

**The Curse of King Tut,
A Mystery!**

by
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Introduction

In 1923, a year after Howard Carter's discovery of the great tomb of the boy king Tutankhamen, "Tut fever" has hit both sides of the Atlantic. Lord Middleton, a friend of Lord Canarvon, is returning home for the first time in eleven years after service in the Far East and Australasia. His long absence from home was a result of The Great War as he fulfilled the role of special emissary to his majesty to secure and help train the forces of the Empire to fight the Austrians. An Egyptologist, botanist and man of some academic brilliance, Lord Middleton has written a number of papers on plant use in early civilizations. On his way back to Europe via the Suez Canal he arranged to meet with Lord Canarvon in Cairo but the latter's untimely death meant that his stay was cut short. He was invited, however, by Howard Carter to inspect the finds of the tomb and particularly to examine the floral wreathes and plants decorating the mummy.

Lord Middleton married Marsha Cabot Cummings, a New England socialite, whom he met on a visit to New York in 1903. The marriage caused something of a scandal because Marsha was a recent divorcee and brought with her, her then infant son, Anthony Cabot Cummings. Known to his friends as "Tony", he has just celebrated his 21st birthday.

Middleton Manor in the County of Shropshire is the seat of the Middleton family. The estate and hereditary title were awarded to George Middleton, the First Lord Middleton, during the reign of Charles I for services to the crown. Unfortunately during his absence, the estate has fallen into a state of disrepair. The West wing has been closed down to save on heating costs. The servants occupy the top floor of the East Wing. The villagers and the servants believe that the West Wing of the Manor is haunted.

Lord Middleton has sent instructions from Cairo that after a brief stay in London he will be returning to Middleton Manor on April 23rd and should be on the train from Paddington arriving at about 7:36 p.m. He has asked for the chauffeur, Paul Ryder, to pick him up at the station. Lady Middleton has organized a grand homecoming and has invited most of the village and the surrounding neighbors and even the servants of the Manor.

CHARACTERS: ACTORS

LADY MIDDLETON nee Marsha Cabot Cummings, wife of Lord Middleton

CHARLES PRESTWICK the butler at Middleton Manor

MOLLY CRUICKSHANK* the chambermaid

HENRY J. HOLMES a famous sleuth who is visiting Judge Strechnick

*When Molly also plays Lady Middleton, the audience character Millie, the housekeeper, will pick up the role of Molly during Scene 2 & 3.

CHARACTERS: AUDIENCE: UPPER CLASS

ANTHONY CUMMINGS, Lady Middleton's son by a former marriage and his girlfriend. Tony has become an inveterate womanizer and gambler. He loves everything American and can't wait to go back. He is intimidated by his mother.

LADY EVELYN HERBERT [& **PHILIP CARNEGIE**, when Lady Evelyn played by an audience member], daughter of the late Lord Canarvon and her escort. A vivacious, good-looking woman who has not allowed the death of her father to suspend her enjoyment of life. [Her escort is a young American tycoon.] They are good friends with the Prince of Wales.

LORD & LADY TROUTBRIDGE, the neighbors. They have three daughters, the youngest of whom, Amelia, has got herself in the family way. This is supposed to be a secret. Lord Troutbridge has gone a bit insane since the news; Lady Troutbridge tries to cover up her husband's insanity by blaming it on his port wine habit. They come from a very old family, which Lady Troutbridge brags about constantly. Their lines:

LORD TROUTBRIDGE

Deep into the darkness peering,
Long I stood there wondering fearing
Upon a midnight dreary,
Quoth the raven Nevermore.
Oh, Amelia, why, why, why???

LADY TROUTBRIDGE

Pay no attention. He's had too much to drink again. Stay away from the port. Did you know my mother the Duchess of Northumberland?

THE VERY REVEREND BLISS & MRS. BLISS, Vicar of Holy Cross Church and an ex army chaplain who still talks about the war all the time and his wife, the village gossip. He uses the same sermons he used as an army chaplain.

DR. & MRS. BELCHITT, the local doctor and wife, the family doctor. He brings some medicine for Charles Prestwick. He shares an interest in botany with Lord Middleton.

DAVID & ELIZABETH MIDDLETON, the impoverished younger brother of Lord Middleton and his estranged wife. They ask everyone for money to finance fictitious projects. They are frequent visitors to Middleton Manor.

MR. RAJAH SINGH & SELINA MA, Tony's private tutor from Oxford. He declares that Tony is totally uneducable. He has been giving lessons in the local private school and has stayed on at Middleton Manor. He complains constantly about his belongings being stolen. He has just had his watch stolen. His lines:

MR RAJAH SINGH

I am sick and tired of these British people stealing my belongings. I am leaving tomorrow morning after Lord Middleton has paid my salary for the last two years. I am a graduate of Oxford University. This is very, very bad.

MR. & MRS. "JONES" - HRH, The Prince of Wales and present American mistress. Good Evening. How do you do? And how do you do? And what do you do? And what do you do? Etc., ad infinitum.

JUDGE & MRS. STRECHNICK, the local law. Judge Strechnick has been sent to protect the Prince of Wales. Their houseguest is the famous sleuth and nephew of Sherlock, Henry T. Holmes.

MR. & MRS. LAWSON, the family solicitor and his wife. He looks after the finances and legal matters of Middleton Manor and is keen to talk to Lord Middleton about some problems.

MR. SMITH – sent from London at the request of Lord Middleton from the British Museum and really Lord Middleton in disguise.

MISS PICKERING, Mr. Smith's secretary, an actress he hired to play the part.

AUDIENCE: LOWER CLASS and suggested one-liners

MRS. VIOLET DRESSER & suitor **OLD NED**, personal maid to Lady Middleton and her old amorous boyfriend and drunk.

VIOLET DRESSER

I'm very good with a needle.

OLD NED

Every time he hears a word rhyming with crumpet i.e. Trumpet/strumpet/pulpit/scarlet/limpet/ pirate – A nice bit of crumpet, she is.

MICHAEL COLLINS old footman and Fenian with his wife, **MAUD GONNE** both of whom are deaf.

MICHAEL COLLINS

It's the curse. He's a dead man. It's the curse of King Tut. Mark my words. Lord Middleton is a dead man.

MAUD GONNE

What did he say? Who's dead? He's lost his purse?

REBECCA WOODS, the housekeeper & her lover, **KARL BOLSHEVIC**, both of whom are looking for better jobs.

REBECCA WOODS

Karl and me are just good friends and no matter what other people say, he's not a communist.

KARL BOLSHEVIC

Long Live the Russian Revolution. Down with the capitalist pigs!

ROGER FOOTSORE & BUNNY – first footman & friend. Both are into betting on the horses. They are willing to put bets on anything, including the outcome of the murder mystery. Who did it? 10-1 it was the butler etc.....

ROGER FOOTSORE

What I want to know is what's in the box?

BUNNY

What do you want to bet it's a bit of treasure?

MONSIEUR FREDERIC LEBOUF & his kitchen maid, **SUE FLEE**, the cook and assistant responsible for the meal

FREDERIC LEBOUF
(with a French accent if possible)

I hate your English cooking. I hate your steak and kidney pudding.

SUE FLEE

Oh la la. Pardonnez moi.

PAUL RYDER, the coachman & chauffeur.

PAUL RYDER
Bring 'em on. Bring 'em on. I'll fight 'em all.

(Sometime during this opening there is a conversation between the impoverished David Middleton and Paul Ryder.)

PAUL RYDER

That's not enough. I need more.

DAVID MIDDLETON

This is the final contribution. And you do it tonight. Right?

PAUL RYDER

I do it tonight. Right.

DAVID MIDDLETON

You remember the plan?

PAUL RYDER

I remember the plan.

DAVID MIDDLETON

You've got the shoes and the rope?

PAUL RYDER

I've got the shoes and rope.

DAVID MIDDLETON

And the thing from Mr. Singh.

PAUL RYDER

I got the thing from Mr. Singh.

DAVID MIDDLETON

Good.

SCENE 1

Charles Prestwick, the Butler, white haired and somewhat dodderly but nevertheless clued in to the task at hand is giving out the parts and organizing the waiters to make sure everyone gets a drink. The waiters have been primed to ask each guest whether they are upper or lower class. Molly Cruickshank, an inveterate little flirt and acting way beyond her station is helping him. She curtseys to anyone who is upper class and greets with contempt anyone from the lower class. She lies about her background and pretends to be the illegitimate daughter of a noble person, whose identity she cannot reveal. As guests are given a role, Charles Prestwick announces them to the gathering throng. Guests are encouraged to clap when someone of social position is announced and to ignore the lower class. Guests are also asked to introduce themselves to each other. There's a definite them & us environment. "Are you upper or lower class?" becomes the catch phrase.

In the room/foyer/entrance there is a large packing case/sarcophagus securely padlocked or sealed. It has been sent ahead by Lord Middleton though its contents are a mystery. Molly takes guests over to it and speculates about the contents and mentions another package in the library.

Other Lines spoken to all during cocktails and throughout the beginning.

MOLLY

See that? [Pointing to the box] It came yesterday and there was another one arrived a week ago. It's in the library. Don't know what it is! Something to do with that Egyptian stuff... That King Tutti bloke that was in the paper. A bet you it's worth a pretty penny.

MOLLY

Did you read about the curse? It killed Lord Canarvon. Pricked 'is finger on somethin' sharp in the tomb, they say. Then everyone starts dropping dead. A man at the British Museum and a French man. Did you know that when Lord Canarvon died all the lights in Cairo went out. Just like that.

MOLLY

Do you know who that is? That's the Prince of Wales... That's his ... You know. When you're royalty you can get away with it.

MOLLY

There's funny things going on here. Weird noises at night. Moaning and groaning. Ever since that box arrived, not that it wasn't bad before, but it just got worse. Why only last week I was lying in bed when I heard someone crying in the West Wing, where it's closed off. Must have been a ghost.

MOLLY

Down in the village they're saying this place is cursed. They say it's the curse of King Tut. The man who brought the boxes from the station fell ill straight away. He's still not well.

MOLLY

It's not right we haven't been paid. And they've done no repairs. There's water coming in me room. I have to put a bucket out when it rains.

CHARLES PRESTWICK

Delighted you could come.

CHARLES PRESTWICK

I'm having such a problem with my back. I think lifting the crate sent by Lord Middleton strained it. His Lordship sent special orders nothing was to be opened until he arrived. I'm not up to lifting things nowadays.

CHARLES PRESTWICK

Her Ladyship will be down in a moment. She's not been feeling well.

CHARLES PRESTWICK

Oh, I do apologize that I did not recognize you. I have been without my spectacles for four months now. Dr. Belchitt assures me that I should have my new pair any day now.

When all the guests have arrived.

CHARLES PRESTWICK

Molly, Molly please show some decorum. You are far too familiar with the guests.

MOLLY

Yes, Mr. Prestwick. No, Mr. Prestwick. Three bags full, Mr. Prestwick. [What does a bloody American know anyway.]

CHARLES PRESTWICK

That's enough. Do not vex me. I warn you as I have warned you previously.

MOLLY

(sarcastically)

Do not vex me. I am doing what you asked Mr. Prestwick. I am looking after the guests.

CHARLES PRESTWICK

Then do not be so intimate.

(turning to the guests who may be greeted in any order)

Good evening Lady Evelyn. I am so terribly sorry about your father. Such a tragedy and just at the pinnacle of success. Such treasures. I know her Ladyship was so upset.....

MOLLY

Oh no, Mr. Prestwick. I will not be intimate.

(she laughs)

Oh... Lord & Lady TROUTBRIDGE, welcome to Middleton Manor.

Sorry to hear your youngest daughter's in the club, expecting one.

Sending 'er away are you? I know a doctor Oh...

(they turn and leave in embarrassment. Molly shouts after them.)

There's 'igh and mighty. These soldiers are all the same. Ya know, Can't trust 'em. It was the war.

CHARLES PRESTWICK

Good evening Reverend Bliss. Lovely sermon on Sunday especially the part about the Khyber Pass. Why anyone would want to go to Kabul is beyond me. Leave the natives to fight it out among themselves I say.

MOLLY

'Allo Mr. and Mrs. Middleton, ... Back again? Still short of a bob or two for your little project? I 'ere you's goin' to raise silver foxes for fur coats. I fancy a fur coat. At least you'll be gettin' another free meal. But I'll tell you. There's not much cash around 'ere. None of us have been paid, but 'er Ladyship pretends there's money on the way. I think she's broke, if you ask me. Of course it's worth a pretty penny, but shss... none of us is supposed to know.

CHARLES PRESTWICK

Violet. Her Ladyship is very distressed. She said her clothes were not put out properly and now you've brought Ned with you. Ned, you must behave yourself. If you get drunk, I must ask you to leave. Is that understood?

MOLLY

Oooo... Mr. Cummings What a joker you are! I know you ... you naughty, naughty boy ... I know what y' are after. [Oh what's your name? Pip? Pip? Well isn't that nice.] You're not the first ya know. We've all had a little bit of Tony. Or you might say Tony's had a little bit of us.

CHARLES PRESTWICK

Dr. Belchitt. Thank you so much for the medicine. I will take it later. Any word on my new spectacles? No? I am sure his Lordship is so looking forwarding to seeing you again. His plant collection is greatly depleted. I have done my best to keep everything alive..... But ... What with the weather and the war.... So much has died....

MOLLY

Paul Ryder... You better shut your big mouth. You read what was in the papers. It's one of those mummies, ya know with the bandages. It could be worth a fortune. Get off me back. It only arrived yesterday. Don't think I don't know what you're after, so keep your mitts off it, hear ya good for nuffin.

CHARLES PRESTWICK

Mr. & Mrs. Middleton. We are so pleased you could come. Finally his Lordship is coming home. After so many years... And the war... Such an important moment.... I know how much he will be looking forward to seeing you. He has seen the tomb and of course he has met Mr. Carter. I understand they have become good friends. His Lordship writes regularly as I do. He's an expert botanist of course and I understand has been of some use.

MOLLY

(she goes down on her knees)

Your majesty. Oh..... Sorry, Mr. & Mrs. Jones.... I seen your picture in the newspaper. God Bless you, Sir. You are the hope of this country.

The working people are behind you Sir. Say the word. We're with you your majesty. I mean Mr. & Mrs. Jones. I promise not to tell nobody.

(The couple is embarrassed and move off, ignoring her.)

CHARLES PRESTWICK

What are you doing here, Mr. LeBoeuf? You should be in the kitchen. What are we having for supper? The cold buffet? This is not acceptable. I know there have been some financial difficulties, but we must all pull our weight. Her Ladyship has had a trying time.

MOLLY

Mr. Singh. I didn't steal your shoes. I polished 'em and put 'em outside your door last night. And for the last time, I didn't take your bloody watch. You should be careful who you go around accusing. You could end up having an very nasty accident.

CHARLES PRESTWICK

Judge Strechnick... Welcome. His Lordship should be here on the train from Paddington. Her Ladyship is so grateful for your support in these trying times. It will be such a relief to have his Lordship back again after so many years. The servants have been so troublesome. I am sure you understand.

MOLLY

Mr. Collins... There's a problem with the boilers. The BOILERS! You're as deaf as a post.... SOMETHING WRONG WITH THE BOILERS. You need to check the boilers. Never mind – I'll check 'em myself.

(Exits briefly, but comes back making a loud fuss.)

CHARLES PRESTWICK

Paul ... Is the car ready to pick up his Lordship? He has been away a long time and coming back to Middleton Manor after so many years is bound to take some adjustment. As soon as I hear from the station that the train is on the way from Paddington, you must set out so as to be there on time. Is that understood? It takes twenty minutes to get to the station. Please do not make any mistakes.

CHARLES PRESTWICK

Good Evening, Mr. and Mrs. Lawson. So pleased you could make it. I know Lord Middleton was looking forward to talking to you. We are having some problems with temporary financing, I regret to say. The servants are becoming quite unruly and who can blame them. They haven't been paid for three months and our suppliers are getting restless.

MOLLY

Here, Mr. Prestwick, it's 'is Royal Highness. It's the Prince of Wales. Look over there.

CHARLES PRESTWICK

Molly I have warned you. You are to be discrete. I am fully aware that His Highness, er, Mr. and Mrs. ...er... JONES are on a private visit to Lady Middleton. It is a PRIVATE visit and it must be kept private. Do you understand?

Mr. Smith, oh yes Lord Middleton said you would be coming. Welcome to Middleton Manor... Your secretary? Miss Pickering? Please make yourself at home. You look familiar, Mr. Smith. We haven't met before? No of course not. My eyesight is deteriorating. I am expecting a new pair of spectacles. I have only been up to London once and I did not care for the crowds and all those motor vehicles.

MOLLY

Can I get his autograph.

(She indicates the Prince of Wales)

CHARLES PRESTWICK

Molly you will do nothing of the sort. Attend to your business or you will go downstairs.

MOLLY

No! I ain't being pushed around by you old fogeys. Excuse me, Mr. Bloody Prestwick. We've got rights now you know. Us workers. There's going to be a revolution if you're not careful.

CHARLES PRESTWICK

You will go downstairs at once do you hear?

(She pauses)

At once. Or you are fired.

MOLLY

See if I care. Keep your rotten job. It not like any of us are getting' paid round here, at least most of us. *(She looks at Paul Ryder.)*

Do this, do that. Bloody Lord this and bloody Lady that. You can keep it.

(She throws down her apron and walks out. Molly checks on the empty box in the library. She puts on her overcoat and prepares her suitcase. She waits for Tony and instructs him in the next phase of the show.)

CHARLES PRESTWICK

Such trouble getting good servants these days. They never last.

(After Molly leaves, Charles continues talking to guests and introducing everyone. Prestwick finds Mrs. Woods when guest should be seated for dinner – he helps seats the guest for dinner.)

Mrs. Woods, would you be so kind as to make sure everyone is seated for dinner. I understand the food is ready. I will go and fetch her Ladyship. His Lordship gave very specific instructions that if he were delayed, we should start dinner without him. Clearly the train is late. Reverend Bliss, perhaps you could give us grace or one of your sermons while I find her Ladyship to inform her that you have all arrived and that dinner is being served. I am really not up to this any more.

(Prestwick exits limping after the Reverend has said grace.)

REVEREND BLISS

Ladies and Gentlemen. Let us bow our heads. Lord, help us as we once again fight the foreigner overseas. Make tigers of us as we launch ourselves against the barbarian hordes. Let us give praise for the forces of the Empire as they stand firm in this our hour of need. This we ask in the name of her majesty Queen Victoria. Amen.

(Prestwick returns to the Dining Room with a large tray. He slips. There's a loud clatter.)

CHARLES PRESTWICK

Oh dear me.... It's my back. I'm not what I was. Thank you. Thank you so much. Could you get me a glass of water? Thank you. Dr. Belchitt has given me some excellent medicine.

(He takes a sachet out of his pocket and puts the contents into the glass and drains it.)

Thank you. I am so sorry. That's better. I do apologize.

(Exit limping badly and very confused.)

(Enter Lady Middleton. She is dressed in Edwardian splendor with bustle and lace. Her accent is British but it slips periodically into New England.)

LADY MIDDLETON

You are all here and seated for dinner. Prestwick why didn't you tell me everyone had arrived? *(She looks around and fails to see him.)*

Prestwick? Where has that man got to? I think he's gone senile. It is so hard to get good servants these days.

Tony will you go to the lobby and ring the station to check on arrival of your father's train?

(She takes him aside and whispers to him confidentially. It looks as if this is a loving mother/son conversation. She is actually giving him instructions and slips him the library key from her purse.)

My dear friends and honored guests . . . and the rest of you, . . . As you know, my husband, Lord Middleton has been away since before the Great War and I know we are all looking forward to his return this evening. He would have been here last year but the business in Egypt detained him. Lord Canarvon asked him, (well the late Lord Canarvon, Lady Evelyn, his daughter, is here and I know we all commiserate with her on her recent loss) to stay and catalogue the discoveries in the Tomb of the Boy King. I wrote to him insisting he return - that I needed his help with the manor house. He agreed and asked me to invite all of you as close neighbors and friends to dinner. I thought we should also pay tribute to the servants, old and new, and my husband agreed. He said he wanted everyone to celebrate his homecoming. So let's have a round of applause to welcome our servants. They do not normally have the opportunity to dine with their betters. And after all, where would we be without them?

There's Violet my maid. Stand up Violet. Don't be shy. Isn't she wonderful?

VIOLET DRESSER

I'm very good with a needle.

LADY MIDDLETON

Isn't she just. She made this dress. And she's brought Old Ned.

OLD NED

A nice bit of crumpet she is.

LADY MIDDLETON

Why thank you, Ned. And there's Mr. Collins. How old are you now Mr. Collins?

MICHAEL COLLINS

It's the curse. It's the curse of King Tut. He's a dead man. It's the curse. Lord Middleton is a dead man.

LADY MIDDLETON

That's very jolly. Thank you, Mr. Collins.

MAUD GONNE

Who's dead? Who's lost his purse.

LADY MIDDLETON

They've been with us a long time. Probably too long. Use the ear trumpet dear. The ear trumpet.

MICHAEL COLLINS

Don't be callin' me wife a strumpet.

LADY MIDDLETON

Rebecca Woods is my housekeeper. She does a wonderful job. Rebecca stand up.

REBECCA WOODS

Thank you. Karl and me are just good friends and no matter what anyone says Karl is not a communist.

KARL BOLSHEVIC

Long Live the Revolution. (*Making the communist salute.*) Down with the capitalistic pigs!

LADY MIDDLETON

That's very nice dear. That makes us all feel a lot better. Roger, our footman?

ROGER FOOTSORE

I want to know what's in the box.

LADY MIDDLETON

The box? Oh the box in the library. Oh that's just my husband's samples. Plants and things. He collects them. And Bunny?

BUNNY

I bet you 10-1 it's treasure.

LADY MIDDLETON

Don't be silly. It will be plants. Mr. LeBouef, our chef.

FREDERIC LEBOUUEF

(With a French accent.)

I hate your English cooking. I hate your steak and kidney pudding.

LADY MIDDLETON

And his kitchen maid, well, um, companion, Sue Flee.

SUE FLEE

(With a French accent.)

Oh la la. Pardonnez moi. I have made something very special for dessert.

LADY MIDDLETON

Tres bien. ... Deary. Paul Ryder. He's our coachman and he knows all about motorcars.

PAUL RYDER

Bring 'em on. Bring 'em on. I'll fight 'em all.

LADY MIDDLETON

Bring on whom?

LADY MIDDLETON

Yes, I am sure we should. Paul's a boxer as well. And we mustn't forget our good neighbors, Lord and Lady Troutbridge.

LORD TROUTBRIDGE

Deep into the darkness peering, etc.

LADY TROUTBRIDGE

Pay no attention. He's had too much to drink again. Stay away from the port. Did you know my mother the Duchess of Northumberland?

LADY MIDDLETON

Thank you all for being here. Where's Molly? Has anyone seen Molly? She's the chambermaid.

(Charles re-enters. He is walking rather slowly and uncomfortably. He has a knife sticking out of his back, which Lady Middleton cannot see.)

There you are Prestwick. Do you know where Molly is?

CHARLES PRESTWICK

I ... I was resting and ... the library... Lady Middleton and Molly... She was ... My back... Suddenly ... My back ...

LADY MIDDLETON

Your back? You shouldn't be lifting things. I've told you before. Get the younger men to do it.

CHARLES PRESTWICK

No...

(He tries to point to the knife sticking out of his back... Sinks to his knees)

LADY MIDDLETON

Prestwick! What's a kitchen knife doing stuck in your back? Prestwick? Speak to me. Dr. Belchitt? Dr. Belchitt. Do something. Dr. Belchitt, is he dead?

DR. BELCHITT

No. He's still alive.

CHARLES PRESTWICK

Lord, Lord. . .

LADY MIDDLETON

Lord? . . . The Lord? . . . Now Prestwick that's the Vicar's job. Vicar, come over here he is calling for you . . .

(Prestwick whispers in Dr. Belchitt's ear: Lord, Lord. Smith. Smith.)

LADY MIDDLETON

Ryder and Roger please take him to his room. I can't have him bleeding all over my carpets. And to think that the Prince of Wales is here. There could be a scandal. Don't worry Prestwick, we'll have it all sorted out.

(Turning to her guests.)

Ladies and Gentlemen, I'm afraid there's been an accident. Lord Troutbridge, this must be kept quiet. Let's just say he slipped.

(Ryder & Dr. Belchitt helps remove Prestwick. Molly cues Tony to re-enter the room, dragging a protesting Molly behind him enters. She has an overcoat on and is gripping a small case.)

MOLLY

Let go of me. You got no right. Let go of me.

(She struggles.)

TONY CUMMINGS

Look who I found trying to sneak out of the house!!!

LADY MIDDLETON

Tony, I'll handle this. Now, Molly! What are you doing? Why are you wearing a raincoat? Are you going somewhere?

MOLLY

I was leaving.

LADY MIDDLETON

Why?

MOLLY

Prestwick. He fired me.

LADY MIDDLETON

Prestwick didn't tell me.

(Tony grabs her case. There's a struggle.)

MOLLY

Gimme my case. It's mine. You got no right. It's mine.

(Tony gets it.)

You got no right. Those is me private things.

(Tony opens the case and finds four wads of £10 notes. Underwear, clothes and personal belongings a la 1920's.)

MOLLY

They're mine. They're mine. I found 'em. That's me private stuff.

LADY MIDDLETON

Molly! What are you doing with all this money?

MOLLY

I found it.

TONY CUMMINGS

And look what else she has, the little thief.

(Tony produces a small Egyptian statue from the case.)

She must have taken it from the library, it's unlocked.

LADY MIDDLETON

The library is unlocked?

(Taking the statute from Tony.)

Now, Molly? What is this?

MOLLY

I dunno. I never seen it before. Someone must have put it in me bag. Honest. I come downstairs and was slipping out all nice and quiet like when Tony grabbed me from behind and dragged me in 'ere.

LADY MIDDLETON

Molly sit there and be quiet. We're going to sort this out.

(Takes suitcase and statute and puts them on the clue table.)

MOLLY

I didn't do nuffin'.

(She cries loudly)

I just took what was mine. I ain't been paid.

(Ryder and Dr. Belchitt re-enter. Ryder whispers to Lady Middleton.)

LADY MIDDLETON

Ladies and Gentlemen... There's been an accident. Poor Prestwick, our butler, who has been with us for many years, has slipped and fallen on a kitchen knife. He is rather badly hurt ... Vicar could you say a few encouraging words.

REVEREND BLISS

Into the valley of death rode the six hundred, guns to the left of them. Guns to the right of them. And Mr. Prestwick, last words? God Save the Queen. Amen.

LADY MIDDLETON

Thank you, Vicar. I thought for the moment he was still alive.

Now, Molly – what have you been up to?

MOLLY

(Crying profusely)

I didn't do nuffin'. I promise your Ladyship. I just saw the money. An' I took it. I'm a good girl I am. I haven't had me wages. You know that. You told us to be patient. But, Mr. Prestwick, he just gave me the sack.... I didn't steal nuffin' 'onest.

LADY MIDDLETON

Molly, behave yourself. Remember where you are. That will be quite enough.

MOLLY

But me lady..

LADY MIDDLETON

Not one more word Molly. Clearly you have been stealing and you are not to be trusted.

MOLLY

All right, I stole. I stole .. I stole some of Paul Ryder's money.

LADY MIDDLETON

Molly! You are a wicked girl. You stole Ryder's money. How could you?

MOLLY

But where did he get it?

LADY MIDDLETON

I do not care where he got it. That is not the point.

MOLLY

And the knife...

LADY MIDDLETON

What about the knife?

MOLLY

It weren't me.

LADY MIDDLETON

The knife?

MOLLY

In Mr. Prestwick's back ... I saw it ... When they took Mr. Prestwick out of 'ere.

LADY MIDDLETON

You stabbed Prestwick?

MOLLY

No.... ! I just used it to..... I dropped it.

LADY MIDDLETON

Chef. Did you see the knife in Prestwick's back? Was that one of your kitchen knives? Yes I know, you hate steak and kidney pudding. But was it one of your knives?

Judge Strechnick you must place Molly under arrest. She has stolen money from this house and she took a knife without permission from the kitchen. I fear she has stabbed our butler, Prestwick. Just when Lord Middleton is about

to arrive home, when we are celebrating. Molly! How could you do this? After all I have done for you. And with the Prince of Wales here.

MOLLY

I didn't stab Mr. Prestwick. I took the money because I was owed money. A girl's gotta live. I worked all me life. I never stole. Alright, I heard all about the Tutankhamen and I thought maybe if there was something ... little ... but it's cursed – Ask Mr. Collins.

LADY MIDDLETON

I'm afraid you're a liar Molly and you're a thief. Judge. Place this girl under arrest. What is that Judge, you have something to say?

(The Judge now reads from a sheet.)

JUDGE STRECHNICK

Your Royal Highness. . . Ladies and Gentlemen. Regretfully we have had a death on the premises. Mr. Prestwick, the butler, has passed away. I understand from Dr. Belchitt that the wound to his back combined with the shock of the blow contributed to his demise. Given the circumstances, I have sent for my houseguest, the well-known Henry J. Holmes, a man of considerable reputation in the solving of complex crimes. I believe that this matter should be settled on the spot to avoid embarrassment to His Royal Highness. Molly, you are under arrest.

MOLLY

Whaaaaa! I never done nuffin'. I am innocent.

LADY MIDDLETON

Molly! Be quiet. Ryder, please will you check whether Lord Middleton has arrived at the station.

Ladies and Gentlemen, these have been unfortunate circumstances, but Chef has gone to a lot of trouble and I won't have anything wasted so please enjoy your meal.

SCENE 2

Stage Manager meets Paul Ryder in the lobby and explains to him what is to happen. Lights suddenly dim. A door bangs open. There is a sound of rushing wind. Lights shine into a space behind the door. Fog machine on. March from Aida begins. Smoke swirls in the doorway. Sound over of Aida March. Smoke pours through the door. A statue appears dressed as Tutankhamen (Ryder or if Ryder is unwilling to do this, the Stage Manager) on first major trumpet burst. He moves forward and stands amid light and smoke. He stands in the doorway lit by the side lighting. He has muscly arms and holds the Egyptian scepter, etc. (He is joined by two women also clad in Egyptian headgear. (optional) They move through the door first and turn inwards and go down on one knee with bowed head.) Tut moves forward.

The triumphal march from Aida thunders out over the loudspeakers. They move ceremoniously into the dining area. (The women follow him.) Tut looks at Singh or anyone else and points accusingly towards him. (The optional women also.) They turn and move back and close the door and lights up as music dims.

LADY MIDDLETON

Dear me. I feel quite faint. Dr. Belchitt? What is happening? Give me lights. Lights. Tony? Tony? What is happening? Judge Strechnick. What is happening out there? Goodness me.

(Suddenly there are raised voices outside and the sounds of a struggle.)

(Enter Henry Holmes with Paul Ryder in a half nelson. Ryder has a bag containing the Tut mask, pairs of shoes, one of which is the same size as Singh's, a pocket watch, rope and a dressing gown cord.)

(This all depends on the actor, American New York/Paris/Scotland. The accent should contribute to the different texture of the play. I have written is as a canny Scot but the lines can be transposed and should be. The main attributes are astuteness, reticence, an ability to absorb the significance of small pieces of information and a sense of humor.)

HENRY HOLMES

Come Sir. Resistance is futile. I am versed in the noble Japanese art of karate and will break your neck if you continue to resist.

(Holmes throws Ryder into a chair.)

LADY MIDDLETON

Was he responsible for that frightening show?

HENRY HOLMES

Lady Middleton I presume. Henry Holmes at your service. Judge Strechnick, it would appear that I arrived in the nick of time. I caught this man exiting in haste. I suspected that he was up to no good and his resistance only confirmed my suspicions.

LADY MIDDLETON

Welcome ... Mr. Holmes. My butler is dead and we are waiting for my husband to return from London, and Molly here has been caught stealing and the Prince of Wales is staying and my dinner party is ruined ...

HENRY HOLMES

Please Lady Middleton. Allow me. There's an Old Persian saying, a new eye sees the true color. Let me discover what has happened here for myself.

LADY MIDDLETON

But, Mr. Holmes, there are certain guests here on private business (*pointing to the Prince of Wales and his escort*). We must be as discrete as possible.

HENRY HOLMES

Of course I do understand. In no way will I embarrass His Royal Highness and his acquaintance – they're ...um. this affair will be kept strictly confidential. You can rely on me.

(*turning to Ryder*)

Good evening. What is your name? What is your job here?

PAUL RYDER

I am the chauffer. I was going to pick his Lordship up from the station when you stopped me.

HENRY HOLMES

You were going to pick up his Lordship. Hmm What is in this bag? A rope.

PAUL RYDER

I needed that in case I broke down.

HENRY HOLMES

A rope in case you broke down? What is this? A mask.

PAUL RYDER

Oh, that – we was just having a bit of fun. I was playing a joke.

HENRY HOLMES

Just meant as a piece of fun? You were playing a joke. Not many people were amused. What about the boots?

PAUL RYDER

I was gonna polish ‘em.

HENRY HOLMES

You were going to polish them? On the way to the station? Does anyone here recognize these boots. There’s a name in one of them. Mr. Singh. Is there a Mr. Singh? Is this your boot Mr. Singh? There is a watch in it. Does this watch belong to you as well? Um. And this dressing gown cord? You are sure these all belong to you? Thank you.

Lady Middleton, you said Molly had been stealing. Who’s Molly?

LADY MIDDLETON

She is my chambermaid and a thief and liar.

HENRY HOLMES

Your maid. Molly, whose money is this?

MOLLY

I ain’t telling.

LADY MIDDLETON

Ask her about the knife, too.

MOLLY

I never stabbed him.

HENRY HOLMES

Who?

MOLLY

Mr. Prestwick, the butler.

HENRY HOLMES

Then what's this about a knife Molly?

LADY MIDDLETON

Ask my chef, Mr. LeBoeuf if he is missing any knives.

HENRY HOLMES

Mr. LeBoeuf, are you missing any knives? Did you see Molly take a knife from your kitchen?

MOLLY

All right, I took a knife from the kitchen, but I dropped it.

HENRY HOLMES

What did you want the knife for?

MOLLY

I'll tell you. But I didn't stab nobody. It was to get the money... Paul Ryder's money. He's the only one of us who has been paid. He hides the money under the floorboards in his room. I needed the knife to pry the loose board up.

HENRY HOLMES

You took Ryder's money?

MOLLY

I didn't take it all.

HENRY HOLMES

What did you do with the knife?

MOLLY

I dropped it outside the library. I was in a hurry. But I didn't stab nobody.

HENRY HOLMES

Dr. Belchitt. Did you examine Charles Prestwick?

DR. BELCHITT

Yes, someone stabbed Charles Prestwick with a butcher's knife between the second and third vertebrae. The wound punctured his lower lung.

HENRY HOLMES

Did he die instantly?

DR. BELCHITT

No. He eventually died from a combination of the blow and loss of blood.

HENRY HOLMES

I see. That is unfortunate. . . Lady Middleton, Lord Middleton was due home I understand.

LADY MIDDLETON

Yes... I instructed Ryder to go to the station to collect him.

HENRY HOLMES

But he hasn't arrived.

LADY MIDDLETON

He must have been delayed in London. The trains must be running late. He has been ill. He wrote me that he was bitten by a mosquito while he was in Egypt.

HENRY HOLMES

I couldn't help but notice the packing crate.

LADY MIDDLETON

It's samples... Lord Middleton is an expert on plants.

HENRY HOLMES

Tell me Lady Middleton, why was your husband in Egypt?

LADY MIDDLETON

He was asked by Lord Canarvon to help Howard Carter with Tutankhamen's tomb. Lady Evelyn, Lord Canarvon's daughter can tell you all about that.

HENRY HOLMES

Lady Evelyn. Please accept my condolences on the loss of your father. An outstanding man. A great tragedy.

LADY EVELYN

(She reads:)

My father was an outstanding man. He had great faith in Lord Middleton's knowledge of plant life. Mr. Carter is still working in the tomb to catalogue all the discoveries.

HENRY HOLMES

This small statue found in Molly's possession. Do you have any comment?

LADY EVELYN

This is very embarrassing. As you probably know the official opening of the tomb took place in February under the strictest of guidelines. However we first discovered the tomb the prior November. I trust, your Royal Highness that this information will not go further than this room. My father and Mr. Carter had considerable problems with the Egyptian authorities. We were entitled to at least half the treasure but because of the French there was a danger that we would be prohibited from taking anything. Why is it always the French? Mr. Carter feared that we would find the tomb ransacked. Secretly once all the debris had been cleared away on the night of November 26th we broke through a small opening, which tomb robbers had made many thousands of year's ago. We crawled through into the antechamber. Everywhere was the glint of gold. We had discovered the greatest treasure in the history of mankind. That night was the most incredible of my life. We decided rightly or wrongly to take some of the smaller pieces, priceless as they were. Our reward for the years of patient research and expense. This piece was one of those taken by Mr. Carter from the tomb. How it got here I do not know.

HENRY HOLMES

How much did you bring out?

LADY EVELYN

I cannot discuss this.

HENRY HOLMES

Who brought the pieces back to England?

LADY EVELYN

I do not know. My father and Howard Carter made the arrangements.

HENRY HOLMES

Was Lord Middleton there at the time?

LADY EVELYN

No. Though, I remember Mr. Carter and my father discussing him.

HENRY HOLMES

How much was all this treasure worth?

LADY EVELYN

Millions – Even more. It's priceless.

HENRY HOLMES

Since that night, have you seen any of those pieces?

LADY EVELYN

Just one. We were at Howard Carter's home in May and there was an Egyptian perfume box on his desk which I remembered from that night.

HENRY HOLMES

What do you know about the curse?

LADY EVELYN

It is nonsense. Rubbish journalists invent so their editors can sell newspapers.

HENRY HOLMES

This may be very difficult but how did your father die?

LADY EVELYN

He died of complications from a mosquito bite. The infection got the better of him.

HENRY HOLMES

Thank you Lady Evelyn.

LADY MIDDLETON

I fail to understand what this has to do with the death of my butler.

HENRY HOLMES

Motive, Lady Middleton. As my uncle would remind us when we questioned him about the crimes that he had solved. Motive, opportunity and means. What greater motive than a two thousand year old treasure. As Lady Evelyn so eloquently put it, "Everywhere was the glint of gold."

LADY MIDDLETON

But Prestwick?

HENRY HOLMES

Charles Prestwick, I believe, stumbled onto something, which cost him his life.

LADY MIDDLETON

So, Molly must have killed him. She had the statue, she had just been fired and has no money, she admits having the knife and she was in the vicinity of the library when she was caught.

HENRY HOLMES

Who caught her?

LADY MIDDLETON

My son, Tony. (*directing Holmes to Tony Cummings*)

HENRY HOLMES

Pleased to meet you, Mr. Middleton.

TONY CUMMINGS

My naming is Anthony Cummings. My friends call me Tony, you may call me Mr. Cummings.

HENRY HOLMES

Mr. Cummings? So, you are the stepson of Lord Middleton? I see. I do apologize, Mr. Cummings. You caught Molly? Why were you out of the room?

TONY CUMMINGS

I was on the phone in the lobby checking the train arrivals at the station. I saw Molly coming out of the library and trying to sneak out of the house.

HENRY HOLMES

I see. Was she carrying that suitcase? You opened it? Did Molly seem shocked? I see. Thank you, Mr. Cummings. Oh... One more question, how far is it from the library to the lobby? You did say you were going to the phone in the lobby... to check the train arrivals. Mr. Cummings, is your stepfather your benefactor? Do you depend on him money?

TONY CUMMINGS

If there was any, may be I would . . .

HENRY HOLMES

What do you mean, if there was any?

TONY CUMMINGS

There is a lack of funds at present with my stepfather playing in that Egyptian sandbox . . . The servants have been quitting left and right . . .

HENRY HOLMES

Lady Middleton. Your servants were not being paid, what was the problem?

MOLLY

I can vouch for that. We're so far behind on paying the bills, the grocer won't make no more deliveries. We get our groceries from Buckminster now and I know they ain't been paid.

LADY MIDDLETON

Well, my husband instructed Oh ask, Mr. Lawson, the family solicitor... He is in charge of all the money.

(She breaks down into tears.)

HENRY HOLMES

Mr. Lawson?

MR. LAWSON

(He indicates that he has lost his voice and points to Mrs. Lawson.)

MRS. LAWSON

The estate is bankrupt. The banks have refused to mortgage the property any further. Some creditors are insisting the estate should be turned into a B&B for American tourists and the artwork auctioned to pay the debts.

(David Middleton explodes quietly and then starts laughing.)

HENRY HOLMES

You seem mightily amused. Your name, sir?

DAVID MIDDLETON

I am David Middleton, the younger brother of Lord Middleton.

HENRY HOLMES

I see, Mr. Middleton. Do you live here?

DAVID MIDDLETON

Not anymore, now I am a just visitor. *(Ha-Ha-Ha)*.

HENRY HOLMES

You seem rather amused this evening. May I be so bold as to ask you how you earn your living?

DAVID MIDDLETON

My wife and I breed silver foxes for fur coats. We own a furrier shop in Chelsea.

HENRY HOLMES

I see. Silver foxes, for fur coats. Must be lucrative?

ELIZABETH MIDDLETON

(Lying) It is very lucrative – my husband and I are very comfortable.

HENRY HOLMES

Hmm . . . Tell me, Mr. Middleton, did you always get on well with your brother?

DAVID MIDDLETON

When we were not at each other's throats – you know sibling rivalry.

HENRY HOLMES

Not very amusing Mr. Middleton. Where were you when Charles Prestwick was stabbed?

DAVID & ELIZABETH MIDDLETON

We were right here, Mr. Holmes – We have a room full of witnesses.

HENRY HOLMES

Of course you do, of course your do.

(Turning to the Lawsons) Mrs. Lawson, how often are you in touch with Lord Middleton?

MRS. LAWSON

My husband and I correspond regularly with Lord Middleton.

HENRY HOLMES

Have you informed him that the estate is bankrupt?

MRS. LAWSON

Yes.

HENRY HOLMES

But Lord Middleton must have a salary from the government or a pension from the War.

MRS. LAWSON

Yes, but it is not much . . . then there are substantial gambling debts . . .

HENRY HOLMES

Lord Middleton has been paying substantial gambling debts.

(Turning to Lady Middleton)

Lady Middleton, was your husband a gambler?

LADY MIDDLETON

Certainly not Mr. Holmes.

HENRY HOLMES

Now, one last thing. Was anyone with Charles Prestwick when he was stabbed?

LADY MIDDLETON

There were only two people gone from this room when Prestwick was stabbed, my Tony, and this little thief and liar, who has all but admitted to killing poor Prestwick.

HENRY HOLMES

Lady Middleton, please allow me to handle this. Dr. Belchitt, did Charles Prestwick say anything to you when he died?

DR. BELCHITT

He said Lord, Lord, . . . Smith, Smith?

HENRY HOLMES

Do I hear you correctly? He said Lord, Lord and Smith, Smith. Is there a Smith here?

MR SMITH

Yes. I am John Smith.

HENRY HOLMES

You are Mr. Smith. May I ask your relationship to Charles Prestwick.

MR SMITH

I have never met him until tonight. I am the curator of Egyptology with the British Museum in London. I was asked by Lord Middleton to help verify the sarcophagus of King Tutankhamen.

HENRY HOLMES

And you brought with you... your, er . . . secretary?

MR SMITH

Yes... Miss Pickering .. Is here to make drawings of the sarcophagus.

HENRY HOLMES

Miss Pickering.

MISS PICKERING

Yes?

HENRY HOLMES

You work for Mr. Smith at the British Museum?

MISS PICKERING

Yes. I do... I am a calligrapher.

HENRY HOLMES

A calligrapher?

MISS PICKERING

Yes... I draw things . . .

HENRY HOLMES

And your office is in the British Museum.

MISS PICKERING

Oh yes.

HENRY HOLMES

Just round the corner from Baker Street.

MISS PICKERING

Yes.. Yes.. That's right . . . er. Just round the corner. Well I walk a bit sometimes.

HENRY HOLMES

Thank you, Miss Pickering.

Lady Middleton, you were expecting your husband this evening were you not?

LADY MIDDLETON

Yes. He gave specific instructions.

HENRY HOLMES

About what?

LADY MIDDLETON

About whom I should invite to this evening's homecoming celebration.

HENRY HOLMES

And you followed those instructions?

LADY MIDDLETON

Absolutely.

HENRY HOLMES

What about the crate?

LADY MIDDLETON

One arrived last Tuesday, I think.

HENRY HOLMES

Did he say what was in them?

LADY MIDDLETON

Specimens I think he said.

HENRY HOLMES

From his trip to Egypt?

LADY MIDDLETON

Yes.

HENRY HOLMES

Lady Middleton, I hope that you do not find this question impudent but you were not born in England... I mean your phony English accent . . .

LADY MIDDLETON

No, I was born in America... And am proud of my origins, nevertheless mixing as I do with so many British people, naturally one's accent changes.

HENRY HOLMES

How long is it since you saw Lord Middleton?

LADY MIDDLETON

It must be ten, eleven years... The Great War you know. It took such a heavy toll. But Peter always wrote.. Once a week... like clockwork.

HENRY HOLMES

Are you looking forward to his return?

LADY MIDDLETON

Of course... It has been long anticipated. It will be a happy reunion but I really do not see what this has to do with....

HENRY HOLMES

Lady Middleton... you are a fraud.

LADY MIDDLETON

A fraud?

HENRY HOLMES

Yes.

LADY MIDDLETON

I don't know what you mean.

HENRY HOLMES

You're not American. You're Australian.

LADY MIDDLETON

How absolutely ridiculous. Sir, I am an American.

HENRY HOLMES

Your accent indicates kangaroos and koalas not New York or Washington.

LADY MIDDLETON

You sir, have no idea about what you are speaking.

HENRY HOLMES

When did you marry Lord Middleton?

LADY MIDDLETON

1903

HENRY HOLMES

But you have a son ... Anthony who's.....

LADY MIDDLETON

Tony already told you, Lord Middleton's is his stepfather. Tony's father still lives in America.

HENRY HOLMES

So you are a divorcée.

LADY MIDDLETON

What I am or what I'm not has nothing to do with you. I find it offensive that you come into my house, insult my servants, interrogate me like a criminal and ask meaningless questions. I have friends in very high places. You would do well to concentrate what intellectual powers you may or may not have on finding a solution to the death of my butler. My personal life is my own.

HENRY HOLMES

Did you plan to murder your husband?

LADY MIDDLETON

You sir, are beneath contempt and I will no longer stand here and be insulted in my own house. (*She turns on her heels and leaves.*)

HENRY HOLMES

The vixen when roused makes short work of her prey. An Old Persian saying. Ladies and Gentlemen. I need to investigate the premises, including your room Molly, and do a little measuring.

MOLLY

But, I didn't do nuffin'.

HENRY HOLMES

Ladies and Gentlemen, I need to examine the body of Mr. Prestwick. In the meantime, with little disturbance of the household as possible, I would be most grateful for everyone's assistance. If you have found a clue envelope, now is the time to open it and review its contents. We will discuss the clues in ten minutes time.

SCENE 3

(The denouement.)

HENRY HOLMES

Welcome back, your Royal Highness, ladies and gentlemen. While you were looking for clues, I examined Charles Prestwick's body. I thought that these broken spectacles I found in his pocket were a clue, but Dr. Belchitt informed me that Mr. Prestwick accidentally broke his spectacles four month's ago and has been waiting for the replacement pair.

(Goes over to the clue table.)

Now, what other clues do we have here? Treasure? Interesting. Letters and telegrams? A smashed picture? This looks like you Lady Middleton and who is this with you?

LADY MIDDLETON

Why? That is a picture of my twin brother, Neal Cabot, and me. {Version 2 – That is a picture of me and my twin sister, Charlotte Cabot.}

HENRY HOLMES

I see. Where is your brother/sister now?

LADY MIDDLETON

Neal/Charlotte is a schoolteacher in Boston. I have not heard from him/her in months.

HENRY HOLMES

But this telegram states that your brother/sister would be visiting you for the Christmas holiday? How long did he/she stay?

LADY MIDDLETON

Oh, that's right, Neal/Charlotte visited for Christmas, but had to return to the States. We have not been in touch since.

HENRY HOLMES

Thank you, Lady Middleton. Now what is this clue -- a key? Where was this found? Does anyone recognize this? Lady Middleton?

LADY MIDDLETON

Yes of course. It's the key to the library, I think. I always keep it.... Goodness. It's gone from my purse. Someone must have stolen it. Lord Middleton gave strict instructions that his library was to be kept locked at all times. Molly of course would clean it once a week but she always came to me to get the key. Why only this morning she came. Now I remember she never returned it.

HENRY HOLMES

Is that right Molly?

MOLLY

That's not true. I cleaned the library like I always does and then I give her back the key.

HENRY HOLMES

A piece of floorboard from Paul Ryder's room . . . stolen money . . . smuggled treasure. . . a smashed picture . . . and broken spectacles . . . What we are dealing with here is a very clever criminal or . . . criminals. But for an act of fate, our murderer or murderers might very well have gotten away with it, and perhaps they will still. Molly! Tell me about the West Wing of Middleton Manor?

MOLLY

It's all closed off. And it has been that way for years because it's too expensive to heat. The boilers don't work. Ever since Lord Middleton left, the Manor is fallin' apart.

LADY MIDDLETON

Do not listen to a word that girl says. She is a filthy little liar.

MOLLY

No, I'm not. I seen you go in the West Wing your Ladyship. I saw you there last week.

LADY MIDDLETON

Because you reported hearing strange noises in the West Wing. I was simply inspecting the premises -- making a list of repairs for Lord Middleton's return.

MOLLY

You wez carrying something.

LADY MIDDLETON

Ridiculous girl. She is making it up. Little liar.

HENRY HOLMES

Enough . . . And we have the different pairs of used boots. Interesting patterns on the soles. The dressing gown cord belongs to Mr. Singh. What's this? Hieroglyphics. Mr. Smith would you please translate this for us? What does it say?

MR. SMITH

"They who enter this sacred tomb shall swift be visited by wings of death."

HENRY HOLMES

And where was this found. It was found on Mr. Singh...

MR. RAJAH SINGH

I am sick and tired of these British people stealing.

HENRY HOLMES

I do understand. Your shoes, your watch, your dressing gown cord. Did you notice when you were missing these items?

MR. RAJAH SINGH

My shoes last night. My watch two or three weeks ago. After Mr. David Middleton was here and we were talking about the terrible things the British did in India. My dressing gown cord, I am not remembering.

[HANDOUT WHO DUNNITS.]

HENRY HOLMES

Not a very successful plot, Mr. Middleton.

DAVID MIDDLETON

I don't know what you are talking about.

HENRY HOLMES

We're you always jealous of your brother?

DAVID MIDDLETON

I don't know what you are talking about.

HENRY HOLMES

You didn't know the estate was bankrupt did you? That's why you were so amused. It must be a bit ironic... The eldest son gets everything and you become a furrier.

DAVID MIDDLETON

I don't know what you're talking about.

HENRY HOLMES

Mr. Ryder. Do you fully appreciate the consequences of your actions? To be hanged until dead? They put a black bag over your head and they drop you through a trap and your neck snaps like a chicken's wishbone.

PAUL RYDER

But I didn't do nothing.

HENRY HOLMES

You plotted.

PAUL RYDER

It was his idea. He told me what to do. (*Pointing to David Middleton*)

HENRY HOLMES

How was this little rouse to go after you collected Lord Middleton from the station?

PAUL RYDER

I was to pretend to have a breakdown on the way back to the manor and I would strangle Lord Middleton with Mr. Singh's dressing gown cord.

HENRY HOLMES

And the boots?

PAUL RYDER

I was gonna use 'em to place footprints round the car. To make it look like there was more people.

HENRY HOLMES

I guessed as much, and the rope?

PAUL RYDER

To tie myself up with.

HENRY HOLMES

Of course, to tie yourself up. Very clever.

PAUL RYDER

It wasn't my idea.

HENRY HOLMES

And what was the little show for?

PAUL RYDER

To place the blame on Mr. Singh. He thinks he's so smart.

HENRY HOLMES

Not very clever. But I imagine you were well paid.

MOLLY

So that's where you got the money. I was wondering where you got it from.

HENRY HOLMES

David Middleton and Paul Ryder you are under arrest for conspiracy to commit the murder of Lord Middleton.

PAUL RYDER

You can't arrest me, nothing actually happened. You have no body.

HENRY HOLMES

We have your confession and conspiracy to commit a capital offense is still a crime. The police are on their way. Lord Troutbridge, I would be grateful if you and Judge Strechnick would guard these scoundrels. Thank you.

(Turning to Molly)

Now, Molly, tell us the truth. Tell us about the money. I know you didn't kill Prestwick. I can help you.

MOLLY

Well alright. Couple of weeks ago I sees Ryder accepting an envelope from David Middleton when he were over here. A big envelope and I got nosy and his room is well, just next to mine. Cleaning the floors like I have to throughout the house, I noticed that one of them floorboards in his room was loose so I got a knife from the kitchen and pry it up when he was out and I found the money and Mr. Singh's watch. I just thought he was stealing stuff. When I got the sack I thought I would take a bit of it and nobody would bother.

HENRY HOLMES

So when you left the drawing room during the reception, you went to the kitchen, got the knife and then what?

MOLLY

I goes up to Paul Ryder's room and takes up the floorboard and helps myself to some of the money, then as fast as I can I goes back to the kitchen to put the knife back but on my way back I sees the library door open. Oh gorbliney, I sez to myself, I must have forgotten to lock it this morning when I cleaned it. So I goes over to close the door and I sees the crate... that crate. I didn't know what to do. I thought it would be interesting to see what was in it so I was bending down and start open' it. Then I heard someone coming. I was sure it was Mr. Prestwick seeing the footsteps wez slow, so I panicked. I didn't want to be caught stealing no stuff. I rushed back upstairs. I got all my stuff together and I thought 'get out of here fast.

HENRY HOLMES

You made for the servants' entrance.

MOLLY

Yea and then just as I put my hand on the door, Mr. Cummings got hold of me and dragged me back in 'ere.

HENRY HOLMES

And the statue?

MOLLY

Cross me 'eart and 'ope to die. I never touched it. I didn't. I never seen it before.

HENRY HOLMES

Did you ever have an intimate relationship with Mr. Cummings?

MOLLY

You must be joking. All 'e talks about is 'ow wonderful America is. Not that he didn't have a go. Know what I mean?

TONY CUMMINGS

It's quite clear to me that Molly stabbed Prestwick.

HENRY HOLMES

Why would you think that Mr. Cummings?

TONY CUMMINGS

She had the opportunity, the weapon and the motive. She was discovered stealing.

HENRY HOLMES

You are quite right, Mr. Cummings, except for one thing . . . she couldn't have stabbed Prestwick.

TONY CUMMINGS

Why not?

HENRY HOLMES

Prestwick was stabbed between the second and third vertebrae on the left side of his back and the wound punctured his lower lung.

Molly, how tall are you?

MOLLY

Five foot four.

HENRY HOLMES

How tall was Charles Prestwick, about six foot?

(He demonstrates how it would have been impossible for Molly to have stabbed Prestwick with a table knife.)

Prestwick was stabbed by someone else. Someone who I think was left handed if I am not mistaken. You are left handed Mr. Cummings I notice.

TONY CUMMINGS

I don't know what you are talking about. I am an American citizen and I am not subject to your crummy old British law. I am leaving.

HENRY HOLMES

Oh no you are not. Lord Troutbridge, be so good as to guard our young friend to prevent his departure. Thank you. Now Lady Middleton, Am I right in saying that the West Wing has been closed and has not been cleaned any time recently?

LADY MIDDLETON

We can barely keep the main part of the house cleaned.

HENRY HOLMES

Then please explain the footprints in the dust. Two sets and they all lead to one room.

LADY MIDDLETON

I don't know what you are talking about.

HENRY HOLMES

Lady Middleton, it is a pity your mother did not teach you to be a better liar. You ARE a fraud . . . It's not your accent. It's your scar – or lack of one. Dr. Belchitt informed me that the real Lady Middleton was in a riding accident last year and as a result had a limp (which you did attempt to mimic) and a scar on her neck – which you were not aware of. (Turns her head and there is no scar).

LADY MIDDLETON

Damn you, you limey bastards.

HENRY HOLMES

That's your sister up there in that room. Isn't it?

LADY MIDDLETON

Yeah, so it's my lah de dah sister up there.

HENRY HOLMES

The real Lady Middleton. So she must have told you about the treasure.

LADY MIDDLETON

She knew the treasure was stolen and nobody else knew about it. Lord Middleton was doing Carter and Canarvon a favor. She was going to get out of her financial problems, but it didn't make me any richer. I figured, if they could steal it from the tomb, I could steal it from them. We are twins so I thought a little impersonation might do the trick. We would fence the stuff in the States and... but then my stupid nephew had to go and stab the butler. Jeez.... *(Pulls gun)*

O.K. Everybody calm down. Nobody makes a move... Nobody touches anything or the future king of England ends up as strawberry jam.

(He/She takes his Royal Highness hostage.)

Tony get the treasure. Is that all of it? O.K. Let's scram.

HENRY HOLMES

One minute Mr./Miss Cabot. *(Ms. Charlotte Cabot in Version 2)*

LADY MIDDLETON/CABOT

What?

HENRY HOLMES

The gun.

LADY MIDDLETON/CABOT

Don't come any closer.

HENRY HOLMES

The gun, Mr./Miss Cabot, is not loaded. I was struck by the weight of your purse and became suspicious. You may remember me coming over to the table and when you were engaged in conversation. I removed the bullets, which you see here, in my hand.

LADY MIDDLETON/CABOT

Jeez, son of a bitch.

HENRY HOLMES

(Goes up to Lady Middleton/Cabot and removes the gun.)

Never underestimate a Scotsman. It's an old Persian saying. Well actually I didn't quite get round to removing them all.

(Removes the final bullets or fires last one into the air.)

Dear me, we could have had the first British monarch shot to death and by an American.

LADY MIDDLETON/CABOT

(Cabot tries to make a break for it but is tripped by Molly.)

Damn you.

HENRY HOLMES

Judge Strechnick, place these people under arrest. Tony, why did you stab the butler?

TONY CUMMINGS

The gambling debts are mine Mr. Holmes, I lost a fortune at Ascot and there are some people who are very upset with me. My mother pay some of my debts, but then cut me off, despite coming into all this money, I asked my Aunt for help to escape back to America, but she had something else in mind . . . Prestwick, the fool, he caught me going through the treasure after Molly had left and she dropped the knife so I just thought he would tell everyone so I But really, it was my uncle/aunt who planned it all. She made me do it – help her – or she'd turn me over to those hooligans in the west end . . .

HENRY HOLMES

While we wait for the arrival of the police, I think we will find another key in the ex-Lady Middleton's handbag. If I am not mistaken it's the key to the second bedroom on the right in the West Wing. Molly, go and see if Lady Middleton is all right.

MOLLY

Yes Sir.

(She curtsies.)

And thank you.

(Exits)

HENRY HOLMES

There's still a little mystery here. Miss Pickering, you don't work at the British Museum. Baker Street Station is a considerable distance from the British Museum. If I remember my map of the underground you would use the Goadge Street Station and a calligrapher studies writing not drawing a small point.

LORD MIDDLETON

All right Holmes. You can put the hounds back in the kennels.

HENRY HOLMES

Lord Middleton. I thought you were going to keep what must be a very uncomfortable disguise on all night.

LORD MIDDLETON

How did you know?

HENRY HOLMES

Elementary my dear Middleton. Your shoes for a start. Burnt Moreton and Sachs if I am not mistaken. £150 a pair. Hardly the sort of shoes a curator at the British Museum earning £80 per year would wear. One might say the same about the rest of your clothes.

LORD MIDDLETON

(Removing his disguise)

It has been a very difficult operation. I have known for sometime that all was not going well at Middleton Manor, but my travels kept me away. But how did you figure out that my sister/brother-in-law was masquerading as my wife?

MR. HOLMES

Quite simple. First, there were these letters from your wife to her brother/sister, Neal/Charlotte Cabot, and his/her reply telegram informing Lady Middleton that (s)he would be visiting over Christmas. Second, four months ago is about when the mysterious noises started coming from the West Wing, which was about the time that Neal/Charlotte Cabot arrived and that Charles Prestwick's spectacles were mysteriously broken. Third, this smashed picture of your wife and her twin indicating some sort of fight . . . between the siblings. Finally, Mrs. Lawson told us of the gambling debts, which have helped bankrupt the estate, the real motive for this ill conceived plot that ended in murder Then when Dr. Belchitt told me of the scar, I was sure I was right.

MR. SMITH

Amazing Holmes. Amazing. Tony, you are out of my will.

MOLLY

(Re-enters and screams)

SHE'S DEAD! Lady Middleton, she's DEAD!!! It's the Curse. It's the Curse of King Tut!

LORD MIDDLETON (OR TONY IF PLAYED BY AN ACTOR)

Don't be a fool... I I Don't believe..... *(Tony drops dead.)*

(The lights flicker and go out. The coffin opens and a mummy with bright red eyes comes up and starts laughing at the guests. Strange music. Fade.)

STAGE MANAGER

Ladies and gentlemen, mummies and the living dead, this has been a performance of “The Curse of King Tut”, brought to you by Murder Ink Productions.