



*The
Unexpected
Guest*

A Play

Agatha Christie

THE UNEXPECTED GUEST

A Play in Two Acts

by

AGATHA CHRISTIE

SAMUEL



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THE UNEXPECTED GUEST

Presented by Peter Saunders at the Duchess Theatre, on 12th August 1958, with the following cast of characters:

(in order of their appearance)

RICHARD WARWICK	<i>Philip Newman</i>
LAURA WARWICK	<i>Renee Asherson</i>
MICHAEL STARKWEDDER	<i>Nigel Stock</i>
MISS BENNETT	<i>Winifred Oughton</i>
JAN WARWICK	<i>Christopher Sandford</i>
MRS WARWICK	<i>Violet Farebrother</i>
HENRY ANGELL	<i>Paul Curran</i>
SERGEANT CADWALLADER	<i>Tenniel Evans</i>
INSPECTOR THOMAS	<i>Michael Golden</i>
JULIAN FARRAR	<i>Roy Purcell</i>

The Play directed by HUBERT GREGG

*The action of the play takes place in Richard Warwick's study in
South Wales near the Bristol Channel*

ACT I

SCENE I

SCENE.—*Richard Warwick's study. About 11.30 p.m. in November.*

Down L is a large built-in bookcase with cupboards beneath. Above this the door to the hall. Up LC is a deep recess lined with books. Against the L wall of the recess stands a table on which is a table lamp. In the R wall is a small window, and below it an armchair. Up RC and at a slight angle are large french windows. In the R wall is a door leading to Richard Warwick's bedroom, and below this a desk. A wheelchair faces the windows up C and L of it is a small table on which is a decanter of brandy, a glass and a box of ammunition. Down L is a leather-covered wing chair, and up stage of it a small table. At LC a sofa faces front, and C a long stool is set obliquely, its R end up stage. There are hunting trophies on the walls.

When the CURTAIN rises, the french windows are closed but the curtains are drawn back on either side of them. Swirls of mist pass the window and the Bristol Channel foghorn sounds its melancholy boom automatically every few moments. RICHARD WARWICK is sitting facing towards the windows up C in the wheelchair. He is handsome and middle-aged. His attitude is that of a man who has fallen asleep in his chair. There is a rug over his knees. LAURA WARWICK is standing up C by the corner of the recess. She is an attractive blonde woman of about thirty, and wears a cocktail dress with matching jacket. The stage remains in darkness. After a few moments a car is heard approaching, and as its headlights sweep across the room illuminating Laura she steps back into the shadow of the recess. The car stops, its headlights are switched off and the car door bangs. A moment later the light of the torch is seen illuminating the mist outside the window. STARKWEDDER is seen feeling his way, running his hands over the glass, peering in. He knocks on the window, knocks again louder. He then tries the handle, the window opens and he stumbles in.

STARKWEDDER. Hello. (*He crosses to C*) Is anyone there? (*Flashing his torch R he sees Richard in the wheelchair. Starkwedder is an active, tough-looking man of about thirty-five dressed in rough tweeds over which he has an overcoat. He has an out-of-door look about him. Not very polished, but a shrewd thinker as well as being a man of action*) So sorry, it's this confounded fog. I've just run my car off the road into a ditch. I haven't the faintest idea where I am. Oh, and I've left the window open, I'm so sorry. (*He crosses to the french windows, speaking apologetically as he goes. He shuts the windows and closes the curtains*) Must have run off the main road somewhere. I've been driving round these topsy-turvy lanes for an hour or more. (*He turns to face Richard*) You

asleep? *(He shines the torch on Richard's face. He stops abruptly as he realizes RICHARD has not moved. He bends over him, touches his shoulder to wake him, and RICHARD's body slides down into a huddled position in the chair)* Good God! *(He shines his torch R and finds the switch below the door R. He goes to switch it on. It lights the desk lamp. He puts his torch on the desk and, looking at Richard, he circles above him. Then, seeing the switch below the door L he crosses to turn it on, lighting the lamps on the recess table and on the table below the door L. Taking a step towards Richard he sees Laura)*

(LAURA has not moved. She stands with her arms down by her sides; she does not speak and gives the impression of trying not even to breathe. There is a moment's silence whilst they stare at each other)

He's—dead!

LAURA *(without expression)* Yes.

STARKWEDDER. You know?

LAURA. Yes.

STARKWEDDER. He's been shot. Through the head. Who . . . ?

(LAURA slowly brings her hand up from where it has been hidden by the folds of her dress. In it is a revolver. STARKWEDDER draws in his breath sharply, crosses and takes it from her)

STARKWEDDER. You shot him?

LAURA. Yes.

(STARKWEDDER crosses below her to put the gun on the table by the wheelchair, then stands above Richard, looking at him, and then uncertainly around the room. There is a pause)

The telephone is over there. *(She nods towards the desk)*

STARKWEDDER *(startled)* Telephone?

LAURA *(in the same detached manner)* If you want to ring up the police.

(STARKWEDDER stares at her as though unable to make her out)

STARKWEDDER. A few minutes one way or the other won't make any difference. They'll have a bit of a job getting here in this fog anyway. I'd like to know a little more . . . *(He breaks off and looks at the body)* Who is he?

LAURA. My husband. *(She pauses)* His name is Richard Warwick. I am Laura Warwick.

STARKWEDDER. I see. Hadn't you better—sit down?

(LAURA moves slowly and slightly unsteadily down stage to behind the R end of the sofa)

Can I get you a—drink? It must have been a shock.

LAURA *(with irony)* Shooting my husband?

STARKWEDDER *(regaining his poise and speaking drily)* I should imagine so, yes. Or was it just fun and games?

LAURA (*inscrutably*) It was fun and games. (*She moves to sit at the R end of the sofa*)

(STARKWEDDER *frowns, puzzled*)

But I would like—that drink.

(STARKWEDDER *takes off his hat, throws it into the armchair in the recess, then pours a drink from a decanter on the table by the wheelchair. Crossing to the R arm of the sofa he hands it to her. She drinks*)

STARKWEDDER. Now then, suppose you tell me all about it.

LAURA (*looking up at him*) Hadn't you better ring the police?

STARKWEDDER. All in good time. Nothing wrong with having a cosy little chat first, is there? (*He takes off his gloves and stuffs them in his overcoat pockets and begins to unbutton his coat*)

LAURA (*her poise beginning to break*) I don't . . . Who are you? How did you happen to come here tonight?

STARKWEDDER. My name's Michael Starkwedder. I'm an engineer. I work for Anglo-Iranian, just home from the Persian Gulf. I've been down here for a couple of days looking up old landmarks. My mother's family came from this part of the world and I thought I might buy a little house. The last two hours—nearer three, I should think—I've been hopelessly lost. Driving round all the twisting lanes in South Wales, ended up in a ditch! Thick fog everywhere. Found a gate, groped my way to this house hoping to get hold of a telephone or perhaps put up for the night. I tried the handle of the window, it wasn't locked so I walked in. Whereupon I find . . . (*He turns up to the table by the wheelchair, indicating the body*)

LAURA. You knocked on the window first—several times.

STARKWEDDER. Yes. Nobody answered.

LAURA (*catching her breath*) No, I didn't answer.

(*There is a slight pause while STARKWEDDER looks at her, trying to make her out. He returns to R of the sofa*)

STARKWEDDER. As I say, I tried the handle, the window wasn't locked so I came in.

LAURA (*staring down into her brandy glass and speaking as though she were quoting*) "The door opens and the unexpected guest comes in." (*She shivers slightly*) That saying always frightened me when I was a child. *The Unexpected Guest.* (*She throws up her head and stares at him. With sudden passion*) Oh, why don't you ring up the police and get it over?

(STARKWEDDER *crosses RC and stands looking up stage at the body*)

STARKWEDDER. Not yet. Why did you shoot him?

LAURA (*ironically*) I can give you some excellent reasons. He drank. He was cruel. I've hated him for years.

(STARKWEDDER *looks at her sharply*)

(*Angrily*) What do you expect me to say?

STARKWEDDER. You've hated him for years? (*Looking thoughtfully at the body he moves above the wheelchair to the table beside it*) But something—special—happened tonight, hm?

LAURA. You're quite right. Something special happened tonight. And so—I took the gun off the table from where it was lying beside him and—shot him. It was as simple as that. What's the good of talking about it? You'll only have to ring up the police in the end. There's no way out. (*Her voice drops*) No way out!

STARKWEDDER. It's not quite as simple as you think.

LAURA. Why isn't it simple?

STARKWEDDER (*coming down stage a little*) It isn't so easy to do what you're urging me to do. You're a woman. A very attractive woman.

LAURA. Does that make a difference?

STARKWEDDER (*cheerfully*) Theoretically, certainly not. Practically—yes. (*Removing his overcoat he goes up to put it on the armchair in the recess. He stands there looking at the body*)

LAURA. Oh! Chivalry!

STARKWEDDER. Call it curiosity if you like. I want to know what it's all about.

LAURA. I've told you.

STARKWEDDER (*crossing behind the wheelchair to R of it*) You've told me the bare facts, perhaps.

LAURA. And my excellent motive. There's nothing more to tell. In any case, why should you believe what I tell you? I could make up any story I liked. You've only my word for it that Richard was a cruel beast and that he drank and that I hated him.

STARKWEDDER. I can accept the last statement I think. (*He looks at the body*) There's a certain amount of evidence to support it. (*He crosses down to the upstage end of the stool*) All the same it's a bit drastic, don't you think? You say you've hated him for years. Why didn't you leave him? Surely that would have been much simpler.

LAURA (*hesitantly*) I've—no money of my own.

STARKWEDDER. My dear girl if you could prove cruelty and habitual drunkenness and all the rest of it, you could get a divorce—or separation—and then you'd get alimony or whatever it is they call it. (*He waits for an answer*)

(*Finding it difficult to reply LAURA rises and crosses to the table above the armchair down L. She puts her glass down on it, keeping her back to him*)

You got children?

LAURA. No—no, thank God.

STARKWEDDER. Well, then, why didn't you leave him?

LAURA (*turning to him, confused*) Well—you see—well, now I shall inherit all his money.

STARKWEDDER. Oh, no, you won't. The law won't allow you to

profit as a result of a crime. (*Moving below the stool towards Laura*) Or did you think that . . . (*He hesitates*) What did you think? (*He crosses to R of her*)

LAURA. I don't know what you mean.

(*STARKWEDDER crosses below Laura and sits in the armchair down L*)

STARKWEDDER (*looking at her*) You're not a stupid woman. Even if you did inherit his money, it wouldn't be much good to you if you were going to be hanged—or imprisoned for life. (*Sitting back comfortably in the chair*) Supposing that I hadn't come knocking at the window just now? What were you going to do?

LAURA. Does it matter?

STARKWEDDER. Perhaps not—but I'm interested. What was your story going to be if I hadn't come barging in and caught you here red-handed? Accident? Suicide?

LAURA (*distraught*) I don't know. (*She crosses to the sofa and sits C; her back towards him*) I've no idea. I tell you I—I haven't had time to think.

STARKWEDDER. No. No, perhaps not—I don't think it was a premeditated affair. I think it was an impulse. (*He rises and moves up L towards the recess*) Something your husband said. (*Turning*) Was that it?

LAURA. It doesn't matter, I tell you.

STARKWEDDER. What *did* he say? What was it?

LAURA. That—I shall never tell anybody.

STARKWEDDER (*crossing down to the sofa, behind her*) You'll be asked it in court.

LAURA. I shan't answer. They can't make me answer.

STARKWEDDER. Your counsel will have to know. (*Leaning over the back of the sofa, drawing her out*) It might make a difference.

LAURA. Oh, don't you see, I've no hope? I'm prepared for the worst.

STARKWEDDER. Just because I came in through that window? If I hadn't . . .

LAURA (*interrupting him*) But you *did*!

STARKWEDDER. Yes, I did—and so—you're for it!

(*There is a pause. Moving to the R arm of the sofa he takes out a packet of American cigarettes. He hands one to her and takes one himself*)

Here. Now let's go back a little. You've hated your husband for a long time, and tonight he said something that just pushed you over the edge. You snatched up the gun that was lying beside . . . (*He crosses above the table by the wheelchair, looking at the body*) Why was he sitting here with a gun beside him, anyway? It's not usual.

LAURA. Oh, that. He used to shoot at cats.

STARKWEDDER (*looking at her; surprised*) Cats?

LAURA. Oh, I suppose I shall have to do some explaining.

(STARKWEDDER comes down to the R arm of the sofa)

Richard used to be well-known as a big-game hunter. That was where we first met, in Kenya. He was a different sort of person then. Or perhaps his good qualities showed and not his bad ones. He had good qualities, you know. Generosity and courage. Supreme courage. He was a very attractive man to women. (*She looks up, aware of Starkwedder for the first time*)

(Returning her gaze STARKWEDDER lights her cigarette with his lighter, then his own)

STARKWEDDER (*after the pause*) Go on.

LAURA. We married soon after we met. Then two years later he had a terrible accident—he was mauled by a lion. He was lucky to escape alive, but he's been a semi-cripple ever since, unable to walk properly. (*She leans back, more relaxed*)

(STARKWEDDER sits on the stool, facing her)

They say misfortune improves your character. It didn't improve his. Instead, it developed all his bad points. Vindictiveness, a streak of sadism, drinking too much. He made life pretty impossible for everyone in this house, and we all put up with it because—oh, you know what one says. "So sad for poor Richard being an invalid." We shouldn't have, of course. I see that now. It encouraged him to feel that he was different from other people, that he could do as he chose without being called to account for it. (*She rises and crosses to the table by the armchair down L, to flick ash in the ashtray*) All his life, shooting had been the thing he liked doing best. So every night after we went up to bed he'd sit here, and Angell, his valet-attendant, would bring the brandy and one of his guns and put them beside him. Then he'd have this window wide open and he'd sit here looking out watching for the gleam of a cat's eyes or a stray rabbit, or a dog. Of course, there haven't been so many rabbits lately. But he shot quite a lot of cats. He shot them in the daytime, too. And birds.

STARKWEDDER. Didn't the neighbours ever complain?

LAURA (*crossing to the sofa and sitting c again*) Oh, naturally. We've only lived here for a couple of years, you know. Before that we lived on the east coast, in Norfolk. One or two household pets were victims there and there were a lot of complaints. That's really why we came to live here. It's very isolated, this house. We've only one neighbour in miles. But there are plenty of cats and squirrels and birds. (*A pause, then she goes on*) The trouble in Norfolk was really because a woman came to call one day for subscriptions for the vicarage fête. Richard sent shots to right and left of her as she was going away down the drive. She bolted like a hare, he said. He roared with laughter when he told us about it. Her fat backside was quivering like a jelly, he said. However, she went to the police about it and there was a terrible row.

STARKWEDDER. I can well imagine that.

LAURA. But Richard got away with it all right. He had a permit for all his firearms and he explained he only used them to shoot rabbits. He explained away Miss Butterfield as a nervous old maid convinced that he was shooting at *her*, which, of course, was all nonsense. Richard was always plausible. He made them believe him.

STARKWEDDER. He seems to have had a rather perverted sense of humour. (*He rises and crosses up stage of the body*) I see—so a gun by his side was a nightly routine? But surely he couldn't have shot anything tonight. Not in this fog.

LAURA. Oh, he always had a gun put there. It was like a child's toy. Sometimes he used to shoot into the wall, making patterns. Over there, if you look. (*She indicates the french windows*) Down there to the left, behind the curtain.

(*STARKWEDDER lifts the curtain down stage of the french windows revealing bullet holes in the panelling. They form the letters R.W.*)

STARKWEDDER. Hm. R.W. Picked out in shots. Remarkable. (*He replaces the curtain, then takes a step downstage*) Damned good shooting. Hm. He must have been pretty frightening to live with.

LAURA. He was. (*With almost hysterical vehemence she rises to c above the stool*) Must we go on talking and talking about all this? It's only putting off what's got to happen in the end. Can't you realize that you've got to ring up the police? That it would be far kinder to do it now. Or is it that you want me to do it? All right, I will. (*She crosses quickly down R to the phone*)

(*STARKWEDDER comes to R of her and puts his hand over hers as she takes the receiver*)

STARKWEDDER. We've got to talk first.

LAURA. We've been talking. And anyway there's nothing to talk about.

STARKWEDDER. Yes, there is. I'm a fool, I dare say. But we've got to find some way out.

LAURA (*incredulously*). For me?

STARKWEDDER. Yes. For you. (*He crosses below the stool to L of it*) How much courage have you got? (*Turning to her*) Can you lie if necessary and lie convincingly?

LAURA. You're crazy!

STARKWEDDER. Probably.

LAURA (*crossing to R of the stool*). You don't know what you're doing.

STARKWEDDER. I know very well what I'm doing. I'm making myself an accessory after the fact.

LAURA. But why? Why?

STARKWEDDER (*thoughtfully*). Yes. Why? For the simple reason, I suppose, that you're an attractive woman and I don't like to think

of an attractive woman being shut up in prison for all the best years of her life. Just as bad as being hanged by the neck, or is this the kind of crime that you *are* hanged for? I can never remember. Anyway, there it is. Your husband was an invalid and a cripple. Any evidence there is of provocation will rest entirely on your word, a word which you seem extremely unwilling to give. Therefore an acquittal appears unlikely, doesn't it?

LAURA. Everything I've told you may have been lies.

STARKWEDDER (*cheerfully*) It may, and maybe I'm a sucker. But I'm believing you.

(*There is a pause. LAURA sits on the stool, her back to him*)

Now talk, and talk fast. (*He moves up stage to the table by the wheelchair, flicking ash in the ashtray*) In the first place, who exactly is there in this house?

(*LAURA hesitates momentarily, then speaks almost mechanically. STARKWEDDER crosses behind the sofa to L of it*)

LAURA. There's Richard's mother and there's Benny—Miss Bennett—she's a kind of combined housekeeper and secretary. An ex-hospital nurse. She's been here for ages and she's devoted to Richard. And then there's Angell. He's a male nurse attendant and valet and looks after Richard.

(*STARKWEDDER sits on the L arm of the sofa*)

There are no servants, only dailies who come in. Oh—and there's Jan.

STARKWEDDER (*sharply*) Who's Jan?

LAURA (*giving him an embarrassed look*) He's Richard's half-brother. He lives with us.

STARKWEDDER (*rising and crossing to L of the stool*) Come clean, now. What is there about Jan that you don't want to tell me?

LAURA. He's a dear. Very affectionate and sweet, but—but he isn't quite like other people. I mean he's—he's what they call retarded.

STARKWEDDER. I see. But you're fond of him, aren't you?

LAURA. Yes—I'm very fond of him. That's—that's really why I couldn't go away and leave Richard. Because of Jan. Richard, you see, would have had him sent to an institution.

(*STARKWEDDER moves up L of the wheelchair, above it, and looks down at the body, pondering*)

STARKWEDDER. Is that the threat he held over you?

LAURA. Yes. If I—if I believed I could have earned enough to keep Jan and myself—but I don't know that I could . . . And anyway, of course, Richard's the boy's guardian.

STARKWEDDER. Was Richard kind to him?

LAURA. Sometimes.

STARKWEDDER. And other times?

LAURA. He'd—he'd talk about sending Jan away. "They'll be quite kind to you, boy," he'd say. "You'll be well looked after. Laura, I'm sure, would come and see you once or twice a year." He'd get Jan all worked up, terrified, begging, pleading, stammering and then Richard would lean back in his chair and roar with laughter. Throw back his head and laugh, laugh, laugh.

STARKWEDDER (*watching her*) Yes, I see. (*A pause*) I see.

LAURA (*rising quickly and crossing below the stool to the table above the armchair down L and stubbing out her cigarette*) You needn't believe me. You needn't believe a word I say. For all you know I might be making it all up.

STARKWEDDER. I've told you I'll risk that. (*He comes down and sits on the R arm of the sofa*) Now then, what's this what's-her-name Bennett like? Is she sharp?

LAURA. Very efficient and capable.

STARKWEDDER. How is it that nobody heard the shot tonight?

LAURA. Richard's mother's deaf. Benny's room is over on the other side of the house, Angell's quarters are shut off by a baize door. There's Jan, of course, he sleeps in the room over this. (*Turning to him*) But he goes to bed early and he sleeps very heavily.

STARKWEDDER. That all seems extremely fortunate.

LAURA. But what are you suggesting? That we could make it look like suicide?

STARKWEDDER (*shaking his head*) No, there's no hope of suicide. (*He rises and moves up c, looking at the body*) He was right-handed, I suppose?

LAURA. Yes.

STARKWEDDER (*crossing above the body to L of it*) Then he couldn't possibly have shot himself at that angle. (*He indicates that Richard has been shot through the left temple*) Besides, there's no mark of scorching. No, the gun must have been fired from a certain distance away. No. Suicide's out. There's accident, of course. (*He pauses for a moment, then starts acting it out*) Now, say for instance that I came here this evening, just as I did. Blundered in through this window. And that Richard took a pot shot at me. That's quite likely, from all you've been telling me of his record. Well, then, I came up to him—got the gun away from him . . .

LAURA (*eagerly, crossing below c of the sofa*) And it went off in the struggle?

STARKWEDDER. Yes—no, that won't do. As I say, the police would spot at once that the gun wasn't fired at such close quarters. Well now, say I got the gun right away from him. Well, once I'd done that why the hell should I shoot him? Yes, it's tricky. (*He sighs*) All right, let's leave it at murder. (*Coming down to RC*) Plain murder. But murder by someone from outside. (*He crosses to the french windows holds back a curtain and peers out*)

LAURA (*helpfully*) A burglar?

STARKWEDDER (*turning*) Well, I suppose it *could* be a burglar, but it seems a bit bogus—what about an enemy? Melodramatic, perhaps, but from what you've told me about your husband he was the sort who might have had enemies. Am I right?

LAURA (*slowly*) Yes. Richard had enemies, but . . .

STARKWEDDER (*putting out his cigarette at the table by the wheelchair and coming to the R end of the sofa*) Never mind the buts for the time being. Tell me all you can about Richard's enemies. Number one is Miss—quivering backside. Hardly a likely murderer though. Anyway, I suppose she still lives in Norfolk. (*He sits on the R end of the sofa*) Who else? Who else had a grudge against him?

(*LAURA appears doubtful. She crosses between the sofa and the armchair down L and begins to unbutton her jacket*)

LAURA. There was a gardener about a year ago. Richard sacked him and wouldn't give him a reference. He was very abusive about it and made a lot of threats.

STARKWEDDER. Who was he—a local chap?

LAURA. Yes. He came from Llanfechan, about four miles away. (*Having unbuttoned her jacket she removes it and lays it across the L arm of the sofa*)

STARKWEDDER (*frowning*) I don't think much of that. You can bet he's got a nice stay-at-home alibi, or if he hasn't got an alibi, or it's only a wife's alibi, we *might* get the poor chap convicted for something he hadn't done. No. What we want is some enemy out of the past.

(*LAURA moves slowly behind the sofa to RC*)

How about someone from Richard's tiger- and lion-shooting days? Kenya—Africa—India? Some place where the police can't check up very easily?

LAURA. If I could only think—only remember. If I could think of some of the stories that Richard's told us. (*She has now arrived above the stool*)

STARKWEDDER. It isn't even as though we'd got any nice properties handy. You know, a Sikh turban carelessly draped over the decanter, or a Mau Mau knife, a poisoned arrow. Damn it all, what we want is someone with a grudge, someone who Richard kicked around. (*He rises to L of Laura*) Think—think! Think!

LAURA. I—I can't think.

STARKWEDDER. You've told me the kind of man your husband was. There must have been incidents, people.

(*LAURA crosses below the stool to LC, trying desperately to remember*)

Someone who made threats. Justifiable threats, perhaps.

LAURA (*slowly*) There was a man whose child Richard ran over.

STARKWEDDER (*quickly*) When was this?

LAURA. About two years ago, when we were living in Norfolk. He made threats.

STARKWEDDER (*sitting on the L side of the stool*) That sounds like a possibility. Anyway, tell me all you can remember about him.

LAURA. Richard was driving back from Cromer. He'd had too many drinks. He went through a little village at about sixty miles an hour, zigzagging. The child ran out into the road from the inn there—Richard knocked him down and he was killed instantly.

STARKWEDDER. Do you mean your husband could drive a car?

LAURA. Yes, he could. It had to be specially built, with special controls.

STARKWEDDER. I see. What happened about the child? Didn't they get Richard for manslaughter?

LAURA. There was an inquest, of course. (*She speaks bitterly*) Richard was exonerated completely.

STARKWEDDER (*surprised*) But weren't there any witnesses?

LAURA. There was the child's father. He saw it happen. And a hospital nurse—Nurse Warburton—was in the car with Richard. According to her the car was going under thirty miles an hour and Richard had had only one glass of sherry. She said that the accident was quite unavoidable. They believed *her*, and not the child's father. I understand he was—rather over-violent. (*She moves to the armchair down L*) You see, anyone *would* believe Nurse Warburton. She seemed the very essence of reliability and accuracy and careful understatement.

STARKWEDDER. You weren't in the car?

LAURA. No.

STARKWEDDER. Then how do you know that what she said mightn't have been the truth?

LAURA (*sitting in the armchair; bitterly*) Oh, the whole thing was very freely discussed by Richard. After they came back from the inquest he said, "Bravo, Warbie, jolly good show. You've probably got me off quite a long jail sentence." And she said, "You don't deserve it, Mr Warwick. You know you *were* driving much too fast. It's a shame about that poor child." And then Richard said, "Oh, forget it! What's one brat more or less in this overcrowded world. Just as well out of it all. It's not going to spoil *my* sleep I assure you."

STARKWEDDER (*rising and glancing over his right shoulder at the body; grimly*) The more I hear about your husband the more I am willing to believe that what happened tonight was justifiable homicide rather than murder. (*Crossing to her*) Now then. This man whose child was run over. The child's father. What's his name?

LAURA. A Scottish name, I think. Mac—Mac something—McLeod, McCrae—I can't remember.

STARKWEDDER. But you've got to *try* to remember. You must. Is he still living in Norfolk?

LAURA. No, no. He was only over here for a visit. To his wife's relations, I think. He came from Canada.

STARKWEDDER. Canada—that's a nice long way away. It would take time to chase up. (*He moves behind the sofa*) I think—yes, I think there are possibilities there. But for God's sake try to remember that man's name. (*He crosses to his overcoat on the armchair in the recess, takes his gloves from the pockets and puts them on. He looks searchingly round the room*) Got any newspapers about?

LAURA (*surprised*) Newspapers?

STARKWEDDER. Not today's. Yesterday's or the day before would do better.

LAURA (*rising and moving to the cupboard behind the armchair*) There are some old ones in the cupboard here, kept for fires.

(*STARKWEDDER comes down between the sofa and stool to the armchair down L, which he pulls forward to clear the cupboard door, and takes out a newspaper*)

STARKWEDDER. Fine. Just what we want. (*He closes the cupboard door, and then takes the paper to the desk. He takes a pair of scissors from one of the pigeon-holes, and makes ready to cut out letters*)

LAURA. What are you going to do?

STARKWEDDER. Manufacture evidence.

LAURA. But suppose—suppose the police find this man?

STARKWEDDER. If he still lives in Canada it'll take a bit of doing. And by the time they do find him, he'll have an alibi all right.

(*LAURA crosses between the sofa and the stool*)

And by then it will be a bit late to check up on things here. Anyway, it's the best we can do. It'll give us breathing space at all events.

LAURA. I don't like it.

STARKWEDDER. My dear girl, you can't afford to be choosy. But you *must* try to remember that man's name.

LAURA (*moving up c*) I can't, I tell you, I can't.

STARKWEDDER (*helpfully*) McDougall, Mackintosh.

LAURA (*turning*) Do stop! You're only making it worse. I'm not sure now that it was Mac anything.

STARKWEDDER. Well, if you can't remember, you can't. We shall have to manage without. You don't remember the date, or anything useful like that?

LAURA (*coming to RC*) I can tell you the date. It was May the fifteenth.

STARKWEDDER (*surprised*) Now how on earth can you remember that?

LAURA (*bitterly*) Because it happened on my birthday.

STARKWEDDER. Ah, I see—yes—well, that solves one little problem. At any rate we've got one piece of luck. This paper is dated the fifteenth. (*He cuts out the date*)

LAURA (*crossing above the desk to R of him*) November the fifteenth.

STARKWEDDER. Yes. But it's the numbers that are awkward. May's a short word—too bad it's not the cricket season. *(He cuts) Capital "M". Now an "A" and a "Y".*

LAURA. What are you doing?

STARKWEDDER *(sitting in the desk chair)* Got any paste?

(LAURA is about to take a pot of paste from a pigeon-hole, but he stops her)

No, don't touch; fingerprints. Ah, yes. *(He takes the tin and removes the lid)* How to be a criminal in one easy lesson. And here's a plain block of writing paper—the kind sold all over England. *(He takes a notepad from the pigeon-hole and proceeds to paste on words and letters)* Now watch this, one—two—three—bit tricky with gloves. There we are. May fifteen. Paid in full. Oh, the "in" 's come off. There, how do you like that? *(He tears the sheet off the pad and shows it to her, rises and goes to L of the body)* We'll tuck it neatly into the jacket pocket so. *(As he does so he dislodges a pocket lighter, which falls to the floor)* Hullo!

(LAURA gives a sharp exclamation and tries to snatch it up, but STARKWEDDER has already done so and looks at it)

LAURA *(breathlessly)* Give it to me. Give it to me!

(STARKWEDDER does so, but looks faintly surprised)

It's—my lighter.

STARKWEDDER. All right, so it's your lighter—that's nothing to get upset about. *(He looks at her curiously)* You're not losing your nerve, are you?

(LAURA moves in front of him to R of the sofa. As she does so she rubs the lighter on her skirt to remove possible fingerprints, making sure that he does not see her do so)

LAURA. No, of course not.

(Having made sure that the paper is tucked securely under Richard's lapel by his breast pocket, STARKWEDDER crosses to the desk, replaces the paste-pot lid, removes his gloves, takes out a handkerchief, and looks at Laura)

STARKWEDDER. There we are, all ready for the next step. Where's that glass you were drinking out of just now?

(LAURA crosses quickly below the sofa to the table down L for the glass. Leaving the lighter on the table she returns with the glass to STARKWEDDER who has moved above the stool)

(He takes the glass and is about to wipe off fingerprints, but stops) No, that would be stupid.

LAURA. Why?

STARKWEDDER. Well, there ought to be fingerprints, both on the glass and on the decanter. This valet fellow's for one, and probably