to believe so ardently that they are still here.  
You think I'm mad.

CAMPION

Not at all.  
I only have a hard time understanding it.

DOTTIE

It's quite simple.  
It's based upon cause and effect.  
(DOTTIE picks up a pen and drops it on the floor)  
Now, what just *happened*?

CAMPION

The British win the Revolutionary war.

DOTTIE

That's absurd.  
The British have always won the Revolutionary war.  
Can you imagine the American Colonies governing themselves?  
They are nothing but war mongering, puritanical teenagers.

CAMPION

How can you be so sure?  
If this pen changes the past,  
Assuming there is a past,  
How will we ever know?

DOTTIE

How can this fountain pen affect the outcome of the war?

CAMPION

It's not all that's happening.

That Charles Dickens misplaces that pen and cannot find it.

The pen is his favorite and he falls into a deep melancholy.

He burns the manuscript he's working on:

something about the French Revolution.

We know about it only through letters he has written to his secret mistress.

DOTTIE

You're making this up.

There's no such person as Charles Dickens, is there?

CAMPION

There is also us.

DOTTIE

What about us?

CAMPION

Do I need to go into details of what is happening between us?

DOTTIE

All that *happened*

(Because it is *no longer occurring*)

Is that I held a pen above the floor,

The earth's gravity pulled it down when I released my fingers,

And I fall in love with you.

But I am always in love with you.

CAMPION

Beginning the moment we meet.

When you identify your husband's corpse.

We look at each other,

Over the chaos and blood and violence of his body,

And know instinctively that you are dropping a pen to illustrate a past you desperately need to believe in.

Because too much is happening to you over your entire life.

And you need to feel control.

And I love you for it.

(They kiss)

DOTTIE

This is cause and effect.  
An event happens and no longer exists.  
I know, it's obscenely confusing  
And if one assumes they understand it, they really do not.  
It's nothing to do with why you're here.

CAMPION

It has become why I'm here.  
How do you get on with your husband?

DOTTIE

I am the rule that establishes the cliché.  
Over and over I fall in love with Simon.  
Over and over he promises me the world.  
Over and over he tells me he's never feels like this with other women.  
Over and over he gives me fists full of cash.  
Over and over I watch him meet other women.  
He brings them to Christmas, too.  
And he continues showering me in cash.  
Though the humanity in him has gone.  
No, it's never been there.  
He simply stops being interested in playing human.  
And there are fists full of cash.  
Have a drink with me, Inspector.  
I'm free.  
I'm frighteningly free.  
I've been watching this day my entire life.  
I have scotch and something green which may be absinthe.  
I think Simon drinks it with Amla every Christmas

INSPECTOR

Absinthe, please.

DOTTIE

Why not? It's Christmas!

What's absinthe supposed to summon, a fairy or a demon?  
We don't have the proper apparatus,  
so we must drink it like French peasant flower sellers and fishmongers.

INSPECTOR

Do you know anyone who wants your husband dead?

DOTTIE

I made a list for you.  
I'm still making it, but these are the first twenty-five,  
Ranked in order of rage.  
Cheers, to freedom and to the anonymous person who unchains me.  
I feel like Fay Wray in *King Kong*.  
Happy to be free, but a little sorry to see the beast die.  
He does the best he can. He can't learn better.  
I suppose men are the same way:  
Beasts that can't learn.  
Present company accepted, of course.

CAMPION

You're too generous.

DOTTIE

I don't know what I'm going to do with myself.  
I can't see anything  
*And it terrifies me.*  
When I'm told he's finally dead,  
I collapse and can't move out of bed.  
I'm not sure why.  
Do you know cats mourn?  
If there are two cats in a home and one dies,  
the other suffers through a depression.  
Even if the cat who dies torments her.  
They miss the presence.

CAMPION

You have a great presence in your life already.  
Unless you doubt me.

DOTTIE

I don't doubt you.

But

Simon is still here.

Somewhere.

I'm afraid I'm wrong.

That there is no past.

He will never leave.

Why, why, why,

Do our minds

Do this to ourselves?!

I don't need so much imagination!

There's no point having so much imagination

That we may torture ourselves!

Simon is dead.

*Simon is the past!*

CAMPION

Even if he isn't, Dottie,

You still possess your own mind.

And I will protect you, darling.

DOTTIE

Even Simon never *called* me Darling.

Let alone allow other men to address me as Dottie.

CAMPION

Things are already better for you,

My Darling Dottie.

DOTTIE

I should freshen my drink.

CAMPION

I appreciate the list,

Agatha has the distinction

Of having the number one position.

DOTTIE



I think she's under the delusion that death can erase a person.  
She and I have numerous conversations about the possibility of a past and future.  
She may take them to heart,  
And attempt to push Simon screaming into the abyss of time.

CAMPION

Why would Agatha want Simon dead?

DOTTIE

She blames him for the death of their parents.  
He torments her as a child.  
I suspect other things I can't speak about as it's not my place, nor my gender.  
Simon *is* a good person,  
but not that good.

CAMPION

How do their parents die?

DOTTIE

I think the official term is "passive suicide".  
Disease, I believe. They don't pursue treatment.

CAMPION

Does that strike you as possible?  
Could Simon influence his parents to do something like that?

DOTTIE

I have no doubt that Simon is a spitting cobra.  
He's such a cold hearted bastard,  
With all the personality of ancient ruins.  
But I don't think he has the stomach to kill.  
He doesn't kill me, on our wedding night when I laugh at him,  
When he catches me dancing with his brother,  
When he believes I'm in love with my maid.  
It's not my maid I'm in love with.

CAMPION

I'm sorry.  
*There's a brother?*

DOTTIE

No one tells you?

Amla.

He's adopted.

He is one the produce of one of those racist "save the children" from the primitive dirty East,  
And give him a good English education.

It's all imperialist xenophobic garbage.

I think the American Colonies are more comfortable for him.

CAMPION

But his last name is Amla.

DOTTIE

It's Amla's choice.

As a child, he is

Percy Chitwick Allingham.

Can you think of a more absurdly British name for a boy who is *obviously* not British?

The parents believe they're doing him a favor,

always, graciously, they do favors

for the poor ignorant, primitive brown child from the Mystical East.

But as a teenager he feels guilty.

Abandoning his parents and roots or something.

It's completely understandable and inevitable.

So he creates an enormous name that sounds like an incantation to an elephant god:

Denagamage Praboth Mahela de Silva Jayawardene Amla.

A bit ornate, but who can blame him.

When Agatha turns sixteen, and Amla is of age, they run away and marry in Italy.

The parents are understandably shocked and broken hearted.

They die not long after.

Agatha blames Simon because she imagines he poisons them against her,  
make them miserable on purpose so they would die.

In a way the marriage is perfectly acceptable.

It's not like they're *blood relations*.

It's no different than Victor Frankenstein marrying the girl he grew up with as a sister.

They're very alike, though: Frankenstein and Amla.

If they are denied what they want, they make it happen,  
even if they must break the laws of nature.

CAMPION

You don't like Amla.

DOTTIE

I like Amla very much. He's refreshingly not British whilst simultaneously being not Foreign.

He can be a bit...proud of his accomplishments,

Though they are impressive and he earns pride.

He's studies at Cambridge and Oxford, on a medical degree and a law degree.

And in the new year he's moving on to Harvard.

More degrees, I suppose.

He can be a boor, but I accept it.

He's been fighting all his life against English culture.

Being not English, not American, not European, and not white.

I think he's always trying to prove his worth.

CAMPION

How did Simon feel about his sister marrying Amla?

DOTTIE

How do you think?

I'm surprised Simon didn't murder him.

It is scandalous when you think about it, isn't it?

They are brother and sister, emotionally, I mean.

Blood is one thing, but that bond does trump nature.

CAMPION

Where are you last night, around midnight?

DOTTIE

Here, playing cribbage with Agatha.

I owe her three pounds sixty.

She's actually a very good friend.

I'm surprised she's related to Simon at all.

CAMPION

How long does Agatha stay with you?

DOTTIE

Until eleven.

Then you arrive.  
You know the rest.

CAMPION  
Forgive me for asking this, but  
Are you aware that your husband has a brain tumor?

DOTTIE  
*What?!*  
Simon?! Simon!

SIMON  
(entering)  
Yes, Darling?

DOTTIE  
Do you have a brain tumor?  
Why don't you tell me?!

SIMON  
I don't want you to suffer.

CAMPION  
From what Amla and Agatha have told me,  
Simon has blackouts,  
Disorientation, temporary loss of memory.  
Dizziness, trouble seeing.  
Episodes of anger and violence.  
You haven't noticed anything, Dottie?

SIMON  
I only have a few months.

DOTTIE  
This changes everything.

CAMPION  
Not everything, Dottie.

DOTTIE

Not everything, yes.  
What do I do?

CAMPION

Mr. Allingham,  
Do you kill Mr. Amla?

DOTTIE

Are you absolutely mad?  
Simon adores Amla. Their bond is deeper than brothers who share the same blood.

CAMPION

Dottie, please.  
Mr. Allingham?

SIMON

Why would I kill Amla?  
I have no reason to.  
He's my best friend.

CAMPION

You blame him for the death of your parents.  
He marries your sister.  
He is cheating on her with Lucy Higashino.  
His life is insured for two hundred thousand pounds,  
Leaving your sister comfortable for life.  
Perhaps you, too, if she shares it.

SIMON

I am here with Dottie,  
Playing cribbage all night.  
Ask the waiter who brought up the tea and croissants.

CAMPION

Is this true, Dottie?

SIMON

Of course it's true!

And you shall address her as Mrs. Allingham.

DOTTIE

It's not true, Simon.

There's no need to cover for me.

You fall asleep and I sneak away,

Sometime around one.

And I return at dawn.

SIMON

To meet someone?

DOTTIE

Yes.

SIMON

Is it Amla again,

Or someone new?

DOTTIE

Someone new.

SIMON

Bring him around sometime,

So I might invite him to be a guest at my club.

Inspector.

(exits)

CAMPION

Please don't leave the hotel for the next few days.

We will need to question you further.

And I want to see you again.

Will you be all right with him?

DOTTIE

Simon and I...have an understanding.

CAMPION

Unfortunately,

My wife and I do not.  
I will be back in the morning.

(exits)

END OF SCENE

Scene Ten

SETTING: Hotel Room.

AT RISE: DOTTIE and SIMON playing cribbage.

SIMON

Fifteen two,  
Fifteen four,  
Pair is six,  
Pair is eight.

(moves his peg on the board)

DOTTIE

Fifteen two.  
You know there's no skill in this game.  
It's all luck, the cards you get dealt.

SIMON

You only say that because you're losing.

DOTTIE

What skill do you need?  
To be able to move the pegs on the board?

SIMON

To count.  
If you don't count up your points correctly,  
If you don't see what you have,  
I'm not required to help you.

DOTTIE

I'm not seeing things correctly?

SIMON

Is Amla cheating on Agatha?  
Your deal.  
Can we order tea? I'm famished.



DOTTIE

You order it.

I don't want to be disrupted by the complexity of ordering tea.

(sound of bells)

DOTTIE

It's Christmas Day.

SIMON

Happy Christmas, darling.

Would you like your present now,

Or in the morning?

DOTTIE

Oh, now please!

SIMON

(gives her a small box; goes to the phone)

Can we have tea for two,

With sandwiches and croissants.

And cake.

Room 305.

Thank you.

(hangs up)

Well, darling, would you like your Christmas Present now or in the morning?

DOTTIE

Darling, you're funny.

(opens present)

Diamond earrings! They're heavenly!

SIMON

Those were my mother's.

Where did you get those?

I would've sworn Agatha took all of mother's jewelry.

That fucking cunt is stealing everything she can as mother dies looting and grabbing things and lying and pretending she doesn't know why anything is missing I don't know why anything is missing you're lying Simon, you're lying

DOTTIE

Why don't you open my present to you, darling?

(gets his book shaped present; it's a book)

SIMON

What's this?

DOTTIE

Darling, you've been wanting it for ages! It's *Frankenstein*.

SIMON

What are these symbols?

DOTTIE

Symbols?

Oh, you, stop playing around,

You know perfectly well that's English.

SIMON

I don't know English.

Why would you get me a book in English and not Spanish.

I can only read German.

DOTTIE

You say...English translations are more valuable.

SIMON

But I cannot enjoy something I cannot read.

DOTTIE

German and English are very alike.

SIMON

That's ridiculous.

We should order tea. I'm famished.  
Whose turn is it?

DOTTIE

I don't know.

I'm ordering tea.

(pretends to order tea)

There.

Do you think Amla is cheating on Agatha?

SIMON

Think?

I know.

Damn good of him to do it, too.

My sister is a shrew.

And marrying a sibling, well, that's not very English, is it?

It doesn't matter if they're not blood relations.

Lucy is his mistress, of course.

Ten time more beautiful than Agatha could ever hope to be,

No matter how much makeup she trowels on.

Lucy's more appropriate, being Japanese herself.

East meets east: it's a much better match.

DOTTIE

In boarding school,

When you're sixteen,

Do you date Lucy?

Are you engaged for a few months...?

SIMON

No, I fuck her in the ass a few times,

To preserve her virtue.

Fifteen two,

Fifteen four,

Fifteen six,

Fifteen eight.

(moves his peg)

DOTTY

I don't have anything. I'm not progressing at all.

I need some air, darling.

I'm going for a walk.

SIMON

In this storm?

There's a threat of flooding.

The pier must be underwater by now.

DOTTY

I can swim.

(exits)

SIMON

My turn.

Fifteen two,

Fifteen four

Pair is six.

END OF SCENE

## Scene Eleven

SCENE: Coroner's office.

AT RISE: CAMPION and CORONER. AMLA on the table, covered with a sheet.

CORONER

We finally know the cause of death.

CAMPION

You say Amla is hit on the head and then someone pushes him off the pier and he drowns.

AMLA

(sitting up)

No.

The head wound isn't bad enough to kill me.

And there's not enough water in my lungs to drown me..

It's poison.

CAMPION

What kind?

CORONER

Arsenic.

He's filled to the fingertips with it.

Quite literally.

Look at his nails. Those lines.

Long term arsenic ingestion.

CAMPION

For how long?

CORONER

Weeks. Maybe even months if the quantities are small enough.

He would have shown signs.

AMLA

Nausea, vomiting blood, and many other things I assume are influenza or allergies or some such nonsense.

Despite being a doctor, I'm blind to the obvious signs of poisoning, even as it takes place over weeks and the symptoms grow worse.  
I've also been too busy to pay attention to my body.

CORONER

So your murder doesn't happen on the pier at all.  
The murder is actually a landscape that can include anyone with whom he has regular contact.

CAMPION

Can a woman accomplish this?

CORONER

Poison is a woman's favorite weapon.

CAMPION

Not the poison.  
Hitting Amla over the head, tossing him off the pier.

CORONER

A woman would easily explain the shallow head wound.  
But getting him off the pier would be difficult.

CAMPION

If he is being poisoned,  
Why go to all the trouble of pushing him off the pier?

AMLA

When you eliminate the impossible,  
Whatever remains,  
However improbable,  
Must be the truth.  
Wilkie Collins.

(SERGEANT enters)

SERGEANT

Inspector!  
I've been looking everywhere for you.  
I found it.

I have the birth certificate,  
And here's the description the clerk provides for the person who requests it.

(hands him the papers; CAMPION reads)

CAMPION

Bloody hell.

Unfortunately,

This isn't proof of anything.

Only motive.

END OF SCENE

## Scene Twelve

SCENE: Hotel lobby.

AT RISE: SIMON is having a drink. CAMPION and AMLA.

SIMON

Inspector Campion, do sit down.

I'll order you a drink.

Amla, you, too,

Although drinking is probably against your new religion.

Don't worry, Inspector, Amla and I are quite comfortable ribbing one another.

My wife sends her regrets. She has a terrible headache and can't come down.

"A terrible headache" translates as "too many gin and tonics".

I also think Amla's demise has been understandably difficult for her.

CAMPION

Understandably?

SIMON

They're lovers.

I do have that correct,

Don't I, my friend?

AMLA

That no longer occurs.

SIMON

Well, there's someone.

I don't mind sharing Dottie as much

As I mind being ignorant,

And having my own mistress be the one to inform me

That I'm a cuckold.

I may be a cuckold,

But I am not a fool

And I refuse to be treated or seen as such.

CAMPION

I don't have your full name for the record.



If you don't mind.

SIMON

Simenon Fleming Allingham

As you can see, there's nothing to be done with any of those names,  
So I go by the inert "Simon".

CAMPION

Can you tell me about  
Marjorie Sayers  
and  
Ngaio Fletcher?

SIMON

Ancient history.  
(Yes, *history*. My wife's influence.  
I'm sure she told you all about her religion of time.)  
Marjorie and Ngaio never appear anymore.  
No, that isn't true.  
When I'm sufficiently soused,  
They make an appearance  
To cry and ask me absurd questions.

CAMPION

What sort of questions?

SIMON

Why?  
Just that.  
Why?  
How am I to answer that?  
Sometimes, I must burn sage,  
Or circle the room with salt to keep them at bay.  
That was years ago, though.  
I don't think of them much, now.  
Thinking of them now is like trying to remember the name of a character in a book being read to  
me when I am three.

CAMPION

What is happening to them, in this ancient history of yours?

SIMON

You know that already.

CAMPION

Nothing specific.

SIMON

They are killing themselves.

Marjorie hangs herself by tying a sheet to her bedpost and jumping out her third story window.

Ngaio is much more sedate, less dramatic.

She drinks bleach.

CAMPION

Why?

SIMON

Now you sound like them.

CAMPION

Do they blame you?

SIMON

Why should they?

I am never anything but friendly with them.

I dance with them at parties, dine with them, send them Christmas cards,

Once the families gather at our place in the country,

We tell ghost stories as the snow comes down,

We open christmas crackers and jump at their gunshot pop

And put on the absurd paper hats inside.

In my dish of Christmas pudding,

I have the shilling.

I never feel so trapped,

So choked by the myth of fate,

And I can't return to snow.

Snow is being buried alive.

The ocean is possibility.

In boarding school, all of us are closer.

We are painfully young and stupid.  
They believe too much in the reality of their bodies.  
That their bodies dictate their fate.  
Things happen.  
Nothing they don't want.  
No cruelty, no violence.  
I like both of them very much.  
They are fourteen and sixteen.  
They give me no time  
to make up my mind,  
To understand.  
How can I know at that age?

AMLA

You make promises.  
Marjorie tells me.

SIMON

I am a hungry adolescent.  
I have no map, nobody informs me of the rules,  
And things happened.  
Yes, *happened*. Past tense.  
*It is over and gone*.

AMLA

Marjorie is pregnant.

SIMON

That's blatantly absurd.  
I tell you that year after year.

AMLA

Marjorie tells me that year after year.

SIMON

Marjorie believes that any physical contact  
Between a male  
Of any species,  
And a female

Of any species  
Will produce offspring.  
Knowing that, I would not kiss her under the mistletoe  
I would give you, Amla, all the honors.  
Perhaps, then, you are not married to my sister.

CAMPION  
Mr. Allingham,  
Where are you last night at midnight?

SIMON  
Playing cribbage with Amla.  
Yes, that makes me look sinister and guilty,  
But it was only cribbage  
And after we finish,  
He pays what he owes me,  
Five pounds three shillings,  
And we go for a walk.

CAMPION  
The boy at the front desk recalls seeing the two of you leave the hotel at 10:45.

SIMON  
We do,  
To take the air,  
And then we return.

CAMPION  
Are there any witnesses or participants  
Who can corroborate you  
*Taking the air?*

SIMON  
We do not ask their names.

CAMPION  
What do they look like?

SIMON

It's too dark.  
There's a storm churning over us.  
All women look the same in such violence.  
That will make finding them quite difficult on an island this size,  
And with a female population uncomfortable  
Disclosing the details of their indiscretions.

CAMPION

There is evidence that Amla engages in sexual activity,  
But the evidence is ambiguous.

SIMON

Whether or not he enjoys it?  
I assure you, he does.

CAMPION

Whether or not he has sex with a woman.  
Do you feel comfortable disclosing the details of your own  
ambiguous indiscretions?

SIMON

We are speaking of my best friend in the world.  
*In the world.*  
I've never cared for anyone else except him.  
Including my wife.  
And especially my sister.  
I would never sully him with such  
Disgusting,  
Revolting  
Behavior.  
Accusations like yours might provoke a rather violent response.

CAMPION

Are you threatening me?

SIMON

I'm speaking academically.  
Philosophically.  
Perhaps I'm bestowing some of my wisdom,

Because I have such respect for you and your profession.

CAMPION

The boy at the desk doesn't see you return.

SIMON

Yet we do.

CAMPION

At what time?

SIMON

11:45 or 11:50.

CAMPION

How long are you together?

SIMON

We hear the Christmas bells,  
Drink the rest of the good scotch I have for us to share.  
We always do this at Christmas.  
Then he goes off to the cold embrace of my sister.

CAMPION

What time?

SIMON

One, two, I don't know.  
Does your intrepid front desk boy remember seeing them leave?

CAMPION

Them?

SIMON

Amla and my sister, of course.  
Who else would want to murder him?

CAMPION

He sees no one.

SIMON

Is there a back door?

CAMPION

Both of them are locked.

SIMON

This is bordering on farcical.

Why on earth are you accusing me?

The obvious suspect is my sister.

That's what husband's and wives do:

Murder each other.

What motive would I have for killing my best friend?

CAMPION

His birth certificate.

On your mother's deathbed, or at some other time,

She confesses that Amla is the son of a maid the family have in India.

And the father is yours.

Amla isn't Sri Lankan or South African at all, but half Indian and half English.

So you research this and obtained a copy of his birth certificate.

The worst part of all of this isn't that Amla commits incest with your sister.

It's that he *refuses to leave* your sister, after you confront him on the pier.

In fact, Amla knows the truth

The entire time.

In fact, Amla makes up the tongue-twisting Sri Lankan name to perpetuate the story.

In fact, I'm sure your parents help him spell it.

Otherwise, the story would get around that your father has a bastard son,

Who is not entirely English.

AMLA

And that is why our mother poisons our father and herself:

she can no longer deal with his ambiguous indiscretions.

Which may or may not include you, Agatha, and myself.

SIMON

I have the birth certificate.

When we are taking the air,

I confront him.  
He admits everything.  
I tell him he must leave Agatha  
He refuses.  
He begs me to keep his secret.  
Amla is half mad with panic that he may lose my sister.  
I tear up the birth certificate.  
Then we come back to play cribbage.  
The desk boy must be taking a piss.  
[ ... ... ]  
Inspector! Happy Christmas!  
Let me order you a buttered rum.  
They're superb here.  
Boy! Two more here.  
They are Amla's favorite.  
Amla loves...  
[ ... ... ]  
He's very good to my sister.  
Is it awful to be jealous of that?  
I feel eight years old,  
And she must play with us for some reason.  
Am I awful?  
Boy, two buttered rums, please!  
Happy Christmas, Inspector!

END OF SCENE



Scene: Thirteen

SCENE: Hotel billiards room. AMLA and SIMON are playing pool. Christmas bells are heard.

AMLA

Happy Christmas, Simon.

SIMON

No need to wish me happiness.

It is always Christmas.

Much better game than snooker, don't you think?

Red in the corner pocket.

(sinks it)

Makes me feel quite accomplished.

Getting the right ball into the right hole.

AMLA

We need to discuss this further.

SIMON

Pool?

Green in the side pocket.

AMLA

Are you truly going to keep my secret?

SIMON

Honestly,

Even if I tell Agatha,

I doubt she would care.

She's always rebellious.

The unstable element in the family.

AMLA

It's more complicated than that.

SIMON

Your turn.

AMLA

She's going to have a baby.

SIMON

Are you out of your fucking mind?

It's one thing to have married my sister,

*But a half breed bloody baby?!*

You might as well be dead.

That's so despicable and disgusting.

Not just because it's the product of incest,

And might be born a mutant,

But to *want* a baby,

That's repulsive.

How can you do this to me?!

I am losing you.

AMLA

Why do you think that?

The baby is Agatha's responsibility.

SIMON

It's a wedge between us.

She does it on purpose, to drive us apart.

And you're happy with it.

You're filled with the joy of a future father.

You're disgusting!

What about me?!

AMLA

Simon, let's go for a walk.

We need some fresh air.

SIMON

We already had fresh air!

Do you think I'm not going to fight you with everything I possess?

I control the fortune from our father and mother.

Consider yourselves cut off.

Our parents are shamed by you and Agatha.

I'll have you arrested,

The baby will be taken away,  
And rot away in an orphanage,  
And if it doesn't die of consumption,  
It'll become a whore at ten,  
Selling her virginity to the highest bidder--

(AMLA hits SIMON in the head with a pool cue)

END OF SCENE

Scene Fourteen

SCENE: Pier.

AT RISE: CAMPION and AGATHA.

AGATHA

I am never going to stop crying.  
Simon isn't always a monster to me.  
We have wonderful times,  
And he could be generous.  
He's my childhood,  
Truly, my knowledge of the world.  
With Simon,  
I am able to step out of life.

CAMPION

What's your relationship with Lucy?

AGATHA

We go to boarding school together,  
Elementary and high school.

CAMPION

Are you friends?

AGATHA

Amla likes and admires her.  
He enjoys her absurd novels.  
It is his one inexplicable vice:  
Quaker romance novels.  
Lucy isn't even a Quaker.  
We saw Quakers on a tour of the east coast of the US  
And she went mad over them.

CAMPION

Is their relationship closer than a literary one?

AGATHA

I wonder.

But I always assume my brother keeps her busy,

If you follow me.

I suppose time is a vast landscape

And all are welcome to it.

CAMPION

Your brother isn't drowning.

The head wound isn't killing him.

He is being poisoned.

Arsenic.

AGATHA

What?

I don't understand.

You said someone hit him---

CAMPION

Someone hits him and throws his body over the pier.

And someone is poisoning him.

AGATHA

The same person?

CAMPION

No.

The arsenic is the work of a patient murderer.

Hitting him and tossing him, that is panic.

It isn't premeditated.

But I have a feeling the murderers are related.

AGATHA

Why?

CAMPION

Possibly this.

(hands her the certificate)

CAMPION

Simon shows the murderer what he's found

(Simon requests a copy of the document)

The murderer is shocked.

If it is Amla, he goes to you immediately.

He wants to end your marriage.

He can't live with this.

Being adopted siblings is one thing,

But if you share the same mother,

That's quite another.

AGATHA

I'm not killing him.

Amla shows me the certificate because he tells me the truth.

He says it doesn't matter, as long as no one else knows.

And I don't care.

We are married almost 15 years.

The moment after he informs me is no different the moment before.

(Yes, before and after. There are such things.)

Amla and I still have children, the ritual of paying bills, and plans to travel,

And come here for Christmas.

It changes nothing. We are still moving to America.

I love him and he loves me,

And we have a good, sturdy life.

CAMPION

He tells someone else,

Because that someone rips this up right here.

AGATHA

It's not me.

I already know.

CAMPION

Amla doesn't request this copy of the birth certificate.

Simon does.

AGATHA

Intriguing.  
But it does take this back to the beginning.  
Perhaps he shows Lucy or Dottie,  
Or even Marjorie or Ngaio,  
But I have no idea where they are.  
I do know that Simon stays in contact with them.  
Not regularly,  
But he can't stop.  
He says their suicides have nothing to do with him,  
Yet he clings.  
Perhaps it's the brain tumor.  
(suddenly laughs)

CAMPION  
What's so funny?

AGATHA  
A brain tumor!  
Is it the deus ex machina of his psychology?  
We tally up all the horrible things he does,  
And say,  
Oh, it is just a mass of an overly energetic lump of tissue pressing on his brain  
Where Goodness and Empathy lodge.  
That's why he's acts a right bloody cunt.  
Dottie must be going mental over this one.  
It explains nothing.  
It excuses nothing.  
The tumor doesn't invent Simon,  
Nor does it explain a bloody thing.

CAMPION  
My sergeant searches your room whilst you are at dinner.  
He finds this.  
(pulls out a small perfume bottle)  
It reeks of arsenic.

AGATHA  
I don't wear perfume.

CAMPION

That would explain why there aren't any fingerprints on it.  
I imagine you are smart enough to toss it with the murder weapon,  
Rather than wipe your prints off and leave it where we could find it.  
That's dumb.  
A lot of this has been dumb and sloppy.  
And you're not.

AGATHA

Thank you.

CAMPION

I think I know who does this, all of this,  
But I don't have any evidence.  
Will you help me?

AGATHA

I have no idea what I could possibly do to help.

CAMPION

I would greatly appreciate it.

AGATHA

I can't think about this now.  
I'm sorry.  
Come by in the morning and we'll talk.

CAMPION

I don't think that's a wise idea, Mrs. Allingham.  
Your life may be in danger.

AGATHA

You may escort me to my hotel room door.  
My husband can take care of me from there.

END OF SCENE



Scene Fifteen

Scene: Hotel room.

AT RISE: AGATHA and AMLA playing cribbage.

AGATHA

Fifteen two, four, six, eight, ten,

Two is twelve.

Your turn, darling.

Shall we order tea?

Oh but it is almost midnight.

AMLA

Let's order champagne.

This is an auspicious occasion after all.

AGATHA

Because it's nearly Christmas?

Darling, Christmas happens every year,

It's a perpetual cycle,

When we step out of life and celebrate...

Something.

AMLA

No, darling.

Wait, just a moment.

I have this perfectly timed.

Will you marry me?

(Bells chiming Christmas day)

AGATHA

You get a gold star for dramatic effect,

And a trip to the psychiatrist to fix your memory.

AMLA

I assure you my memory is quite perfect.

Yours, however, is severely damaged.

AGATHA

I don't understand.

If this is a game, I don't want to play anymore.

Let's exchange presents, and I shall declare you the greatest, most generous husband there is.

Seriously, darling, what is wrong?

AMLA

You really have no idea?

Are you in complete denial,

Or do you have some sort of brain tumor affecting your memory?

How else could you forget that you are *already married*?

AGATHA

What?!

That's absurd!

AMLA

I ran out of clean shirts.

I lament this to your brother and, as we are the same size, he offers one of his.

Help yourself, he says.

I help myself this morning and, as I find a very appropriate shirt, I notice in his suitcase a copy of *Frankenstein*.

I thumb through it and I find this.

An interesting document, to be sure.

Knowing you have your own copy of *Frankenstein* and you have it with you on this trip,

Because you take it wherever we go,

I decide to make a discrete enquiry.

Guess what I find?

No, there's no need to guess.

A copy of the same piece of paper.

AGATHA

Those are nothing!

Ancient pieces of paper, the past incarnate with no place in the present.

Those are NOT the present!

AMLA

The thing about legal documents is that they transcend time and always exist in the present.

AGATHA

It's a joke!

It's a dare!

It's not even legally binding!

It's a bet that was stupid childish nonsense.

AMLA

I believe that. I do.

But,

Why do both you and your brother keep said documents tucked away in books that you take with you everywhere?

AGATHA

There's absolutely no reason for him to have it,

Unless he means to blackmail me.

AMLA

In the same copy of *Frankenstein*?!

And do you know where in the text it is lodged:

The same pages where yours is lodged.

The marriage of Victor and Elizabeth.

Stop lying to me! Give me the truth!

AGATHA

There's no reason to be upset or question my love---

AMLA

How far is this evolving?

AGATHA

As my father dies, fifteen years ago,

I spend as much time as I can with him.

I love him so much more than my mother,

Who was harsh and critical and a terrible woman.

AMLA

You better be telling me the truth.

I only want the truth.

AGATHA

I am gifting you the truth.

This is the truth.

My father confesses more than he should to a teenage girl.

I don't understand most of what he says.

He's in unimaginable pain.

Morphine stops working.

He confesses that...

I'm adopted.

I am the daughter of my mother's maid who dies in childbirth in a pool of blood,

A pool so deep and spreading, she drowns in it, it fills her lungs.

And my father goes the same way.

He spills out of every opening in his body,

Until he deflates like a balloon.

I couldn't wipe his face fast enough.

I only want to see him before he dies,

But there was so much blood,

I miss him in the moment before.

Drowning in a pool of his own blood.

Simon and I have no blood relations at all.

AMLA

Why don't you tell me this before?

AGATHA

I'm afraid you'd think less of me.

Being a bastard, of unknown heritage.

AMLA

I don't care about any of that!

Where do you think I come from?

An Indian prince?

I am the bastard, spawned from the union between your father

And my mother who was your governess.

Do you really think my mother welcome his advances,

Or accept them in order to retain her position?

AGATHA

Your entire life you work so hard to be British.  
You say terrible things about the lower classes.  
You are a typical upper class British snob.  
You insist upon treating only the aristocracy.  
You want to live in London or New York.  
You worry more about advancement through the Oxford hierarchy  
Than me!

AMLA

I will keep your secret.

AGATHA

Yes, and think less of me.  
And this.  
This mistake.  
This act of rebellion Simon and I do as a dare.  
This thing which is still valid.  
If I confess to you this,  
I would have to confess to everything.  
The truth exists only when we give it a moment in time.  
When we don't, there is no present for it to turn in.

AMLA

I want the truth to fix this moment and the next and the next and the next.  
It isn't working.  
How far did your little dare take you?  
*Is it still going on?*

AGATHA

I don't remember.  
Therefore, nothing happened  
Or is happening.

AMLA

You swear to me I'm the only one you have ever loved!  
Now you can't give me the moment of truth,  
You have no faith that I won't let it disappear,  
And never return.  
You're my wife and the world to me!

AGATHA

Let me go! You're hurting me!

(She fights back, he gets thrown and hits his head on the edge of a table; she feels for a pulse and can't find it; runs to the telephone and dials)

AGATHA

I need your help. Right now. This instant.

I'll explain when you get---

Just get here!

(slams the phone down; she collects the papers and books and puts them on the table; knock on the door; it's SIMON)

SIMON

I was winning at cribbage---

Bloody hell, what happened?

AGATHA

We're fighting, he grabs me and I push him and he falls and hits his head on the table.

Is he alive? We should get a doctor.

SIMON

You are killing him.

AGATHA

He's really dead?!

Oh fuck!

I can't breathe.

SIMON

Sit.

Put your head between your knees.

Deep breaths.

It is an accident.

Tell the police everything--

AGATHA

I can't tell them everything.

He found *Frankenstein*.  
Both our copies.

SIMON  
You brought yours with you?!

AGATHA  
You brought yours *with you*?!  
He wouldn't find yours if he isn't getting a shirt out of your suitcase!  
Couldn't you get the shirt for him?!  
That's why he grabbed me.  
He's in a rage.  
He thinks I'm a disgusting perverted common slut.  
He dies thinking I'm a pervert.  
He dies hating me.

SIMON  
He doesn't think that.

AMLA  
I would never think that.  
You're my wife, and have been since we were ten.  
Despite your indiscretions.

AGATHA  
What are we going to do?

SIMON  
Let me think.

AGATHA  
Are you all right?  
Simon, what's wrong?

SIMON  
Piercing headache.  
I get them occasionally.  
If I begin acting strangely--

AGATHA

Strangely?

What's wrong with you?

SIMON

Tumor, pressing on my brain.

I'm scheduled for surgery.

I was going to stay with you and Amla whilst I recovered.

We plan to tell you this holiday.

AGATHA

Happy Christmas to you, too!

How bad is it?

SIMON

Critical.

But let me think.

AMLA

We need Dottie and Lucy.

SIMON

Dottie and Lucy.

We'll put him in the shower.

Make it seem as if he slipped.

Dottie and Lucy will be our alibis.

We'll have been playing bridge.

Amla hates bridge.

AMLA

I can't grasp it.

SIMON

(as he dials)

Yet you were a star spin bowler in first class cricket,  
the most complicated, lethargic sport in the world.

A game that lasts five days,

And bridge bores you.

Lucy, is Dottie with you?



Tell Dottie to come to Agatha's suite.

Listen carefully:

I need you to set up a bridge game,  
pour out drinks, whatever we usually have,  
and make it seem like we've been playing bridge all night.

Lucy...Lucy...

Just do it, Lucy!

(Hangs up)

She'll do it.

AGATHA

No one is going to believe us.

I don't believe us.

(DOTTIE bursts into the room)

DOTTIE

Simon, this is no time of night to be so hysterical---

[...]

What is happening here?

AGATHA

We are fighting.

He grabs me, and I push him and

DOTTIE

He's dead.

You kill him.

AGATHA

It's an accident!

DOTTIE

We must call the police.

SIMON

NO, no police.

DOTTIE

That's absurd!  
What is wrong with you, Simon?  
You haven't had that much to drink tonight?  
You're positively green!

SIMON  
My best friend is dead.  
What color should I be?  
The police will blame Agatha.

DOTTIE  
Why should they?  
It's an accident!

SIMON  
It's manslaughter.  
This is what we're going to do.  
We're going to put him in the shower and make it seem like he slipped.  
Agatha, you go to bed and find him in the morning.  
Get up at your usual time.  
We'll tell the police we were all playing bridge...

DOTTIE  
Simon, this is madness!  
What are you thinking?!

SIMON  
*I'm saving Agatha!*  
Just do what I say.  
Help me undress him and get him into the bathroom.

DOTTIE  
You are doing all of this for the sister with whom you cannot have a civil conversation?

SIMON  
Agatha is my wife.  
(drops to the ground)

AGATHA

Simon?!

Simon, wake up,

Simon, please, please,

Please stop doing this to me.

I'm sorry for everything,

I promise things will be better.

We'll do what you want.

SIMON?!

DOTTIE

He's dead.

But not from a brain tumor.

Though the tumor deranges him at the end.

You being his wife, what nonsense!

It is nonsense, isn't it Agatha.

Agatha?!

AGATHA

We have to have a new plan.

To explain Simon.

We can't have two corpses at once:

That's perfectly farcical.

We'd all be arrested.

Cribbage.

You two play cribbage and I'll be asleep.

We need to take the bodies down to the pier and dump them in the ocean.

But if we take them to the pier and dump them,

It'll look like a robbery.

And Simon drowns.

DOTTIE

Are you out of your mind?

The police aren't going to believe that Simon drowns!

AGATHA

WE HAVE TO DO SOMETHING!

SIMON

Agatha is right.

It's the only way to save all of you.

AGATHA

Dottie, I need you to go to your suite and bring me the leather case in Simon's suitcase.

Do it, fast.

(DOTTIE exits)

AGATHA

I'm so sorry, Simon, I must do this.

(tears up the papers, flushes them down the toilet; goes to the phone)

Lucy, stop what you're doing.

I need to borrow your wheelchair.

I need to transport two corpses to the pier and I can't carry them, that's why!

Amla and Simon.

Sorry, it was just absurd luck

That you lost two of your lovers in one night.

Thank you.

(DOTTIE returns with the case; AGATHA goes through it, pulls out documents, shaking her head as she did so; then tears them up and flushes them; LUCY knocks at the door and, seeing the bodies, nearly gets hysterical; DOTTIE puts her hand over her mouth to silence her and in the struggle to keep her quiet, snaps her neck)

DOTTIE

Bloody whore.

AGATHA

Why??

DOTTIE

It's humiliating to know my husband prefers

the physical company of a crippled psychotic suicide.

Simon calls out her name over and over fulfilling his marital duty to me.

To be honest, I'm hardly interested in whatever he does to me,

The bizarre acts Simon believes are appropriate marital relations,

but grant me the dignity of keeping his fantasies to himself.

Though this won't make her disappear from time.

LUCY

No.

He loves me more than both of you.

DOTTIE

Then there is you, Agatha.

Whenever we visit you and Amla,

Your name erupts from his mouth,

Over and over and over.

He feels a greater need to have relations

So he may say your name over and over and over.

AGATHA

Oh, shut up, Dottie!

DOTTIE

Four months and two days ago

I have a fancy to read *Frankenstein*.

Simon is always reading it and I finally decide,

why not give it a go and have something to discuss at dinner.

We most definitely found material in *Frankenstein* for several conversations.

I especially enjoy the descriptive detail of his enjoyment of you---

details I don't require,

But he feels the great need to divulge,

And then have relations with me again. And again.

That's when I begin poisoning him.

And you.

Every time either of you turned your back to me,

into the teapot or gin bottle or coffee pot

a subtle, coy measure of arsenic goes.

Not enough to taste, but enough to eat away your insides,

Destroy the most intimate parts of you that my husband found so

Unforgettable.

How many nights I must share a bed with you,

Or stand aside as you and he...

But the arsenic, bits at a time, make you go away.

I give you a double dose in your coffee tonight,

Both of you,  
Well, I'm surprised you can still stand.  
Oh, by-the-by,  
I'm also fucking *your* husband.

(AGATHA collapses)

END OF SCENE

Scene

SCENE: Same

AT RISE: Campion, Coroner, and SERGEANT and everyone else present.

CAMPION

Dottie?

Dottie?!

What's happening here?

DOTTIE

Christmas, darling.

A traditional British family gathering.

Everyone coming together,

In an isolated hotel,

On a tiny island off the British coast,

Where a storm is preventing everyone from leaving.

Happy Christmas, my love.

Unfortunately, I have no present for you.

Not even a cracker to pull.

Oh, I do have a terrible cracker joke for you:

*What kind of cough medicine does Dracula take?*

*Coffin medicine.*

That joke should have included an apology.

CAMPION

Darling, where in time do I look for what is happening?

DOTTIE

Maybe you should ask them.

(all of the corpses begin talking at once about what had happened, yelling at DOTTIE, at each other, and it is a vibrant, chaotic cacophony)

DOTTIE

I have nothing.

I am truly going nowhere

END OF SCENE

END OF PLAY