**Audition: Birdboot, Moon**

**Birdboot** You can’t start with a *pause!* If you want my opinion there’s a total panic back there. *(He laughs and subsides)* Where’s Higgs tonight, then?

**Moon** It will follow me to my grave and become my epitaph. Here lies Moon the second string: where’s Higgs? Sometimes I dream of revolution, a bloody *coup d’etat* by the second rank – troupes of actors slaughtered by their understudies, magicians sawn in half by indefatigably smiling glamour girls, cricket teams wiped out by marauding bands of twelfth men – I dream of champions chopped down by rabbit-punching sparring partners while eternal bridesmaids turn and rape the bridegrooms over the sausage rolls and parliamentary private secretaries plant bombs in the Minister’s Humber – comedians die on provincial stages, robbed of their feeds by mutely triumphant stooges – and march – an army of assistants and deputies, the seconds-in-command, the runners-up, the righthand men – storming the palace gates wherein the second son has already mounted the throne having committed regicide with a croquet-mallet – stand-ins of the world stand up! *(He pauses briefly)* Sometimes I dream of Higgs.

**Birdboot** *(chewing into the mike)* Have a chocolate!

**Moon** What kind?

**Birdboot** *(chewing into the mike)* Black Magic.

**Moon** No, thanks.

**Birdboot** I’ll give you a tip, then. Watch the girl.

**Moon** You think she did it?

**Birdboot** No, no – the *girl,* watch her.

**Moon** What girl?

**Birdboot** You won’t know her, I’ll give you a nudge.

**Moon** *You* know her, do you?

**Birdboot** *(suspiciously; bridling)* What’s *that* supposed to mean?

**Moon** I beg your pardon?

**Birdboot** I’m trying to tip you a wink – give you a nudge as good as a tip – for God’s sake, Moon, what’s the matter with you? You could do yourself some good, spotting her first time out – she’s new, from the provinces, going straight to the top. I don’t want to put words into your mouth but a word from us and we could make her.

**Moon** I suppose you’ve made dozens of them, like that.

**Birdboot** *(instantly outraged)* I’ll have you know I’m a family man devoted to my homely but good-natured wife, and if you’re suggesting –

**Moon** No, no…

**Birdboot** – a man of my scrupulous morality –

**Moon** I’m sorry…

**Birdboot** – falsely besmirched –

**Audition: Mrs Drudge, Simon Gascoyne**

**Simon** Ah! Hello there! I’m Simon Gascoyne, I hope you don’t mind, the door was open so I wandered in. I’m a friend of Lady Muldoon, the lady of the house, having made her acquaintance through a mutual friend, Felicity Cunningham, shortly after moving into this neighbourhood just the other day.

**Mrs Drudge** I’m Mrs Drudge. I don’t live in but I pop in on my bicycle when the weather allows to help in the running of charming though somewhat isolated Muldoon Manor. Judging by the time *(she glances at the clock)* youdid well to get here before high water cut us off for all practical purposes from the outside world.

**Simon** I took a short cut over the cliffs and followed one of the old smugglers’ paths through the treacherous swamps that surround this strangely inaccessible house.

**Mrs Drudge** Yes, many visitors have remarked on the topographical quirk in the local strata whereby there are no roads leading from the Manor, though there are ways of getting *to* it, weather allowing.

**Simon** Yes, well I must say it’s a lovely day so far.

**Mrs Drudge** Ah, but now that the cuckoo-beard is in bud there’ll be fog before the sun hits Foster’s Ridge.

**Simon** I say, it’s wonderful how you country people really know weather.

**Mrs Drudge** *(suspiciously)* Know whether what?

**Simon** No – weather. Yes, it does seem to be coming on a bit foggy.

**Mrs Drudge** The fog is very treacherous around here – it rolls off the sea without warning, shrouding the cliffs in a deadly mantle of blind man’s buff.

**Simon** Yes, I’ve heard it said.

**Mrs Drudge** *(moving* R) I’ve known whole week-ends when Muldoon Manor, as this lovely old Queen Anne House is called, might as well have been floating on the pack ice for all the good it would have done phoning the police. lt was on such a week-end as this that Lord Muldoon who had lately brought his beautiful bride back to the home of his ancestors, walked out of this house ten years ago, and his body was never found.

**Simon** Yes, indeed, poor Cynthia.

**Mrs Drudge** His name was Albert.

**Simon** Yes indeed, poor Albert. But tell me, is Lady Muldoon about?

**Mrs Drudge** I believe she is playing tennis on the lawn with Felicity Cunningham.

**Simon** *(startled)* Felicity Cunningham?

**Mrs Drudge** A mutual friend, I believe you said. A happy chance. I will tell them you are here.

**Simon** Well, I can’t really stay as a matter of fact – please don’t disturb them – I really should be off.

**Mrs Drudge** They would be very disappointed. It is some time since we have had a four for pontoon bridge at the Manor, and I don’t play cards myself.

**Simon** There is another guest, then?

**Mrs Drudge** Major Magnus, the crippled half-brother of Lord Muldoon who turned up out of the blue from Canada just the other day, completes the house-party.

**Audition: Felicity, Cynthia, Magnus (Simon)**

*The sound of a wheelchair approaching down several flights of stairs with landings in between. It arrives bearing Magnus at* *about 15 m.p.h., knocking Simon over violently*

**Cynthia** Simon!

**Magnus** *(roaring)* Never had a chance! Ran under the wheels!

**Cynthia** Darling, are you all right?

**Magnus** I have witnesses!

**Cynthia** Oh, Simon – say something!

**Simon** *(sitting up suddenly)* I’m most frightfully sorry.

**Magnus** *(shouting yet)* How long have you been a pedestrian?

**Simon** Ever since I could walk.

**Cynthia** Can you walk now?

*Simon rises and walks*

Thank God! Magnus, this is Simon Gascoyne.

**Magnus** What’s he doing here?

**Cynthia** He just turned up.

**Magnus** Really? How do you like it here?

*Felicity enters* L

**Simon** I could stay for ever.

**Felicity** So – you’re still here.

**Cynthia** Of course he’s still here. We’re going to play cards. There’s no need to introduce you two, is there, for I recall that you, Simon, met me through Felicity, our mutual friend.

**Felicity** Yes, Simon is an old friend – though not as old as you, Cynthia dear.

**Simon** Yes, I haven’t seen Felicity since…

**Felicity** Last night.

**Cynthia** Indeed? Well, you deal, Felicity. Will you partner Felicity, Magnus, against Simon and me?

**Magnus** *(aside to Cynthia)* Will Simon and you always be partnered against me, Cynthia?

**Cynthia** What do you mean, Magnus?

**Magnus** You’re a damned attractive woman, Cynthia.

**Cynthia** Please! Please remember Albert!

**Magnus** Albert’s dead, Cynthia – and you are still young. I’m sure he would have wished that you and I…

**Cynthia** No, Magnus! This is not to be!

**Magnus** It’s that Gascoyne, isn’t it? I’ll kill him if he comes between us!

**Cynthia** Right! Who starts?

**Magnus** I do. No bid!

**Cynthia** Did I hear you say you saw Felicity last night, Simon?

*They all play, in turn, discarding and picking up, etc.*

**Simon** Did I? Ah yes, yes quite. Your turn, Felicity.

**Felicity** I’ve had my turn, haven’t I, Simon? Now it seems it’s Cynthia’s turn.

**Cynthia** *(picking up cards)* That’s my trick, Felicity dear.

**Felicity** Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned, Simon.

**Simon** Yes, I’ve heard it said.

**Felicity** So I hope you have not been cheating, Simon.

*Simon stands up, throwing down his cards*

**Simon** No, Felicity – it’s just that I hold the cards!

**Cynthia** Well, done, Simon!

**Felicity** Strange how Simon appeared in the neighbourhood from nowhere. We know so little about him.

**Simon** *(sitting)* It doesn’t always pay to show your hand.

**Cynthia** Right, Simon, it’s your opening on the minor bid.

**Felicity** I hear there’s a dangerous madman on the loose. Personally I think he’s been hiding out in the deserted cottage on the cliffs.

**Simon** Flush!

**Cynthia** No! Simon, your luck’s in tonight!

**Felicity** *(stalking out* L) We shall see – the night is not over yet, Simon Gascoyne!

**Simon** So you’re the crippled half-brother of Lord Muldoon who turned up out of the blue from Canada just the other day, are you? It’s taken you a long time to get here. What did you do – walk? Oh, I say, I’m most frightfully sorry!

**Magnus** *(ignoring him)* Care for a spin round the rose garden, Cynthia?

**Cynthia** No, Magnus. I must talk to Simon. *(She rises)*

**Simon** My round, I think, Major.

**Magnus** You think so?

**Simon** Yes, Major, I do. *(He rises)*

**Magnus** There’s an old Canadian proverb, handed down from the Blackfoot Indians, which says – *(ponderously)* He who laughs last, laughs longest.

**Simon** Yes, I’ve heard it said.

**Magnus** *(wheeling himself out* L) Well, I think I’ll go and oil my gun.

**Audition: Hound, Cynthia, Felicity**

**Cynthia**Thank you so much for coming.

**Hound** Notat all. You never know, there might have been a serious matter.

**Cynthia** Drink?

**Hound** More serious than that, even.

**Cynthia** *(correcting)* Drink before you go?

**Hound** No, thank you.

**Cynthia** I do hope you find him.

**Hound** Find who, madam? Out with it!

**Cynthia** I thought you were looking for the lunatic.

**Hound** And what do you know about that?

**Cynthia** It was on the radio.

**Hound** Was it, indeed? Well, that’s what I’m here about. I didn’t want to mention it because I didn’t know how much you knew. No point in causing unnecessary panic, even with a murderer in our midst!

**Felicity** Murderer, did you say?

**Hound** Ah – so that was not on the radio?

**Cynthia** Whom has he murdered, Inspector?

**Hound** Perhaps no-one – yet. Let us hope we are in time.

**Magnus** You believe he is in our midst, Inspector?

**Hound** I do. If anyone of you have recently encountered a youngish, good-looking fellow in a smart suit, white shirt, hatless, well-spoken – someone possibly claiming to have just moved into the area, someone who on the surface seems as sane as you or I, then now is the time to speak.

**Felicity** I…

**Hound** Don’t interrupt!

**Felicity** Inspector…

**Cynthia** *(moving to Felicity)* No, Felicity!

**Hound** Please, Lady Cynthia, we are all in this together. I must ask you to put yourself completely in my hands.

**Cynthia** Don’t, Inspector – I love Albert.

**Hound** I don’t think you quite grasp my meaning.Didn’t it strike you as odd that on his escape the madman made a beeline for Muldoon Manor? It is my guess that he bears a deep-seated grudge against someone in this very house! Lady Muldoon – where is your husband?

**Cynthia** My husband? You don’t mean…?

**Hound** I don’t know – but I have a reason to believe that one of you is the real McCoy!

**Felicity** The real what?

**Hound** William Herbert McCoy, who as a young man, meeting the madman in the street and being solicited for sixpence for a cup of tea, replied, “Why don’t you do a decent day’s work, you shifty old bag of horse manure,” in Canada all those many years ago and went on to make his fortune. The madman was a mere boy at the time but he never forgot that moment, and thenceforth carried in his heart the promise of revenge!

*At which point he finds himself standing on top of the corpse. He looks down carefully*

**Hound** Is there anything you have forgotten to tell me?

*They all see the corpse for the first time*

**Felicity** So the madman has struck!

**Hound** Yes, just as I feared. Now you see the sort of man you are protecting.

**Cynthia** I can’t believe it!

**Felicity** I’ll have to tell him, Cynthia. Inspector, a stranger of that description has indeed appeared in our midst – Simon Gascoyne. Oh, he had charm, I’ll give you that, and he took me in completely. I’m afraid I made a fool of myself over him, and so did Cynthia.

**Hound** Fear naught, Lady Muldoon – I shall apprehend the man who killed your husband.

**Cynthia** My husband? I don’t understand.

**Hound** Everything points to Gascoyne.

**Cynthia** *(indicating the corpse)* But who’s that?

**Hound** Your husband.

**Cynthia** No, it’s not.

**Hound** Yes, it is.

**Cynthia** I tell you it’s not.

**Hound** *I’m* in charge of this case!

**Cynthia** But that’s not my husband.

**Hound** Are you sure?Then who is it?

**Cynthia** I don’t know.

**Felicity** I’ve never seen him before.

**Hound** This case is becoming an utter shambles.

**Cynthia** But what are we going to do?

**Hound** *(snatching the phone)* I’ll phone the police!

**Cynthia** But you are the police!

**Hound** Thank God I’m here – the lines have been cut!

**Cynthia** You mean…?

**Hou**n**d** Yes! We’re on our own, cut off from the world and in grave danger!

**Felicity** You mean…?

**Hound** Yes! I think the killerwillstrike again!

**Magnus** You mean…?

**Hound** Yes! One of us ordinary mortals thrown together by fate and cut off by the elements*,* is the murderer! He must be found – search the house!