

ALIBIS

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

SETTING:

The drawing room of Seven Oaks, an old mansion in the English countryside, owned by actress Primavera Donna. Prima is obviously a woman of means. The room is spacious and tastefully furnished, although the heavy furniture and darkly colored walls suggest the room has remained largely undisturbed for some time. Upstage center, double doors lead into a small foyer area, presumably this is the main entrance to the mansion. At the right side of the room, two large armchairs are seated in front of a cozy-looking fireplace. Upstage of the chairs, a hallway leads off into the kitchen. There is a large clock set against the back wall. Upstage left, an arched hallway leading from the foyer to the study is visible behind the steps of a banister staircase. Downstage of the stairs is an elegant looking sofa and a well-stocked bar.

AT RISE:

It is evening. JUSTIN, a rather stuffy looking butler, is positioning the swords hanging above the fireplace, when a ridiculously cheerful DOORBELL is heard, followed by a crash of THUNDER. Straightening his tie, he crosses to the double doors and opens them with a practiced flourish. Standing in the doorway is a woman (HOPE LESLIE TRITE) in an evening gown.

JUSTIN: *(Launching into a well-rehearsed speech.)* Ah, good evening, Miss Trite! It is my humble pleasure to welcome you to Seven Oaks. I do hope . . .

HOPE: *(Interrupting as she barges inside.)* Hello, Jerry darling. Do be a dear and take this for me, will you? *(Flings wrap at him.)* Thank you, dear. My, what atrocious weather – it's simply raining cats and dogs out there! I simply **deplore** wet weather; it makes my hair so frizzy! And where is our charming hostess hiding? Prima? Prima, darling!!!! Yoo-hoooo???

JUSTIN: *(Gingerly peeling wrap from his face.)* My mistress wishes to extend her utmost apologies for not being able to greet each of her guests individually. Please make yourself comfortable until the rest of the guests have arrived.

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BY PETER KENNEDY

HOPE: Oh, dear. What a crashing bore! (*Spies bar.*) Well, I suppose I could use just a teensy drink – to warm myself up, like some hot chocolate. Thank you, Jeeves.

JUSTIN: Justin, Madam.

HOPE: (*Crosses to bar.*) Yes, yes, of course.

JUSTIN turns as SANDY LYNXE stumbles through the open doorway. His arms are piled high with luggage.

SANDY: Good heavens, Hope, what did you pack in these things - anvils? (*Collides with JUSTIN.*) Oh, drat it all! I'm terribly sorry, Jason!

JUSTIN: (*Shakily.*) Quite all right, Mr. Lynxe. However, my name is Justin, sir.

SANDY: Terribly sorry! Are you sure you're feeling well? You look a bit ill.

JUSTIN: Well, actually sir, I . . .

SANDY: Glad to hear it! Would you mind taking these up to Miss Trite's room? (*Tosses luggage to JUSTIN, who promptly sinks to his knees.*) Thank you! Hope, darling, whatever you're concocting over there, make one for me. When's dinner, Jason?

JUSTIN: Eight o'clock, sir.

SANDY: Oh good! What are we having?

JUSTIN: Red herring.

The DOORBELL rings again, followed by a crash of THUNDER. SANDY joins HOPE at the bar as JUSTIN sets luggage down to answer the door. He opens the door to discover DOCTOR JACQUELINE HYDE at his feet.

JUSTIN: (*Regaining composure.*) Ah, good evening Dr. Hyde. It is my humble pleasure to . . .

JACQUELINE: (*Crawling between his legs.*) Wait! Don't move, don't whisper, don't touch a thing!!

JUSTIN: Madam, may I inquire exactly what you are doing?

JACQUELINE: I dropped my glasses and I can't see a blasted thing without them! Oh, here they are . . . (*Trails off.*) right underneath your foot. Oh dear. Do you think that anyone else will notice?

(Holds up mangled spectacles.)

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JUSTIN: Assuredly not, madam.

JACQUELINE: Oh, thank heavens!

SANDY: Jackie darling, how are you? Can I fix you up with something to drink?

JACQUELINE: No, thank you, dear. Let me catch my breath. (Sees *HOPE*.) Prima! You look simply ravishing in that gown. My, how you've changed! Your hair, your face. (*Eyes chest curiously*.) Your . . .

HOPE: No, no, Jackie. It's me, Hope, Prima hasn't arrived yet.

JACQUELINE: That's odd. Well, you look ravishing anyway, dear. (Turning.) Jacob? Will you fetch me something tasteless and non-alcoholic, please?

JUSTIN: Certainly, madam. But my name is JUSTIN!

JACQUELINE: Yes, dear. I'm sure you are. (*JUSTIN crosses to bar as SANDY and HOPE join her at sofa*.)

JACQUELINE: (Continued.) Well. Here we are! I wonder whatever could be keeping Prima?

HOPE: (Sweetly.) I suppose that it must take her quite a long time to put on all that makeup. Don't you agree, Sandy?

SANDY: (Looking up from magazine.) I'm sorry, darling, I wasn't listening.

HOPE: I said, don't you think . . .

There is a tremendous CRASH offstage. Everyone leaps up simultaneously.

SANDY: Jason! What the devil was that!

JUSTIN: I haven't the foggiest, sir.

HOPE: It sounded as if it came from outside!

Suddenly, the DOORBELL rings. JUSTIN remains motionless.

SANDY: Well? Aren't you going to answer it?

JUSTIN: I'm waiting for the thunder, sir.

SANDY: Thunder? What thun . . . ?

There is a tremendous clap of THUNDER.

JACQUELINE: How did he do that?

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Again, JUSTIN opens the doors to reveal another guest. SIR TANLEY A. FRAUDE is looking quite muddy and disheveled. He holds a steering wheel in one hand and a pipe in the other. JUSTIN is at a loss for words.

TANLEY: Hullo, everyone. I seem to have had a bit of car trouble.

SANDY: Good grief, Sir Tanley! Are you alright?

TANLEY: Nothing that a cup of coffee loaded with caffeine couldn't fix.

JUSTIN: (*Taking the hint.*) Right away, sir. (*Pause.* JUSTIN eyes the steering wheel.) Would you like me to take that for you, sir?

TANLEY: Yes, thank you very much.

SANDY assists JUSTIN in prying TANLEY'S fingers loose. JUSTIN places the wheel carefully on top of the luggage and crosses back to the bar to begin fixing the coffee.

HOPE: (*Leading TANLEY to sofa.*) Here, darling. You just sit right over here while I fetch you one of those cute little ice-bag things for your head.

TANLEY: Really, Miss Trite, that's hardly necessary.

HOPE: Oh, but I insist! (*She tweaks SANDY on the nose and exits stage left.*)

SANDY: Extraordinary!

TANLEY: Yes. That blasted dog never knew what hit him.

SANDY: No, not that. I mean Hope doing someone else a favor – when it doesn't even benefit her.

JUSTIN: (*To TANLEY.*) Your caffeine, sir.

TANLEY: Thank you, er . . .

SANDY: Jason.

JACQUELINE: Jacob.

JUSTIN: Justin!!!

This is followed by the usual DOORBELL and THUNDER. JUSTIN opens the door to admit SISTER BELLA DONNA, who stands wordlessly as he rushes through his speech to avoid being cut off again.

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JUSTIN: (Continued.) Ah, good evening Sister Bella Donna! It is my humble pleasure to welcome you to Seven Oaks. I do hope that you will have an enjoyable evening, and if there is any way at all that I can be of assistance please let me know. (Pauses to catch breath.) May I take your coat?

SISTER has remained standing silently throughout his speech. Smiling happily, she reaches into her handbag and pulls out an index card, which she hands to JUSTIN.

JUSTIN: (Reads card.) "Dear sir or madam (as the case may be), My name is Sister Bella Donna and I have taken a vow of silence for the next thirty years or so. Have a nice day, and God bless you."

SANDY: (Confiding to TANLEY.) Isn't that Prima's long lost sister? The one who ran away to Switzerland to become a nun?

TANLEY: Quite so. Rumor has it she became a nun and took a vow of silence after being spurned by her lover. Of course, that's only a rumor.

JACQUELINE: Really, it isn't polite to gossip! How would you feel if she were to talk about you?

SANDY: That's all very well, dear, but she can't talk at all, remember?

JUSTIN: (Responding to second card.) Second door to your right.

SISTER smiles in thanks. Waving merrily to the guests – who wave back politely – she exits stage left.

JACQUELINE: This is going to be an awfully interesting evening.

HOPE: (Re-entering stage left and calling over shoulder.) Sorry, darling! (Turns.) Who on earth was that woman in the funny black dress? I bumped into her in the hallway and she blessed me.

SANDY: That's Sister Donna, darling. She's a nun.

HOPE: Oh, that explains it! Anyway, here's your ice-bag, Tanley. (Hands bag to him.) I had a devil of a time finding it.

TANLEY: Thank you, Miss Trite. That was very nice of you. (Examines bag.) Even if there is no ice in it.

HOPE: Oh, silly me! Where could my mind have been?

JACQUELINE: We do wonder sometimes, dear.

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There is a KNOCK at the door, followed by THUNDER.

SANDY: A knock? Someone must be reading the script wrong!

JACQUELINE: Quick! Answer it before we have to listen to that dreadful thunder again!

JUSTIN is about to open the door when it is suddenly flung open, obscuring him from view. MR. E.S. SOLVEDD strides in. He holds a magnifying glass in one hand and a leash in the other.

SOLVEDD: Good evening, everyone! Sorry I'm late – my bloodhound was run over by some maniac driver on the way over.

TANLEY cringes and attempts to hide his face. SOLVEDD holds up the leash and stares at the bit of fur that is still attached to the collar.

SOLVEDD: (Continued.) Oh well. I suppose he was bound to die someday, anyhow. But enough of me! Where is our dear friend Prima?

SANDY: We don't quite know, actually.

SOLVEDD: Hmmmm. What about the butler? I don't see him anywhere, either.

HOPE: He was just here a minute ago . . .

There is a muffled groan from behind the door.

SOLVEDD: Shhhh! (He tiptoes over to the door and pulls it back slightly.) Ah, Joseph! There you are! (There is another groan.) What's that? Oh, of course I meant Justin. Here, be so kind as to take this for me, will you? (Tosses leash behind door.) Thank you. Oh, and close the door when you get up. It's rather chilly in here.

JUSTIN emerges shakily and closes door as SOLVEDD warms himself by the fireplace.

SOLVEDD: (Continued.) Well, we're certainly having quite a storm tonight.

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TANLEY: I'll say. It's raining cats and . . . er, it's raining quite heavily out there.

HOPE: Oh dear. I do hope that old bridge holds out until morning.

There is suddenly the sound of GROANING TIMBERS, followed by a far-off SPLASH.

JACQUELINE: Thank you, dear. A little melodrama always livens things up.

SISTER returns stage left from bathroom. She smiles shyly at SOLVEDD and sits dangling her feet back and forth.

SANDY: Well, as long as we're waiting, I may as well relax and reflect on the day's events. You should too, Tanley.

TANLEY: Why is everyone staring at me?

JUSTIN: (Crossing to SISTER.) Your chocolate milk, madam.

SISTER accepts milk and straw as JUSTIN exits stage left. There is an awkward pause as the TICKING of the clock becomes audible. SOLVEDD fiddles with fire. JACQUELINE taps her foot and stares at her watch. TANLEY stifles a yawn. HOPE looks in her compact. SISTER slurps noisily through straw.

JACQUELINE: Really, this is most impolite! You would think that Prima would have enough manners to show up at her own dinner party on time.

SANDY: Maybe we should start eating without her.

TANLEY: Perhaps she's ill.

HOPE: Wouldn't that be a shame!

SISTER hands a card to SOLVEDD.

SOLVEDD: Sister Donna has suggested that we summon the butler and ask him what's going on.

Chorus of agreement.

TANLEY: Good idea! I'll ring for him.

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