

THE BUTLER DID IT

A Short Spoof

by

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SchoolPlay Productions Ltd

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CAST

Cutler, *the Butler*

Lord Codliver

Lady Codliver

Lucy, *their daughter*

Ernest, *their son*

Major Laff

Dinah Sore

Lady Camilla Vole

Seymour Clewes, *a detective*

THE BUTLER DID IT

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A Drawing Room at Codliver Hall.

(Enter CUTLER the Butler).

Cutler: Hello, audience. Glad you could make it. Welcome to Codliver Hall the stately home of Lord and Lady Codliver. His ancestors came from Normandy with William the Conqueror. Hers came from Northampton with a Move-U-Fast removal van.

(LORD and LADY CODLIVER cross the stage as he speaks, and exit).

Cutler: That's them. Nice couple. Lovely house. Loads of money. It's nice working here.

(LUCY CODLIVER crosses the stage).

Cutler: Here comes their daughter, little Lucy Codliver.

Lucy: Hello, Cutler. Isn't it a lovely day? I'm going to pick some pretty flowers.

Cutler: *(To LUCY).* Beautiful day, Miss Lucy. *(To audience).* Delightful child. Sweet as sugar.

(Enter ERNEST, a pleasant-looking boy but rather plump).

Ernest: If you want to play on my Super Nintendo when it's your day off, Cutler....
(Exit).

Cutler: That's very kind of you, Master Ernest. Thank you. *(To audience).* A credit to his parents, is Master Ernest. He and Lucy are identical twins - at least, they WERE identical until he became interested in Mars bars. *(He mimes a fat stomach).* Yes, this is a lovely place to work at. I've been here six months now. It's quiet and peaceful - well, except when Lord and Lady Codliver invite some of their friends to stay.

(MAJOR LAFF crosses the stage).

Cutler: Such as Major Laff.

(DINAH SORE crosses the stage).

Cutler: And Miss Dinah Sore.

(Enter LADY CAMILLA VOLE).

Cutler: Or Lady Camilla Vole and this means trouble for yours truly!

Camilla: Ah, Cutler, I was hoping to find you here. There's a horse running at Newmarket this afternoon. It's bound to win.

Cutler: Oh, really?

Camilla: So much so that I'd be willing to bet a couple of hundred smackeros on it!

Cutler: Oh, not again!

Camilla: Yes, indeed. So, if you could let me have that amount by lunchtime

Cutler: you'd be ever so grateful.

Camilla: Quite!

Cutler: And you'd continue to say nothing to nobody about nothing!

Camilla: Your grammar's appalling, Cutler, but your grasp of the situation is perfect. Remember - two hundred pounds by lunchtime *(Exit)*.

Cutler: *(To audience)*. You're probably wondering what all that was about.

Voice from offstage: What was all that about?

Cutler: I thought so. Well, it's like this. Lady Camilla's a widow now, see, but about a year ago, when her husband, Sir Arthur was alive, I was THEIR butler at Vole Manor here, instead of me rabbiting on, let's have a flashback - you know, where the lights go dim for a bit, and when they come up again you're supposed to imagine we've gone back in time. O.K? Right, so let's go back to last summer then. I was tidying up after dinner. Miss Sore, who was staying the weekend, was asleep in an armchair, and Sir Arthur came up to me and said

(Lights dim, then rise. CUTLER is talking with SIR ARTHUR. DINAH is asleep in armchair).

Arthur: Now then, Cutler, how's your mother?

Cutler: My mother, Sir Arthur?

Arthur: Yes, after the operation? Is she out of hospital yet?

Cutler: *(As if suddenly remembering)*. Oh, yes, definitely. Back at work on Monday

Arthur: Back at work? So soon after having her leg off?

Cutler: Eh? Oh, er, well

Arthur: You told me she was a waitress in a Chinese restaurant.

Cutler: They've given her a sitting-down job. Writing out the menus.

Arthur: Amazing!

Cutler: Is it?

Arthur: Didn't you say she had extremely poor eyesight?

Cutler: (*Anxious*). What?

Arthur: Isn't that why I loaned you £1000 - so that you could get her a guide dog?

Cutler: (*Struggling*). Ah, yes, well, you see the guide dog's very intelligent. It helps her with the menus.

Arthur: That's ridiculous! What kind of dog can read Chinese writing?

Cutler: (*Pause*). A Pekingese?

Arthur: Now look here, Cutler, stop this nonsense! You've borrowed a total of £5000 from me for operations and Chinese dogs and so on. No doubt you're keen to start paying it back. Will you write me a cheque or shall I halve your wages until the matter is settled?

Cutler: (*A little agitated*). Cheque? Halved wages? Er - no, leave it with me, Sir Arthur. By the end of the day I'll definitely let you have what's owing to you.

Arthur: See that you do. Goodnight. (*Turns to leave*).

Cutler: (*With his back turned to SIR ARTHUR*). Er, before you go, Sir Arthur, I'll prepare your usual evening glass of lemonade.

(*CUTLER pours lemonade and from an inside pocket produces a whisky bottle. LADY CAMILLA appears in a doorway upstage, unnoticed by CUTLER or SIR ARTHUR*).

Cutler: I've put a drop of something extra in, Sir - it'll help you get to sleep.

(*SIR ARTHUR comes downstage, takes the offered glass*).

Arthur: Thank you. (*He drinks and falls dead almost instantly*).

Cutler: There you are. I told you I'd let you have what was owing to you.

Camilla: (*Entering*). Very interesting. I had no idea you were an expert on poisons, Cutler. That one certainly acts fast.

Cutler: (*Alarmed*). Oh, your ladyship! I must call an ambulance. Sir Arthur's not at all well.

Camilla: (*Taking the whisky bottle from him and sniffing the contents*). I'm not surprised. Strychnine, if I'm not mistaken.

Cutler: I don't understand, mi lady!

Camilla: I take it my husband had been foolish enough to lend you money, and

you thought you could get out of paying him back by scratching him from the race - the human race, that is?

Cutler: *(As if his feelings have been deeply hurt).* How can you say that, your ladyship?

Camilla: Oh, it's only a question of knowing the words and getting them in the right order. It comes with practice!

Cutler: But I wouldn't poison anybody!

Camilla: We'll ask the police to analyse the contents of your Johnny Walker bottle, then, shall we?

Cutler: *(Throwing himself on her mercy).* All right, I confess. I DID poison your beloved husband, Sir Arthur. He was a good, kind master and I know I shouldn't have killed him, but well, none of us is perfect, are we? I mean, I expect you've done things

Camilla: Be quiet, man! You're talking drivell! Now listen to me carefully. I shan't report you to the police if you agree to do what I say.

Cutler: Oh, yes - anything!

Camilla: First, I need time to mourn the tragic loss of my dear, murdered husband.

(She hands back the bottle and pauses for 5 seconds, wiping away a tear).

Camilla: Right. Now then, I want you to let me have the five thou you borrowed by the end of this week and then get out of Vole Manor.

Cutler: By the end of the week? But I can't

Camilla: Oh, I don't care how you get it, but get it you will - by Friday. Meanwhile, I shall arrange for you to take up a butler's position elsewhere, not too far away from here!

Cutler: Not far away? Why's that, then?

Camilla: Because I shall want you to bring me three-quarters of everything you earn. Deliver the money yourself in a strong envelope, late at night, when it's pitch-dark.

Cutler: Envelopes after dark - but that's

Camilla:Blackmail. Precisely! *(She crosses to DINAH SORE and shakes her arm).* Wakey-wakey, Dinah. Something terrible's happened! Arthur's collapsed!

Dinah: *(Opening her eyes).* Oh dear, I must have dropped off. *(She notices ARTHUR on the floor).* Why is Arthur lying on the carpet? *(She stands, approaches the body and screams as the stage is blacked out).*

(The lights rise again. CUTLER is alone).

Cutler: (*Addressing the audience*). Now you're back to where you were when the play started - Codliver Hall. This is where Lady Camilla found a job for me. She keeps her word, does Lady Camilla. Found me a job, takes most of me wages and, on top of that, she makes me nick money to back racehorses for her.

Lady Cod: (*Offstage*). Cutler!

Cutler: If only Lady Codliver knew I was having to steal her jewellery because of her best friend! Luckily there are so many tiaras and diamond brooches knocking about this place that nobody's noticed anything's gone yet.

Lady Cod: (*Offstage*). Cutler!

Cutler: *Calls*. Here, mi lady! (*To audience*). Things can't go on like this, though. I'm going to get caught with me hand in the jewel-box before much longer.

(*Enter LADY CODLIVER*).

Lady Cod: Cutler, an extra guest is arriving for the weekend. He'll be here after dinner. Arrange a room for him in the West Wing, will you?

Cutler: Yes, mi lady.

Lady Cod: (*About to exit, turns at the door*). Oh, and by the way, Cutler, I've mislaid a pearl necklace and a sapphire pendant. Have a look round for them, please. (*Exit*).

Cutler: (*To audience*). What did I tell you? This can't go on. So, I'm going to let you in on something - my fiendish plan. But you've got to keep schtoom! That means keep your traps shut, see! (*He moves downstage and beckons the audience to draw nearer*). Here, listen! I'm going to solve the problem of Lady Camilla Vole this very evening - in my usual way! What always happens here is this -

(*As CUTLER speaks the following lines, LORD and LADY CODLIVER, LUCY, ERNEST, LADY CAMILLA, MAJOR LAFF, and DINAH SORE enter and sit*).

Cutler: After dinner, everybody comes into this room for coffee and chat, see. Now I've prepared a very special cup of coffee for Lady Camilla. (*Secretively he shows the audience the bottle of whisky which he produces from an inside pocket*). It's a specially lethal, quick-acting poison of my own devising - I can let you have the recipe before you go - and I've put some in a cup for Lady Cam. I'll go and fetch it. (*Exit*).

Dinah: Isabel, the veal orloff was simply out of this world!

Lady Codliver: I'm glad you enjoyed it, Dinah. I must praise cook: it will inspire her to even greater achievements.

Major Laff: The strawberry souffle was just too tempting. I couldn't resist a second helping!

Lord Codliver: Cook has a magic touch as far as fish is concerned, you know. Her mackerel in cider sauce must be eaten to be believed.

(Pause).

Lady Codliver: What shall we talk about next?

(Enter CUTLER with tray of coffee cups. One bears a conspicuous letter 'C' on the side).

Cutler: No need for further small-talk, sir. That's given me time to go and get the coffee. Now then, does everyone take theirs white? *(LUCY picks up the cup marked "C" but CUTLER takes it from her and replaces it on the tray).* Guests before family, Miss Lucy. *(To LADY CAMILLA).* Coffee, Lady Camilla? *(To audience).* That was close! *(LADY CAMILLA sips from the cup marked "C").*

(CUTLER continues handing out coffee as SEYMOUR CLEWES approaches the stage / acting area through the auditorium).

Cutler: It's all plain sailing now. Tell you what - count up to 10 and you'll see some action. Start now - One!

Lady Codliver: I expect he'll be arriving any time now.

Cutler: Two!

Major Laff: Who?

Lady Codliver: Our other guest for this weekend.

Cutler: Three!

Camilla: I don't think I feel very well.

Cutler: Four!

Dinah: *(To LADY CODLIVER).* Who else have you invited, then, Isabel?

Lady Codliver: A friend of Henry's - an Inspector Clewes.

Cutler: *(Not listening to the conversation).* Five!

Camilla: *(Looking at CUTLER with increasing pain and suspicion).* Cutler, come over here

Cutler: Coming, mi lady. Six!

Camilla: *(To CUTLER as the others remain unaware of her discomfort).* This coffee - did you was it ?

Cutler: *(Smiling).* I'm afraid I don't grasp your meaning, your ladyship. Seven!

Clewes: (*Reaching the stage*). Here we are, Codliver Hall.

Cutler: Eight!

Camilla: Cutler, you wouldn't dare You'll never get away with this

Cutler: Nine!

Clewes: (*Ringing an imaginary bell*). Just the place for a quiet, restful weekend break.

Cutler: (*Crossing to admit CLEWES*). Ten!

Camilla: I've been poisoned!!! Aaaaaaarrrrhhh!!! (*Flops back in her seat, dead.*)

(The others freeze in horror. CUTLER takes a casual look before moving to open the door).

Clewes: Inspector Seymour Clewes, the famous police detective.

Cutler: (*Taken aback*). Good evening, sir. Welcome to Codliver Hall. Unfortunately, you have arrived at a moment of tragedy. One of the guests has just died.

Clewes: In mysterious circumstances?

Cutler: You could say that, yes, sir.

Clewes: Might have guessed. So much for my restful weekend. Oh well, lead on. If there's any murder and scandal involved, I can expose the culprit and turn the whole thing into a TV whodunit.

Cutler: (*As they walk on the spot to denote a longer journey than the actual space demands*). Death was sudden, sir, but I'm sure you'll find Lady Camilla died of natural causes.

Clewes: We shall see. We shall see.

(The others unfreeze as CUTLER and CLEWES join them. LORD CODLIVER shakes hands with CLEWES).

Lord Codliver: Seymour, we need your help. Something terrible's happened.

Clewes: So your butler informs me. (*He inspects the body*).

(While CUTLER addresses the audience, LORD CODLIVER explains the situation to CLEWES in mimed conversation).

Cutler: Now that's something I wasn't quite expecting - a police detective! Puts a bit of a spanner in the works, does that. Mind you, he don't look bright, really, does he? Not exactly Hercule Thingammy or Sherlock Whatsisname. If I'm careful and watch me step - and if you lot keep mum - I should be all right. I can guess what's going to happen. This Seymour Clewes bloke will

interview everybody one at a time and then summon us all to the library for the grand finale when the identity of the culprit will be revealed! Very dramatic! Most impressive! Tell you what, though; if he ever suspects me for a second, I'll - I'll dance the Can Can.

Clewes: So, as far as you know, Lady Camilla had no enemies?

Lady Codliver: None at all.

Lord Codliver: Most amiable woman. Got on well with everybody - even ex-criminals, traffic wardens, schoolteachers.... those sort of undesirables.

Lady Codliver: She'd been through a difficult time recently, too. Her husband died last year, you see, from some kind of food-poisoning.

Clewes: That's a coincidence.

Lord Codliver: What is?

Clewes: Husband and wife dying in a similar way. You say that when Lady Camilla collapsed she cried out "I've been poisoned!!!" Was that EXACTLY what she said?

Lord Codliver: Well, she said, "I've been poisoned!!! Aaaaaarrrrhhh!!!"

Clewes: I see. Still, life's full of coincidences. We mustn't attach too much importance to it!

Lady Codliver: Have you any theories, Mr Clewes?

Dinah: Do you suspect foul play?

Major Laff: Don't be silly, Dinah. It's too early for that. Only an idiot would form an opinion at this stage.

Dinah: Quite.

Major Laff: Only a bungling amateur would form a theory without further investigation.

Clewes: I've got a theory.

Major Laff: What!

Cutler: (*Uncomfortably, to LADY CODLIVER*). Might I be excused, mi lady, to go and supervise the kitchen?

Clewes: (*Sharply*). Stay where you are!

Cutler: (*Alarmed*). What?

Clewes: (*Taking CUTLER by the arm and directing him to an empty seat*). My theory is that in any household, the butler is the one person who knows precisely what is going on. He keeps his ear to the ground, notices all comings and goings. I think you may be able to help me considerably, Mr. - er - ?

Cutler: Cutler, sir.

Clewes: Mr. Cutler, right. First of all, tell me how long you've worked at Codliver Hall, Mr. Cutler.

Cutler: (*A little nervous*). Oh, I've been here a very very long time, sir.

Lady Codliver: Only about a year.

Clewes: And how well did you know Lady Camilla Vole?

Cutler: Who?

Clewes: The dead woman?

Cutler: Oh, I hardly knew her at all, sir.

Lord Codliver: He used to work for her.

Cutler: Ah, yes - but, er, she never used to talk to me much, sir.

Clewes: Very interesting. So you were working for Lady Camilla at the time of her husband's sudden death?

Cutler: No!

Dinah: Yes! I was staying at Vole Manor when it happened and I remember your being there, Cutler.

Cutler: (*Badly shaken for a moment, then recovering*). Oh - er - you're right. It had slipped me memory. But fancy YOU being there on the night Sir Arthur died of poisoning. (*To CLEWES*). THAT'S interesting, isn't it, sir?

Dinah: (*Angrily*). What are you suggesting, Cutler? You know perfectly well that Lady Camilla explained how Sir Arthur poisoned himself accidentally by mixing up the labels on his weedkiller tin and his liver salts.

Clewes: Don't upset yourself, miss. There's probably no connection between Sir Arthur's death and that of his wife. I prefer to concentrate on this evening's unfortunate incident. It's motive we have to look for. Motive. So I think I'll have a word with each of you and then I'll summon you all back to the library like they do on the telly, when the identity of the culprit will be revealed.

Cutler: (*To audience*). Told you so! Don't hang around for the Can Can!

Clewes: Major Laff, perhaps you'd be good enough to remain here. Everyone else may go to their rooms, or play Cluedo or have a wee or something. I'll send for you when I want you.

(*Exit LADY CODLIVER and DINAH SORE followed by CUTLER and LORD CODLIVER carrying the body of CAMILLA VOLE*).

Major Laff: Don't think I'll be of much help to you, Inspector.

Clewes: That's what they all say, sir.

Major Laff: Who?

Clewes: People on the telly. Now, tell me, Major where were you when Lady Camilla was - er - taken ill?

Major Laff: In here, with everybody else.

Clewes: Had you known Lady Camilla long?

Major Laff: Since childhood. We were cousins. I didn't see her very often, though.

Clewes: Why was that?

Major: I live in Australia.

Clewes: So you were DISTANTLY related, then? Will you benefit from her will?

Major Laff: Possibly. She has nobody else to leave it to. Mind you, it wouldn't surprise me to learn she had little money left.

Clewes: What do you mean?

Major Laff: Well, she puts a lot on the gee-gees, you know, but I don't think she's much good at picking winners. I've overheard her telling Cutler to place bets for her. She never seems to give him any money, though.

Clewes: Good chap, Cutler. My instinct tells me he's a decent sort.

(Enter DINAH SORE).

Dinah: Excuse me, Inspector. Could I have a word with you in private?

Clewes: Not at the moment, miss. All in good time.

Dinah: But I have some information that may further your enquiries.

Clewes: Possibly, miss, but I'd like to talk to Lady Codliver first, if you don't mind.

Dinah: Yes, but....

Clewes: Perhaps you'd ask her ladyship to come and have a word with me.

Dinah: But....

Clewes: If you'd be so kind!

Dinah: *(Annoyed).* Oh, if you insist! *(Exit).*

Clewes: Wants to get in on the action, Major. Read too many Agatha Christies, I expect. Ha-ha.

Major Laff: I suppose you may be right. Well, is that all, Inspector?

Clewes: For the moment, Major. For the moment.

Major Laff: I'll be in the library if you want me again. I need to find a little peace.

Clewes: A little piece of what?

Major Laff: Pardon?

Clewes: Just a jest. Off you toddle, Major.

(Exit MAJOR as CUTLER enters).

Cutler: Any joy with the Major, then?

Clewes: Just between ourselves, I'm suspicious of our friend Major Laff. I'd like to see a copy of Lady Camilla's will to see if he's mentioned in it.

Cutler: You think he might have bumped her off so's he could get her money?

Clewes: Possibly.

Cutler: I reckon he's up to no good. He's got a very furtive way of pouring gravy on his veal cutlet.

Clewes: He reminds me of the chap in my last case.

Cutler: Oh, yes?

Clewes: The Case of the Bloke Found Hanging About inside a Wigwam.

Cutler; What was he charged with?

Clewes: (*Digging CUTLER in the ribs with his elbow*). Loitering Within Tent!
Nice one, eh?

Cutler: Very droll.

Clewes: By the way, the Major says Lady Camilla used to ask you to back horses for her but never gave you any money. Is that right?

Cutler: No, well, yes.... er I mean no.

Clewes: So that's definite, then?

Cutler: Absolutely. Brownie's honour.

Clewes: Fair enough. He could have been trying to throw suspicion on you - making it look as if her ladyship owed you a lot of money and wouldn't pay it back, so you got angry and poisoned her.

Cutler: The rotten so-and-so.... or words to that effect. That proves he done her in himself then, don't it? If he's in Lady Camilla's will, he's got a motive. He rubs her out and collects what's owing.

Clewes: Maybe. But is there anybody else with a motive? What about Lady Codliver, for instance?

Cutler: Well, I've got a sort of hunch.

Clewes: (*Taking a look at CUTLER'S back*). You can't help the way you're made, man.

Cutler: No, I mean Lady Camilla probably poisoned her husband, right?

Clewes: Sir Arthur?

Cutler: Yes.

Clewes: Why would she do that?

Cutler: Because Sir Arthur and Lady Codliver were a bit too keen on each other?

Clewes: Oh, yes?

Cutler: Whenever the Codlivers visited Vole Hall, Lady Codliver always used to let Sir Arthur beat her at Scrabble even though he couldn't spell for toffee.

Clewes: (*Scribbling in his notebook*). Couldn't spell for what?

Cutler: For toffee?

Clewes: How do you spell that?

Cutler: (*Looking over his shoulder at the notebook*). Two effs. They used to go on long walks, too.

Clewes: An interesting theory. But who killed Camilla?

Cutler: Oh, well, Lady Codliver would want her revenge when Camilla tippexed Sir Arthur out of the picture, wouldn't she?

Clewes: So where does Major Laff come in?

Cutler: He's probably got the hots for Lady Codliver as well. He'd do anything she asked him to do. So her ladyship probably persuaded him to bump off Camilla. I expect she told him she'd seen Camilla's will and that they would each get a nice little slice of it when Camilla was called to everlasting rest.

Clewes: Go on.

Cutler: And that once they'd got the money, they could run away together to Bermuda or Bali or....

Clewes: Birmingham?

Cutler: Yes, or Birmingham.... where they'd both live happily ever after.

Clewes: Brilliant, Cutler! YOU ought to be a detective; you're nearly as good as I am.

Cutler: It's nice of you to say so, sir.

Clewes: Right, now here comes Lady Codliver. Sit over there on that armchair and - er, cover yourself with this (*CLEWES lifts a dustsheet from behind the chair and drapes it over CUTLER*). I want you to hear what she says without being observed.

(*Enter LADY CODLIVER. CLEWES motions her to a chair*).

Clewes: Ah, Lady Codliver! Do sit down.

Lady Codliver: I expect you want to ask me some questions. I'll tell you all I can.

Clewes: Well, for a start, who won the Cup Final in 1947?

Lady Codliver: I beg your pardon?

Clewes: Who won the - it's just a joke, see. I'm trying to put you at ease. I'm well known for my rich sense of humour.

Lady Codliver: Charlton Athletic.

Clewes: What?

Lady Codliver: Charlton Athletic won the F.A. Cup in 1947.

Clewes: (*Taken aback*). Really? Fancy that. Well....

Lady Codliver: They beat Burnley, one nil.

Clewes: (*At a loss for words*). You don't say? Amazing. Now then....

Lady Codliver: But in 1948....

Clewes: Yes, yes, I'm sure you're right, Lady Codliver, but I wanted to ask you about Lady Camilla.

Lady Codliver: Did I murder her, for instance?

Clewes: Yes, well, I mean, not exactly - oh, all right then, yes: did you murder her?

Lady Codliver: No.

Clewes: Why not?

Lady Codliver: What do you mean, why not?

Clewes: Didn't you have quite a strong motive?

Lady Codliver: (*Angrily*). Camilla was one of my closest friends. What possible motive could I have?

Clewes: Let me be frank....

Lady Codliver: Be anyone you like, but don't accuse me of murder!

Clewes: What was the relationship between yourself and Lady Camilla's husband?

Lady Codliver: Arthur and I? What do you mean?

Clewes: Do you deny that when staying at Vole Manor, you and Sir Arthur often used to go on long walks together?

Lady Codliver: (*Indignant*). Look here, who's been trying to throw suspicion on me?

Clewes: I have my sources of information..

Lady Codliver: It's that little rat, Cutler, isn't it? He's the one you ought to question - the loathsome, poisonous little toad.

(*The dustsheet moves agitatedly*).

Clewes: Lady Codliver, is it or is it not the case that you and Sir Arthur were often in each other's company at Vole Manor?

Lady Codliver: (*Composing herself during a brief pause*). It's perfectly true - but it's not what you think. Arthur and I were good friends - but nothing more than friends. What we discussed in private had nothing at all to do with any secret romance.

Clewes: So what DID it have to do with?

Lady Codliver: Beetroot.

Clewes: I beg your pardon?

Lady Codliver: Beetroot. Let me explain; my husband, Henry, is a very keen gardener. It's his passion. Especially beetroot growing. Henry's an absolute wonder with beetroot. At the County Show each summer, he enters the beetroot section and always wins a prize - at least, he wins Second or Third Prize. Bur never First

Clewes: All very interesting, but I don't see

Lady Codliver: - the First Prize is always won by someone else. The SAME person each year.

Clewes: Yes?

Lady Codliver: Well, it makes my husband very depressed. Beetroot-growing is the only thing he's any good at. He's a bit of a chump at anything else.

Clewes: So?

Lady Codliver: So I thought that if Henry's arch rival could be - well, NOBBLED one year - just one year, you understand - Henry's beetroot

would win First and he'd be over the moon.

Clewes: And who is this rival beetroot champion?

Lady Codliver: Can't you guess?

Clewes: *(He looks thoughtful. Then suddenly enlightened as a smile crosses his face. This fades and he appears totally mystified again).* No.

Lady Codliver: Camilla Vole, of course!

Clewes: Oh!

Lady Codliver: I know that Camilla would never actually AGREE to risk losing First Prize - she's even more of a beetroot nut than Henry is - but I thought I could persuade Arthur to help me.

Clewes: How?

Lady Codliver: By seeing to it that the wrong beetroot was sent to the County Show, or switching Camilla's garden fertiliser for weedkiller next Spring - we discussed various schemes.

Clewes: And did Lord Vole go along with all this?

Lady Codliver: In the end he did, yes.

Clewes: And what did Henry think of it all?

Lady Codliver: Oh, he knew nothing about it. He mustn't find out. If he discovered what I was trying to do, he'd be furious. Henry was desperate to win First Prize, but only by fair means. Please don't tell him ...

(She stops as LORD CODLIVER enters carrying an envelope).

Lord Codliver: Ah, Seymour, Dinah Sore is anxious that you get this. Poor girl seems pretty agitated.

Clewes: *(Taking the envelope).* Thank you. *(He reads).* "Inspector Clewes. Strictly confidential. Top Secret. For your eyes only. Open only when you are alone. *(He immediately tears open the envelope, takes out the note and reads aloud).* "I must speak to you at once. I know who murdered Lady Camilla. She was poisoned by someone in this house and I have proof".

(Signs of extreme agitation from CUTLER beneath the dustsheet. Observed only by the audience, CUTLER, still wearing the dustsheet, rises during the next lines, moves crab-like towards the wings and exits).

Clewes: There's always somebody who thinks they can tell you how to do your job. What they don't realise is that I have my methods. I know what I'm doing and I'll do it in my own way.

Lady Codliver: But surely you're going to speak to her?

Clewes: All in good time. All in good time. First, I'd like a private word with

Cutler the butler. (*He turns to the armchair and notes with surprise that CUTLER has gone*). Oh! (*Puzzled, he thinks for a moment*). On second thoughts, can you spare me a minute, Henry?

Lord Codliver: Certainly.

Lady Codliver: I'll leave you, then. I'll get Cutler to take Dinah a nice cup of tea to soothe her nerves.

Clewes: Perhaps you'd tell Cutler to see me when he's done that.

(*Exit LADY CODLIVER*).

Clewes: Now then, Henry, how are your beetroots?

Lord Codliver: My beetroots?

Clewes: I'm told you're something of a beetroot expert.

Lord Codliver: Well, yes, I've been growing them for years. Won a few prizes. Do quite well, you know.

Clewes: But not well enough?

Lord Codliver: What do you mean?

Clewes: You never quite manage to win First Prize at the County Show, do you? Doesn't that trophy always go to Lady Camilla Vole?

Lord Codliver: Look here, Seymour, what's all this got to do with?

Clewes: Or, at least, the First Prize USED to go to Lady Camilla. Now, of course, things will be different, won't they? There's nobody stopping you being Number One in the beetroot world. The chief opposition has been UPROOTED, as you might say.

Lord Codliver: Just what are you getting at, man?

Clewes: Well, let's face it, Henry, it's a motive, isn't it? You've always got to look for a motive in this job, and bagging the best beetroot is yours.

Lord Codliver: But that's ridiculous! Do you seriously think I'd murder an old friend over a mere beetroot?

Clewes: How about a cauliflower, then?

Lord Codliver: What!

Clewes: Just a joke, Henry, just a joke. But you've got to admit....

Lord Codliver: I admit nothing, Seymour! The whole idea's absurd. You might as well accuse Ernest or little Lucy.

Clewes: Yes, it's time I had a word with them. Where will they be at the moment, do you think?

Lord Codliver: (*Looking at his watch*). Asleep, probably. It's well past their bedtime. They were sent to bed half an hour ago.

(*ERNEST and LUCY burst into the room*).

Lucy: Oh, Mr. Clewes, we've just seen something very fishy in the kitchen.

Clewes: Tell the cook to fry it with a few chips. I've had no supper yet.

Ernest: No, you don't understand. We've just seen Cutler leaving this room disguised as a ghost.

Lord Codliver: Good heavens!

Lucy: We followed him and overheard him ask mother if he should take Miss Sore a nice cup of tea because she seemed agitated.

Clewes: Yes well?

Ernest: Cutler's been behaving very strangely since he came to work here.

Clewes: How do you mean?

Ernest: Well, for instance, he and Lady Camilla always seemed to be hob-nobbing together secretly.

Lucy: I think he may have been threatening her!

Ernest: And then there's the cupboard under the sink?

Clewes: (*Impatiently*). What about the cupboard under the sink?

Lucy: He's put a hasp on it and keeps it locked all the time.

Ernest: Which is odd because it's only used to store soap and scrubbing brushes in.

Clewes: I can't be bothered with domestic trivia of this sort.

Lucy: Yes, but we've just seen him open up the cupboard under the sink.

Clewes: Really?

Ernest: He took out a large, mysterious-looking bottle

Lucy: and poured some liquid from it into Miss Sore's cup of tea.

Lord Codliver: That's very strange, don't you think, Seymour?

Clewes: Not at all, Henry, not at all. We mustn't jump to conclusions.

Lord Codliver: But surely....

Clewes: The explanation's obvious, Henry.

Lord Codliver: Yes, but

Clewes: Your butler is partial to a drop o' the hard stuff - we all have our little weaknesses - and he keeps a bottle of whisky locked away in the sink cupboard. Tonight, out of the kindness of his heart, he adds a drop to Miss Sore's tea, knowing she's out of sorts and needs something to put her back to rights.

Ernest: But we thought he was trying to - to....

Lucy: to poison Miss Sore!

Clewes: (*With a smug chuckle*). Oh, dear me - what imaginations you youngsters have! Poison indeed!

(*Enter MAJOR LAFF in a state of alarm*).

Major Laff: I say - something terrible's happened! Dinah's lying dead on the library carpet!

(Everyone except CLEWES reacts to the news).

Clewes: Cutler must have overdone it with the whisky!

Major Laff: I thought she'd fainted at first and tried to move her. Then I noticed this note she was clutching in her hand. It's addressed to you, Clewes.

(He hands the note to CLEWES, who glances at it for a moment before reading aloud).

Clewes: "Lady Camilla Vole was murdered by Cutler the Butler. She was blackmailing him. She knew he'd murdered her husband, Sir Arthur. I was a guest at Vole Manor when Sir Arthur was poisoned. I saw Cutler pour strychnine into Sir Arthur's lemonade and I heard a conversation between Lady Camilla and Cutler in which she said she would blackmail him. They thought I was asleep, and I couldn't let them know I had overheard what they'd been saying because it's rude to eavesdrop, and in any case, Camilla's always been a good friend of mine so I thought I'd just let her get on with it - blackmailing Cutler the Butler, I mean. But when I heard Cutler telling the audience that he intended poisoning Camilla - nobody else seemed to notice, oddly enough - I felt I could remain silent no longer. Arrest Cutler immediately. Hoping this finds you as it leaves me, Dinah Sore."

Well, I'm glad it DOESN'T find me as it leaves her, I must say.

Lady Codliver: Cutler - the murderer! And we were thinking of giving him a three and a half per cent rise in pay!

Lord Codliver: We could all have been murdered in our beds! He'll get no more than one and a half per cent!

Clewes: Now let's not jump to conclusions. In spite of all this *(Waving the note)*. I'm convinced of Cutler's innocence. I can always tell whether somebody's guilty or not. There are obvious signs. Clean fingernails and a well-laundered shirt are unmistakable indications of pure living. Cutler displayed both. Major, would you mind telling Cutler we want him in here, please.

Major Laff: *(Visibly anxious)*. But, I say Clewes, the man's dangerous.

Clewes: Misjudged, but quite harmless, Major, I assure you. Of course, if you're afraid

Major Laff: Oh, very well, I'll go and find him. *(Exit)*.

Lucy: I'll come and help you look.

Lord Codliver: I hope you know what you're doing, Seymour.

Clewes: Trust me, Henry, trust me.

Lady Codliver: But the evidence of Dinah's note is pretty convincing.

Clewes: (*Smugly*). I didn't get where I am today by taking any notice of evidence. Instinct is my weapon in crime-solving. Instinct to me is like a laser beam piercing a straight path to the truth!

(*Enter CUTLER followed by MAJOR LAFF*).

Cutler: (*To CLEWES*). You sent for me, sir?

Clewes: Several lines ago. What kept you?

Cutler: I was putting fresh cheese in the mousetraps, sir.

Clewes: Well done. We should all profit by following your example.

Cutler: Kind of you to say so, sir.

Clewes: Not at all. Now, Cutler, I have to inform you that Miss Dinah Sore has been found dead in the library.

Cutler: I see, sir. I'll notify cook that there will be one less for breakfast.

Lady Codliver: Cutler, is that all you can say? Miss Sore is DEAD!

Cutler: (*Quickly assuming an air of distress*). Dead? Oh, dear, that's terrible! She can't have been more than 35. What a tragedy! Heart attack, no doubt. She has confided in me that her doctor was greatly concerned. Such a pleasant lady. Generous with her tips. She'll be sadly missed. Shall I ring the undertaker's, madam?

(*Enter LUCY with tray of drinks*).

Clewes: That can wait. First I'd like to ask a few questions about -

Lucy: - Thought you'd all like something to drink. Lemonade, mother?

Lady Codliver: (*Reaching for glass*). Oh....well, thank you dear.

Lucy: No, don't take that one, mother. The one next to it. (*LADY CODLIVER takes another glass*). Father?

Lord Codliver: Thank you, Lucy. (*Takes a glass from the tray*).

Lucy: Mr. Clewes? Yours is the one on the right.

Clewes: (*Taking a glass*). Thank you. Very thoughtful.

Lucy: (*To MAJOR LAFF*). The one on the left there.

Major Laff: (*Taking a glass*). Kind of you, Lucy.

Lucy: Which leaves just one glass. Why don't YOU have it, Cutler? You seem shaken - if not stirred - by Dinah's sudden death. You really ought to have something.

Cutler: (*Hesitant*). Well I don't think....

Lucy: But you must, mustn't he, father? Please Cutler take the glass.

Cutler: (*Taking a glass, reluctantly*). Very well, then. Thank you, miss.
(*They all drink, CUTLER last*).

Clewes: Very nice. Now, if we can get on with the enquiry

Lucy: (*Sweetly*). Excuse me for interrupting, but did you enjoy your lemonade, Cutler?

Clewes: (*Impatiently*). Please, Miss Lucy, I WOULD be grateful if

Lucy: because I have a little confession to make.

Lady Codliver: Lucy, what?

Lucy: yes, you see I put a drop of something stronger than lemonade in your drink, Cutler. Some of the whisky from your own whisky bottle!

Cutler: (*Horried, spluttering*). What whisky bottle?

Lucy: You know - the one you keep in the cupboard under the sink.

Cutler: (*Aghast*). But it's locked!

Lucy: Normally, yes - but I'm jolly good at picking locks with a bent paper clip.
(*Reveals clip in the palm of her hand*). Since it was YOUR whisky, Cutler, I poured a generous amount into YOUR lemonade.

Cutler: (*Sagging at the knees*). Whisky? That wasn't whisky, you stupid little brat!

Lady Codliver: You're fired, Cutler!

Cutler: (*With a desperate laugh*). Fired, am I? That's good, that is. I'm more than fired. Thanks to you (*To LUCY*) you interfering little monster, I've had it. That weren't whisky in the bottle. It were - it were

Lucy: I think you mean "It was", Cutler, not "it were". But tell us, what exactly was it that I added to your drink?

Clewes: (*Perplexed*). Here, what's going on?

Ernest: Go on, Cutler, tell us what you keep in your whisky bottle.

(*CUTLER sinks on to one knee, gripping his throat and stomach dramatically*).

Cutler: You've done for me, you menace. You've poisoned me!

Lucy: Oh dear, surely you don't keep poison in a whisky bottle, Cutler? Well, what a shame! But, really, how was I to know?

Lord Codliver: So it WAS Cutler who killed Camilla!

Lady Codliver: And Arthur!

Major Laff: And now poor Dinah!

Cutler: Yes, yes, it was me! Of course, it was me! And I'd have got away with it, too, if it hadn't been for that meddling kid. Damn you! Damn all of you! The poison's doing it's worst! Ahhhhhh!

(CUTLER crumples up and lies unmoving on the floor).
(General consternation).

Clewes: You shouldn't have done that, you know, young lady. It's going to take some explaining.

Lady Codliver: Lucy, dear, you must be more careful. This is terrible!

Lucy: Well, at least we've cleared up a few murder cases, Mr. Clewes. By the way, do you keep a set of handcuffs on you?

Clewes: Handcuffs? Well, as a matter of fact, yes, but -

Lord Codliver: Lucy, I hardly think -

Lucy: - In that case, I should put them on Cutler, if I were you.

Clewes: Put them on - ? I can't quite see the point of restraining a deceased servitor.

Lucy: Pardon?

Clewes: Cuffing a duff butler. It hardly seems respectful.

Lucy: Please do as I ask, Mr. Clewes. I'd feel much safer if you did.

Clewes: *(Kneeling to handcuff CUTLER'S hands behind his back).* Well, if it helps you cope with what must be a distressing experience for one so young. But Cutler can cause no further harm, you know. The poor chap's quite dead.

Lucy: Ah, but that's it, you see. He's not.

Lady Codliver: Lucy, dear, whatever do you mean?

Lucy: Cutler's not dead at all. I'm afraid I told a little white lie when I said I'd added something to his lemonade. I never went anywhere near his nasty little cupboard under the sink. Cutler drank pure lemonade like everybody else in the room.

(General reaction. CUTLER shows sudden signs of life and raises his head angrily).

Cutler: What! I'm not poisoned? *(He struggles vainly to rise).* I've been tricked! You rotten little pest! A good hiding's what you need! Ought to be locked up in the coal cellar for a few days!

Major Laff: Hold your tongue, Cutler. You're nicked!

Clewes: Quite so, Major, though that's actually MY line, if you don't mind. *(To CUTLER).* Keep still, Cutler. No use getting nasty. The game's up. Henry, perhaps you'd be good enough to phone for a police car. Tell them Clewes has got a result in one of his most baffling mysteries. Though, to tell the truth, I suspected you from the very start, Cutler. Gave yourself away, being so cocky. My laser-beam instinct is never wrong. Nobody pulls the wool over MY eyes for long. *(To LORD CODLIVER).* Yes, Henry, ring for an

escort. The case is solved. The Butler did it!
(CUTLER is pulled to his feet. As he comes stage centre, he turns and faces the audience).

Cutler: All right, so I underestimated friend Clewes. Yes, and I remember what I promised to do if he worked out that I was the villain of the piece.

Clewes: Who's he talking to?

Cutler: *(Calls).* Music, if you please!

(Can Can music. CUTLER begins dancing clumsily but with energy. Then CLEWES and, one by one, the entire company begin dancing. All exit, facing the audience, dancing vigorously).

THE END