

SPUD FERRET AND THE CASE OF THE STOLEN DIAMONDS

A One Act Play

by

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CAST

Lady Cynthia Sludge	<i>103 years old</i>
Davinia Flimsy	<i>Excitable young woman who writes crime novels</i>
Sebastian Crumb	<i>Davinia's dancing partner</i>
Chivers	<i>A maid</i>
Sir Egbert Knowe-Bacon	<i>World famous wine expert</i>
Grimace	<i>The butler</i>
Lindsey Lovegrove	<i>A brash American in his early thirties</i>
Lady Blip	<i>Owner of Blip Mansion</i>
Compost	<i>The gardener</i>
Spud Ferret	<i>The world's greatest detective</i>

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The Drawing Room of Blip Mansion, ancestral home of LADY AGATHA BLIP: A rambling country house in the heart of rural Wastemorland. French windows upstage centre lead out to the garden. The room is bedecked with velvet curtains and flock wallpaper. A door upstage L. leads out to the hall. There is a table laden with drinks, a decanter and glasses up R; a settee centre stage; and two chairs against the wall downstage R. Also an old-fashioned telephone.

(LADY CYNTHIA SLUDGE sits in her bathchair. She is 103 years old and fast asleep).

Davinia: Oh, Sebastian, isn't this exciting? Another delightful week end at Blip Mansion, Lady Blip's delightful country house in the heart of rural Wastemorland!

Sebastian: RaTHER.

Davinia: Do you know, they say the ghost of Sir Montmorency Blip still stalks the grounds at twilight, searching for the miscreant who caused his untimely death?

Sebastian: RaTHER.

Davinia: And look, Sebastian! Outside the full moon shines brightly, sending dark shadows across the face of the house But am I mistaken? Or could one those shadows be moving? Could it be the spirit of Sir Montmorency Blip? Or could there be a murderer on the loose?

Sebastian: What? Oh, yah! RaTHER!

(Enter CHIVERS, a maid).

Chivers: Beg pardon, mum, but her ladyship says she'll be joining you presently. She's just gone upstairs to put away her diamonds.

Davinia: Her diamonds, Chivers? Isn't she being somewhat premature?

Chivers: Beg pardon, mum?

Davinia: The evening has hardly begun. Why should Lady Blip be so keen to put away her diamonds?

Chivers: I'm sorry, mum, but her ladyship was most particular.

Davinia: Hmm. Very good, Chivers. That will be all.

Chivers: Yes, mum. Thank you, mum.

(CHIVERS curtseys and leaves).

Davinia: Well, I must say, Sebastian, Lady Blip takes great care of those diamonds. She only ever wears them on special occasions But why should she lock them away before the evening has come to an end? Could it be she suspects one of her guests of being a thief?

Sebastian: Oh, yah. RaTHER.

(Enter SIR EGBERT KNOWE-BACON, the world famous wine expert).

Sir Egbert: Oh, hallo, you two. Am I interrupting something?

Sebastian: Oh, yah. RaTHER.

Davinia: Oh, don't be silly, Sebastian. Do come in, Sir Egbert. You're most welcome. I was merely remarking upon the fullness of the moon. It seems to me it's the sort of night a murderer might strike..

Sir Egbert: Good Lord! What an imagination you have! I suppose it comes from writing all those crime novels of yours. What was that last one called again?

Davinia: Oh er the Case of the Poisoned Cheesecake.

Sir Egbert: Poisoned cheesecake, eh? Well, fiendishly clever, I must say.

Sebastian: RaTHER.

Davinia: Did you want anything in particular, Sir Egbert?

Sir Egbert: Well, actually, I just came in to see if Crumb wanted to come through for a brandy. What about it, Crumb?

Sebastian: Oh, raTHER.

Sir Egbert: Good man. I must say I could do with one. I'm feeling a little queasy after my dessert.

Davinia: Really? What did you have?

Sir Egbert: I had the cheesecake.

Davinia: The cheesecake?

Sir Egbert: Yes, that's right. Come along, Crumb.

(Exit SIR EGBERT and SEBASTIAN CRUMB).

Davinia: Goodness! The cheesecake! Could it be more than a coincidence? And why should Sir Egbert and Sebastian go through THERE when the brandy is in HERE on the drinks trolley? Now, I know it seems rather silly of me, and yet I can't help feeling something awful is about to happen

(FX: a gunshot is heard offstage).

Davinia: Oh, no! Oh, goodness! I was right!

(Enter GRIMACE, the butler).

Davinia: Oh, Grimace! I just heard the sound of gunfire from the kitchen!

Grimace: Indeed, madam. The gardener wishes to extend his sincerest apologies. He was just testing his twelve bore to see if it was loaded. It was.

Davinia: Goodness! Is everything all right?

Grimace: I believe the cook had a piece of her ear shot off, madam. Nothing more serious than that.

Davinia: Oh, thank heavens it was only one of the servants who was injured!

Grimace: Indeed. Will that be all, madam?

Davinia: Tell me, Grimace do you feel as I feel? That it's going to be one of those evenings? You know, when strange, unexplained and mysterious events take place? When the ghost of Sir Montmorency Blip stalks the grounds? When perhaps even murder rears its ugly head?

Grimace: Madam, I regret to say I do not share your faith in apparitions. As to the question of murder, however, you need have no fear. If anyone should try to murder you this evening, rest assured you will be the first to know.

(Exit GRIMACE).

Davinia: Goodness! Could there be some hidden meaning in what he just said? I shall have to keep an eye on that Grimace *(She picks up a Magazine from the drinks table).* Goodness! A recent copy of the Wastemorland Weekly. I haven't read all the advertisements in this one. *(She opens the magazine. A playing card falls out. It is the Queen of Diamonds).* Why, what's this? A playing card! *(She picks it up).* The Queen of Diamonds! Perhaps this could be a clue. And a single word is written on it. 'Rob'. Goodness! Someone is going to rob the Queen of Diamonds! Diamonds why, of course! Lady Blip! Someone is going to rob Lady Blip of her diamonds! Goodness! I must warn her before it's too late! But wait if the thief discovers I have told her of his plans, he may resort to something far more serious. He may resort to murder! Perhaps it would be prudent to say nothing for the present. I must hold my fire, and trust that the truth will out.

(She puts the card back inside the magazine, and replaces the magazine on the drinks table. LADY CYNTHIA SLUDGE wakes up. She is very old,

completely deaf and wears a monocle. She examines DAVINIA closely).

Lady Cynthia: Ah! Now whom have we here?

Davinia: Good evening, Lady Cynthia.

(Pause. LADY CYNTHIA looks her up and down).

Lady Cynthia: I'm a hundred and three, you know.

Davinia: Yes, Lady Cynthia, I know.

(LADY CYNTHIA sits).

Lady Cynthia: Tell me, are you married?

Davinia: No, not yet. I can't afford it.

Lady Cynthia: Then where is your husband?

Davinia: I'm not married, Lady Cynthia. I can't afford it. At the moment, you see. I have two options. Marry someone rich. Or steal something very valuable.

(Pause).

Lady Cynthia: I'm married too, you know.

Davinia: I'm not married, Lady Cynthia!

Lady Cynthia: But I haven't seen my husband for years.

Davinia: But, Lady Cynthia ...

Lady Cynthia: That's probably because he's dead, you know. Yes, that's it Tell me, how do you like being married?

Davinia: *(Sighs)*. I'm not married. I work for a living. I'm a crime writer.

Lady Cynthia: A sign writer, did you say?

Davinia: No, a crime writer! I write stories. You know, about murder, and that sort of thing.

Lady Cynthia: I see. *(Pause)*. And tell me, what does your husband do for a living?

Davinia: I haven't got a husband, you silly old bat!

Lady Cynthia: Oh come now, you're too kind

Davinia: I've told you! I'm not married!

Lady Cynthia: Really? I'm a hundred and three, you know.

Davinia: *(Sighs)*. Oh dear We're not making much progress, are we? I've been coming here nearly every weekend for the last three years and you still can't remember who I am! *(LADY CYNTHIA looks at DAVINIA through her monocle).*

Lady Cynthia: Now tell me, have I seen you somewhere before?

(DAVINIA comes downstage).

Davinia: Naturally, suspect number one would be Lady Cynthia. Yet how could a harmless old woman be capable of murder? But wait! Yes, of course! It could all be a clever disguise! I must bide my time and wait to see if she forgets something. And of course, there is something else that forces me to withhold my suspicions. As things stand at the moment, no one has actually been murdered

(Enter LINDSEY LOVEGROVE, a brash American in his early thirties).

Lovegrove: Ladies! Hello! *(He bounds across to the sofa).* Lady Cynthia!
How very charming to see you again!

Lady Cynthia: I'm a hundred and three, you know.

Lovegrove: Yes, I know. And still as beautiful as ever!

Lady Cynthia: Tell me, young man, have you seen my spectacles?

Lovegrove: Your spectacles?

Lady Cynthia: Yes. I can't find them anywhere. If only I had my spectacles, I'd be able to see where they were.

(But LOVEGROVE has caught sight of DAVINIA).

Lovegrove: Yeah, sure thing, Cynth baby. Catch you later *(To DAVINIA).*
Well, hello there! Did we exchange 'phone numbers over dinner?

Davinia: I really can't remember.

Lovegrove: Well, hey, listen. I'm Lindsey Lovegrove, the famous movie star. And you know something? You've got a face that could make a million dollars! Say! How would you like to be in my next movie? How would you like us to make sweet music together?

Davinia: How would you like a knee in the groin?

Lovegrove: Hey, take it easy, babe. I never meant nothing!

Davinia: Yes, well, we girls must stick up for ourselves, you know.

Lovegrove: Oh, sure! No problem! I just figured maybe you'd be interested, that's all. See, pretty soon I'm gonna hit the big time. All I gotta do is raise a hundred thousand dollars, and I can make my own movies and star in them as well! How do you like that?

Davinia: Not as much as you like it, obviously.

Lovegrove: Say! Give a guy a break, will ya?

Davinia: I'm sorry, Mr. Lovegrove. But, you see, I'm afraid I don't trust you.

Lovegrove: Hey! Why not?

Davinia: I have a curious feeling something terrible is about to happen. And that you, Mr. Lovegrove, may be the cause of it.

Lovegrove: Hey, you're crazy, you know that? Nothing ever happens in this crumby place!

(FX - a gunshot is heard offstage).

Davinia: Goodness! What was that? I knew it! Someone has been shot!

(Enter GRIMACE).

Grimace: Ladies sir. I am sorry to cause you any inconvenience, but Lady Blip has asked all her guests to make their way here to the drawing room, and to remain here until she has spoken to them.

Davinia: Goodness! Is it anything serious?

Grimace: I believe the news is not good, madam. The other guests are on their way here at this moment.

Davinia: And that second shot from the kitchen? What was that?

Grimace: I regret to say it was the gardener, madam.

Davinia: The gardener? Again? And who was the unfortunate victim?

Grimace: The cook, madam. Two fingers removed from the left hand.

Davinia: I say, Grimace, wouldn't it be prudent to take the gardener's shotgun away from him?

Grimace: That is quite out of the question, madam. I understand the gardener is on Neighbourhood Watch patrol until midnight.

Davinia: Heavens! We're not safe!

Lady Cynthia: Grimace!

Grimace: Yes, your ladyship?

Lady Cynthia: I'm a hundred and three, you know.

Grimace: Very good, your ladyship.

Lady Cynthia: And Grimace?

Grimace: Yes, your ladyship?

Lady Cynthia: Bring me another copy of the Wastemorland Weekly. I wish to have something to help me fall asleep.

Grimace: Very good, your Ladyship.

(GRIMACE turns to go. As he reaches the door, however, his way is blocked by an insurmountable obstacle. It is LADY BLIP).

Lady Blip: No, Grimace! You will stay here with the others!

Grimace: But, your ladyship, I

Lady Blip: No, Grimace! You will do as I say, or I shall sack you without further ado!

Grimace: Very good, your ladyship.

(GRIMACE stands aside to allow LADY BLIP into the drawing room).

Lady Blip: Right! Come along, the rest of you!

(Enter SEBASTIAN CRUMB and SIR EGBERT KNOWE-BACON, both clutching glasses of brandy. CHIVERS enters, and stands near the door alongside GRIMACE).

Lady Blip: *(Suspiciously)*. Just a moment! Compost! Where is Compost?

Grimace: I believe he was testing his shotgun, your ladyship.

(FX: a gunshot is heard offstage).

Lady Blip: Good Lord! That's the third time tonight! What on earth is he playing at?

(Enter COMPOST, the gardener, carrying a double barrelled shotgun. He is a toothless scarecrow of a man who drinks a gallon of rough cider every night).

Lady Blip: Ah, there you are, Compost. Now what is going on?

Compost: Thar done piddled on the bummer, that thar 'ave.

Davinia: Goodness! What is he saying?

Grimace: If I might be of assistance, your ladyship?

Lady Blip: Very well, Grimace. Carry on.

Grimace: I believe he is saying they don't make them guns like what they ought to, no, cor blimey, your ladyship.

Compost: *(Agreeing)*. Hazzat cock-up what's buggered, ennit?

Grimace: It's the safety catch what done it *(Thinks)* ennit?

Compost: An' oiz knackered 'er knuckers boi damn!

Grimace: And I've been done gone shot poor cook in the foot, now, haven't I?

Davinia: Goodness! The cook has been shot by the gardener! How beastly!

Lady Blip: Yes. And if those wounds are not seen to, she'll never play football again.

Grimace: Shall I call for an ambulance, madam?

Lady Blip: (*Sighs*). Very well, Grimace. And take Compost with you, to help clear up the mess.

Grimace: Yes, your ladyship. Come along, Compost.

Lady Blip: And Compost?

Compost: Argh?

Lady Blip: Do be more careful next time.

Compost: Az want 'em collicobbles seein' to! Give 'em a roit good rubbin'! Argh!

(*Exit GRIMACE and COMPOST*).

Lady Blip: Really, old Compost is terrible. I simply can't understand a single word he says. I told him he should have gone on to a finishing school.

Lovegrove: Gee, Agatha baby, that sure is a shame about Compost and the cook. Kinda spoils a swell weekend. But say, what's the big idea of meeting up in the drawing room? We gonna play some party games, or what?

Lady Blip: Party games are not what I had in mind No, I have brought you all here because I have something important to tell you. Somebody has stolen my diamonds!

Davinia: I knew it! I knew something beastly was going to happen!

Lovegrove: Your diamonds?

Lady Blip: Yes indeed. The famous Blip diamonds. Valued at over one hundred thousand dollars.

Lovegrove: Hey, this is crazy! I mean, you don't think it was one of US, do you?

Lady Blip: Well, who else could it be? All I know is, I took off my diamonds after dinner. And five minutes later, when I returned to my room, they were gone! Which means that one of my guests someone in this room at this very moment has stolen my diamonds!

Davinia: It could have been one of the servants. In MY stories it usually is.

Lady Blip: I haven't excluded Grimace or Compost. Or you, Chivers.

Chivers: Thank you, ma-am. I'm very grateful to you.

Lady Blip: No. It could have been anyone

Sir Egbert: Good Lord! Well, I mean to say, has anyone 'phoned the police?

Lady Blip: No, no. I don't want the police involved. They always ask for biscuits and cups of tea, you see, and leave their muddy footprints on the carpet. No, I want to solve this like a civilised human being.

Sir Egbert: That's all very well, Agatha, but if the police aren't here to stop him, what's to prevent the thief from simply walking out of here with your diamonds?

Lady Blip: That's quite impossible. The front door is securely locked. All the windows are bolted down. And anyone trying to get out through the kitchen

will come face to face with Grimace and his shotgun Now, I propose to give the thief until midnight to hand over the diamonds. Then, if they are not returned, I shall have no alternative but to ask you all to leave my house tomorrow morning directly after breakfast, never to return. I cannot afford to have a thief staying on the premises.

Davinia: Oh, goodness! This is simply too awful! Someone is bound to be murdered this evening! Anyone who steals expensive diamonds will stop at nothing to cover up their tracks!

Lady Blip: Oh, do be quiet, Davinia. You're letting your imagination run riot again! Control yourself, you silly girl! Sebastian, look after her, will you?

Sebastian: (*Moves towards her*). Oh, raTHER

Davinia: (*Shrinking away in horror*). Keep away from me, you fiend! How do I know you're not the murderer?

Lady Blip: There hasn't been a murder, you silly girl! And there isn't going to be, either! Now, please - let us concern ourselves with the matter in hand!

Sir Egbert: Just a moment, Agatha, old girl if COMPOST stole those diamonds, what's to stop him just walking out of the door?

Lady Blip: What do you mean?

Sir Egbert: Well, it's no use having Compost out in the kitchen with his shotgun if HE turns out to be the thief!

Davinia: Oh, please! Sir Egbert! We're trying to solve a mystery!

Lady Blip: Precisely. Now let's get on with it.

Sir Egbert: Oh, don't mind me. I'll just have another brandy. Seems rather a large loophole in the plot, mind you.

Lovegrove: Say, Sir Egbert how come you didn't get your FIRST brandy from the drinks table?

Sir Egbert: (*Puzzled*). I've really no idea....

Lady Blip: Really! All these interruptions! By all means help yourself to more brandy, Sir Egbert. But kindly allow ME to solve the mystery!

Sir Egbert: Whatever you say, Agatha, old thing. Cheers. (*He pours himself a brandy from the drinks table*).

Lady Blip: Very well Now, I think we can establish very easily that Compost did not steal my diamonds. He's been a good and faithful servant all these years.

Davinia: I see. Blind devotion to the aristocracy. The perfect motive.

Lady Blip: Exactly. Also, he has an I.Q. of 26 and is usually intoxicated.

Lovegrove: Hey, that ain't no kinda proof! Where I come from, guys like that get elected as President!

Lady Blip: I see you are determined to undermine my argument. Perhaps it was YOU who stole my diamonds?

Lovegrove: Aggie! Baby! Darling! How could I? After all those wonderful times we've had together?

Lady Blip: Lindsey! Please! Not in front of the servants!

Sir Egbert: (*Moving to him*). What do you mean? You bounder! Let me tell you I am quite prepared to defend Lady Blip's honour in this matter!

Davinia: Goodness! All we seem to be doing is arguing! If we carry on like this we'll NEVER solve the mystery! Now what WE need is one of those clever private detectives!

Lady Blip: Don't be silly, Davinia! Where are we going to find a private detective at THIS time of night?

(*Enter SPUD FERRET, the world's greatest detective*).

Spud: That's a very good question, Lady Blip.

Lady Blip: Good heavens! Who are you?

Spud: My name is Ferret, Spud Ferret. I'm a private detective.

Lady Blip: Spud Ferret? What a very peculiar name!

Spud: That may be so, your ladyship, but I combine the hunting skills of the ferret with the handy versatility of the potato.

Lady Blip: I see. But where did you suddenly spring from? I didn't send for you.

Spud: For the last half hour, Lady Blip, I have secreted myself in your front hall, behind the umbrella stand. Prior to that, as I was making my way from the local police station, I was suddenly whisked away by an interstellar time warp, along with a number of other items that were close to hand.

Lady Blip: An interstellar time warp, did you say?

Spud: Yes, your ladyship. That is correct.

Lady Blip: You will of course pardon my impertinence, Mr. Ferret, but frankly I don't believe you.

Spud: I see. Well, in that case, I shall have to think of something else.

Lady Blip: Indeed you must. This is England, Mr. Ferret. We are not accustomed to dealing with interstellar time warps.

Spud: Very well. In that case, I just happened to be passing, and the front door was open.

Lady Blip: What? Why, that's disgraceful! Grimace! Grimace, come here at once!

(*Enter GRIMACE*).

Grimace: Yes, your ladyship?

Lady Blip: Grimace, how many times must I tell you not to leave the front door

open?

Grimace: But, your ladyship, I can assure you ... the front door has been locked for the entire evening!

Lady Blip: I see ... Well, Mr. Ferret, unless you are prepared to tell me the truth, I shall be obliged to telephone the police!

Spud: I'm afraid that won't be possible, your ladyship. I was down at the police station myself only a short while ago. I'm afraid they're a bit tied up at the moment.

Lady Blip: Tied up? What on earth do you mean?

Spud: Well, as you know, the police station in the village of Duckwood is manned by those two stout custodians of the law, P.C. Boot and P.C. Banks. Late this afternoon, however, the police station was raided by a couple of burglars. As I understand it, one of the villains held the police at gunpoint while the other one ... tied them up. I was making a routine call and discovered them bound and gagged and locked in a broom cupboard ... Naturally they were unable to communicate by word of mouth, but by means of sign language, but by means of sign language I was able to ascertain that the criminals intended to make their way here to steal Lady Blip's diamonds. I began to make my way here immediately, but unfortunately my progress was interrupted by an interstellar time warp ... Oh, and a telephone call to the police station will suffice to confirm that everything I've just told you is true.

Sir Egbert: Now look here, Ferret ... there's something I don't understand ...

Spud: Oh, yes, sir? And what might that be?

Sir Egbert: Well, look here ... I mean to say ... well, when you found the police tied up ... why didn't you untie them?

Lovegrove: Yeah! Why talk to them in sign language?

Lady Blip: And how did the thieves break into the house when it is so securely guarded?

Lovegrove: How did YOU get in here?

Sir Egbert: Why all this nonsense about an interstellar time warp?

Lovegrove: How can you hide behind an umbrella stand when there ain't no umbrellas?

Lady Blip: And even if I do ring the police ... how can they answer the 'phone with their hands still tied behind their backs and their mouths stuffed with gags?

Spud: Well, these are all very interesting questions ...

Lady Blip: And ones to which we require an answer, Mr. Ferret ...

Davinia: Just a moment, Lady Blip. Let Mr. Ferret answer your questions later. In the meantime ... well, you said you didn't want the police involved ... and Mr. Ferret IS a private detective ... so why not let Mr. Ferret solve the case of

the stolen diamonds?

Lady Blip: Well, I'm not sure I mean, it's really most irregular

Davinia: But Mr. Ferret is a neutral party. He has no axe to grind. Surely he is the person most likely to arrive at the correct solution?

Grimace: If I might interrupt, your ladyship

Lady Blip: Well, Grimace? What is it?

Grimace: I have received a telephone message from P.C. Banks of the local constabulary, your ladyship. He says we are to expect a Mr. Ferret, a private investigator, and that he is to take full charge of the case as soon as the diamonds have been stolen.

Lovegrove: You mean the police ARRANGED for the diamonds to be stolen? Just so Ferret could get on the case?

Davinia: It's perfectly logical, Mr. Lovegrove. The police have to allow more crimes to be committed if they want to involve the public in crime prevention.

Lovegrove: Say what? That's the dumbest thing I ever heard!

Sir Egbert: But this is absurd! How can P.C. Banks give a message over the telephone if the poor fellow's still bound and gagged?

Davinia: Why, that's simple, Sir Egbert He er he must have dialled the number with his nose, then transmitted the message by means of Morse code signals made by grunting noises in his throat!

Sir Egbert: Good God! That's brilliant! Where's the brandy? (*SIR EGBERT helps himself to more brandy*).

Lady Blip: Very well, Mr. Ferret. You are now in charge of the case. Are you familiar with all the facts?

Spud: Indeed I am, your ladyship.

Lady Blip: And you're sure you know what you are doing?

Spud: Yes, of course. I've seen it hundreds of times on the television.

Sir Egbert: Television? What on earth is he talking about?

(*SPUD FERRET goes immediately to question GRIMACE*).

Spud: Now then, sir what were you doing on the evening of the fourteenth? In other words, tonight?

Grimace: I was engaged in my usual tasks. Cleaning the house from top to bottom.

Spud: I see. And do you do that every evening?

Grimace: Unfortunately, yes. Lady Blip insists upon it.

Lady Blip: Absolutely! And if it isn't done properly, out you go, Grimace.

Grimace: Yes, your ladyship (*GRIMACE looks crestfallen. SPUD looks suspicious*).

Spud: So, Grimace you have easy access to Lady Blip's bedroom?

Grimace: Indeed, sir. But then, so do all the servants.

Spud: Hmm! Very well where is the chambermaid?

(CHIVERS steps forward and curtseys).

Chivers: Here, sir, if you please, sir.

Spud: Now then, my girl did you or did you not steal those diamonds?

Chivers: No, sir, I did not.

Spud: How can you be so sure?

Chivers: Well, sir, I wouldn't lie about a thing like that, now, would I?

Spud: Hmm! very true. Very true Lady Blip, this girl is completely innocent.

Chivers: Thank you, sir.

Sir Egbert: Just a minute, Ferret! Surely you can't just take her word for it?

Davinia: I'm sure Mr. Ferret has his own tried and tested methods, Sir Egbert.

Spud: Indeed I have, madam. Now, if you will permit me to continue ...? After all, we do want to find out who stole those diamonds, don't we?

Sir Egbert: Damn it all! I give up! Where's the brandy?

Spud: Now then, Lady Blip where is your cook?

Lady Blip: I believe she is indisposed, Mr. Ferret. Is that not so, Grimace?

Grimace: Indeed it is, your ladyship. *(To SPUD).* I regret, sir, that she is lying recumbent upon a stretcher. Hardly the attitude of one with any criminal intent.

Spud: Come again?

Grimace: It wasn't her what done it, sir.

Spud: I see. But what is she doing lying on a stretcher?

Grimace: I regret to say she was shot by the gardener, sir.

Spud: Shot, do you say? That's a little suspicious, is it not? I think I'd better speak to that gardener right away!

Lovegrove: Hey! Hold it right there, Mr. Smart Ass Private Eye! If you've been stuck behind that umbrella stand all this time, you already KNOW that guy Compost shot the cook! You ain't got much of a memory, buddy!

Davinia: Please, Mr. Lovegrove! I'm sure Mr. Ferret's doing his best!

Lovegrove: He's sure got a lot of explaining to do.

Spud: No, you're right. It was just a momentary lapse of memory, that's all.

Lady Blip: But if you can't even remember the basic facts, Mr. Ferret, I really don't see how you are ever going to solve the mystery!

Spud: I'm sorry, Lady Blip. I think I must still be suffering from the effects of the interstellar time warp.

Lovegrove: Hey, you cut the crap! You hear me, fella?

Davinia: Mr. Lovegrove! Please! Give Mr. Ferret a chance to organise his thoughts! Grimace, send in the gardener.

Grimace: Very good, madam.

(Exit GRIMACE).

Spud: Yes. An excellent idea. The gardener. Thank you for your assistance, madam.

Davinia: Oh, don't mention it. I just hope you are able to solve the mystery. Before those beastly criminals strike again!

Sir Egbert: Can I offer you a drink, Mr. Ferret?

Spud: Er ... no, thank you, sir.

Sir Egbert: Well, I'm certainly having another. *(SIR EGBERT pours himself another brandy).*

Spud: Do you really think that's wise, sir? I think you've had a bit too much already.

Sir Egbert: What do you mean? Good heavens, man, do you know who you are talking to?

Spud: Not as yet, sir, no.

Lady Blip: Mr. Ferret, allow me to introduce Sir Egbert Knowe-Bacon, of the Foreign Office. He's the world's leading authority on alcohol. Mostly on how to drink it. *(SIR EGBERT is furious).*

Sir Egbert: Yes! And if I could get my hands on your wine cellar, Lady Blip, I'd be happy for the rest of my days! But people like me have to drink for a living, while rich people like you, Lady Blip, can sit around all day doing nothing!

Lovegrove: Hey, what's the big idea, Knowe-Bacon? You said you were gonna defend Lady Blip's honour a while ago! And now you're makin' out like she's public enemy number one! So what's happenin'?

Davinia: Isn't it obvious? He's got to act suspiciously, or he won't be a suspect. And if he wasn't a suspect, he wouldn't be in the room!

Spud: Exactly ... and while we're on the subject, Miss Flimsy, there are one or two questions I would like to put to you.

Davinia: Goodness! What on earth do you mean?

Spud: Now I wonder if YOU might have a motive for stealing those diamonds?

Davinia: I beg your pardon?

Spud: You had two options, you said. Marry someone very rich. Or steal something very valuable.

Davinia: I don't know what you're talking about! Why, if anyone needs a hundred thousand dollars, it's Lindsey Lovegrove! That's how much he said his next

movie would cost!

Lovegrove: Hey, wait a minute! You're trying to frame me! Trying to stitch me up!

Spud: This is robbery, sir, not needlework.

Lovegrove: Take a walk, Ferret, you schmuck. (*To LADY BLIP*). Hey, listen! Aggie! Baby! You know I'd never do anything to upset you!

Lady Blip: That, I think, remains to be seen

(*SPUD goes to SEBASTIAN CRUMB*).

Spud: What about you, sir? You've been keeping very quiet.

Sebastian: Oh, raTHER!

Spud: Tell me, sir would YOU have a reason for stealing those diamonds?

Sebastian: Oh, raTHER!

Spud: So, Lady Blip! At last! A confession!

Lady Blip: I think we can discount Mr. Crumb. He's far too stupid to steal any diamonds.

Sebastian: Yah! RaTHER.

(*Enter GRIMACE followed by COMPOST*).

Grimace: The gardener, sir.

Spud: Ah, yes. The gardener. You're in quite a bit of trouble, my lad. You can't go popping people off with a shotgun whenever you feel like it.

Compost: Argh!

Spud: Still, that's a matter for the police to deal with. In the meantime, what do you know about these diamonds?

Compost: You wanna hoik yer teats off to Wroxham! Get 'em squiffed!

Lady Blip: What did he say, Grimace?

Grimace: (*Hesitates*). I would rather not repeat it, madam, with ladies present.

Spud: Right, my lad! I'll deal with you later!

Compost: (*Scowling*). Urgh!

Lady Cynthia: I'm a hundred and three, you know.

Spud: What was that?

Lady Cynthia: Waiter, there's a fly in my soup.

Spud: I beg your pardon, madam?

Lady Cynthia: A little cabbage water with my asparagus if you will. No, not too much. It gives me wind, you know.

Lady Blip: Cynthia Sludge, Mr. Ferret.

Spud: I'm sorry to hear that, madam. I hope you'll soon make a full recovery.

Lady Blip: No, no, Mr. Ferret, Lady Cynthia Sludge. That is her name.

Spud: Oh, I see. Well, I shan't need to trouble you any further, your ladyship.

Lady Cynthia: I'm a hundred and three, you know.

Spud: So I observe, your ladyship, from the number of rings round your neck

Sir Egbert: You bounder, Ferret! Don't be so damned rude!

Davinia: Please, Sir Egbert, Mr. Ferret is doing his best

Sir Egbert: Nonsense! He doesn't have a clue what he's doing!

Davinia: Oh, dear

Spud: Not so, Sir Egbert!

Davinia: What?

Spud: Never fear, Miss Flimsy! I am very close to solving the mystery!

Davinia: Really? I'm not

Spud: Now then, Lady Blip have we accounted for everyone?

Lady Blip: Yes, Mr. Ferret. That is everyone.

(A dramatic pause).

Spud: In that case, Lady Blip I am now in a position to tell you who stole your diamonds. *(Gasps of admiration from EVERYONE).*

Lady Blip: But, Mr. Ferret, that's amazing!

Davinia: Incredible, I'd say.

Spud: Not really, Miss Flimsy. You see, all the facts point to one person.

Lady Blip: Then tell us, Mr. Ferret! Tell us at once! Who stole my diamonds?

Spud: Well, there are plenty of motives, your ladyship. And there was plenty of opportunity. However, we can only arrive at the correct solution by a process of elimination Now, an old woman like Lady Cynthia could not have got up the stairs quickly enough. So it can't have been her. Chivers, the maid, we have discounted, along with the cook. Sir Egbert Knowe-Bacon had a motive, of course. He wanted to buy his own wine cellar. But he was almost certainly too drunk to do anything about it

Sir Egbert: What do you mean, too drunk? *(He burps).* Pardon me.

Spud: Now as for Mr. Crumb well, he's too stupid.

Sebastian: Oh, raTHER!

Spud: and Compost, the gardener, has an alibi. He was in the kitchen, attacking the cook with his shotgun.

Compost: Ass wangled moi turnips good an' proper! Argh!

Spud: Exactly Now what of Miss Davinia Flimsy? Could SHE have stolen those diamonds? Impossible. She was in this room all the time But our friend, Mr. Lovegrove could have taken them. He needed the money to make himself a movie.

Lady Blip: What do you mean make himself a movie?

Spud: Well, Lady Blip, it was my understanding that Mr. Lindsey Lovegrove is a film star.

Lady Blip: Oh, dear, Lindsey's been having one of his turns again. I have to tell you, Mr. Ferret, that my late husband, in a typical fit of eccentricity, kidnapped Mr. Lindsey Lovegrove from a lunatic asylum in California while on a business trip to America. Until his death, my husband employed Mr. Lovegrove as his chauffeur. And my husband's will states quite clearly that Mr. Lovegrove is to stay at Blip Mansion for as long as he chooses.

Sir Egbert: But this is outrageous! Why didn't you tell us one of your guests is a lunatic?

Lady Blip: I didn't think anyone would notice.

Sir Egbert: Well, that's it, then! If Lindsey Lovegrove is so accustomed to lying, he's probably lying about the diamonds!

Spud: Hmm Tell me, sir, do you make a habit of telling people lies?

Lovegrove: Sure thing, man! Me, I tell lies all the time!

Spud: Then it was YOU who stole Lady Blip's diamonds!

Lovegrove: No way, man! I ain't stolen no diamonds!

Spud: I see. And is that the truth?

Lovegrove: Sure is.

Spud: Right. Well, it can't have been you, then.

Sir Egbert: But this is preposterous! I mean how do you know when he says he's telling the truth that he isn't lying?

Spud: Because no man who normally lies about telling the truth would fail to tell the truth if he thought that telling the truth about his lying would make us suspect that he was lying when he was really telling the truth. *(Pause)*. It's really very simple.

Sir Egbert: Dash it all, Ferret! *(He sways uncertainly, a glass still in his hand)*. That's brilliant *(He collapses on to a chair)*.

Spud: Which leaves us with YOU, Grimace.

Grimace: Indeed, sir?

Spud: Indeed, Grimace You see, Grimace, YOU have the perfect motive. You hated Lady Blip. You hated the way she pushed you around, and made you clean the house from top to bottom every day Yes, Grimace, YOU could have stolen those diamonds!

(Another dramatic pause. Everyone looks accusingly at GRIMACE).

Spud: Unfortunately you were so busy doing the housework that you didn't have a spare moment to steal anything So, no, Grimace, it can't have been you

Grimace: No. I think not, sir.

(Yet another pause. Then DAVINIA voices everyone's thoughts).

Davinia: But, Mr. Ferret, you haven't solved the case at all! You've merely mentioned everyone who COULD have done it, and then told us why each of them COULDN'T have done it!

Spud: Indeed I have, Miss Flimsy. All except for one person!

Davinia: Who?

(A pause. SPUD smiles knowingly).

Spud: Me. *(Everyone looks at SPUD, puzzled).*

Davinia: You? But but it can't be you!

Spud: Well, I know it sounds a bit unlikely. But who else can it be? You said yourself, Lady Blip, that it had to be someone in this room and since it can't be anyone else, it must be me.

Davinia: But you were hiding behind the umbrella stand when the diamonds were stolen!

Lovegrove: And you figure I'M crazy? Well, I got nothing on THIS guy!

Davinia: Come along, Mr. Ferret. Surely even YOU can see this must be a mistake?

Spud: No, I'm sorry. I've worked it all out like a proper private investigator and I must stand by my decision. I hereby arrest myself for the theft of Lady Blip's diamonds.

Davinia: What?

Spud: I'd better 'phone the police right away, before I have an opportunity to effect my escape

Davinia: With respect, Mr. Ferret

Spud: Yes, madam?

Davinia: Well, as a successful crime writer, I am more than familiar with situations such as this. I believe I can tell you who stole those diamonds!

Spud: Oh yes, madam? And who might that be?

Davinia: The one person you have not yet considered. Lady Blip!

Lady Blip: Me? Why me? Don't be ridiculous! Why should I want to steal my own diamonds?

(DAVINIA begins to pace up and down the room).

Davinia: I think there is something you should know, Mr. Ferret. It was Lady Blip's late husband, Sir Montmorency Blip, who began these regular house parties some five years ago. It was obvious to everyone even then that she

did not enjoy them. But, just as with the business of employing the lunatic Lindsey Lovegrove as her husband's chauffeur, Lady Blip was obliged to abide by her husband's every wish. When her husband died, she wanted to stop the house parties altogether - but a clause in her husband's will said that the parties had to continue and could only come to an end if something happened to make her feel she could no longer trust her guests. I think she was hoping to use the scandal of the stolen diamonds to get rid of all her unwanted guests. And, with no more guests to attend to, she could get rid of Grimace too, and Compost, and all the servants, and at last lead a quiet life all by herself, with no-one to bother her.

Spud: Well, Lady Blip? Is this true? Did you actually steal your own diamonds?

(A pause. LADY BLIP looks rather annoyed).

Lady Blip: Blast you, Davinia Flimsy! All right, then! It's true! I DID steal my own diamonds! I just wanted to be rid of the whole lot of you! Silly old Cynthia and that old drunk, Sir Egbert! That horrid Lindsey Lovegrove and that stupid Sebastian! Grimace and Compost and Chivers and cook - they all hate me. I know they do! And you, Davinia, with your stupid crime stories! Murders and robberies and other vicious acts of vandalism! This is England, Davinia. Things like that don't happen to people like us! Ah well, at least where I'M going I'll get some peace and quiet All right, Mr. Ferret. The game is up. You may put me under arrest.

Spud: Very good, your ladyship. Grimace, would you be so kind as to escort Lady Blip to her room?

Grimace: Very good, sir.

(SPUD picks up the telephone and dials a number).

Spud: The police will be very interested in this.

Davinia: Oh dear Just a moment, Mr. Ferret

Spud: I'm sorry, madam. I've just made a citizen's arrest and I must inform the police.

Davinia: I see Oh well, the truth will out, I suppose

(The telephone is answered).

Spud: Hello? P.C. Banks? Ferret here What? Ah, yes. Well, sorry to give you cause for concern. I was temporarily inconvenienced by an interstellar time warp All right, well, never mind that now. I've got a job for you. I

want you to drive out to Blip Mansion and arrest Lady Blip for stealing her own diamonds I beg your pardon? (*SPUD is left holding the receiver*).
He rang off.

Grimace: With respect, sir, it may have been the mention of the interstellar time warp.

Davinia: I wouldn't know about that, Grimace. But what I do know is that no crime has actually been committed!

Lady Blip: Good Lord! What do you mean?

Davinia: Well, you see, technically speaking, stealing your own property is not against the law.

Lady Blip: But what about wasting police time?

Davinia: Mr. Ferret isn't a policeman.

Lovegrove: Hey! You mean she ain't done nothin' wrong?

Davinia: Nothing at all.

Lovegrove: You mean we can all still come here for weekend house parties?

Davinia: Yes, I don't see why not.

Sebastian: Oh, raTHER!

Sir Egbert: (*Murmurs*). Splendid! Absolutely splendid!

Lovegrove: Aggie! Baby!

Lady Cynthia: I'm a hundred and three, you know.

Lady Blip: Oh no, you don't! I'm off!

(*LADY BLIP knees GRIMACE in the groin and runs off*).

Grimace: Ooh! Your ladyship!

Davinia: Goodness! Are you all right, Grimace?

Grimace: I shall recover presently, madam. One is trained to expect such behaviour from the upper classes.

(*LOVEGROVE, DAVINIA and SPUD go to the French windows*).

Lovegrove: Well, how do you like that? She doesn't want us here for any more house parties!

Davinia: Goodness! She's sprinting down the drive like an express train! I wonder what's got into her?

Spud: Rocket fuel, I should think, madam.

Lovegrove: Hey, come on, guys! Let's get after her! Come on Knowe-Bacon, you schmuck! If Aggie gets away, there'll be no more house parties! (*He hauls SIR EGBERT to his feet*). You too, guys! Your jobs are on the line!

Grimace: I think Mr. Lovegrove may be right. Come along, Chivers. You too,

Compost. And bring your shotgun, Compost. Lady Blip may need some gentle persuasion.

Compost: Argh! Oi'll stick 'er bombazeen with moi furklenuts!

Grimace: Quite so (*Exeunt. DAVINIA, FLIMSY and SPUD FERRET are left alone on stage, together with LADY CYNTHIA, who has fallen asleep again. SPUD and DAVINIA move downstage away from the French windows.*)

Spud: One thing still puzzles me, Miss Flimsy. How did you manage to solve the mystery when the answer was so unexpected?

Davinia: I'm a crime novelist, Mr. Ferret. I simply decided on the least likely solution and I knew I was bound to be right. In fact this case will be perfect for my next crime novel. It has all the necessary ingredients. A ridiculous crime. Unbelievable characters. And a number of irrelevant facts that have no connection with the story. Also, Mr. Ferret, one has to EXPECT the unexpected.

Spud: I see. In that case, would you mind if I examine that magazine?

Davinia: Please. Be my guest.

(SPUD picks up the 'Wastemorland Weekly'. He finds the playing card with 'Rob' written on it).

Spud: Aha. Just as I thought.

Davinia: Yes. I know what you're thinking. The vital clue. Planted deliberately by Lady Blip. Someone was going to 'rob' the queen of diamonds. And so they did. But it was left there deliberately to mislead us.

Spud: Well, not exactly, madam. You see, P.C. Banks lost one of his playing cards in the interstellar time warp. I knew if I could find the missing card, I could prove the interstellar time warp really exists. And here it is! The queen of diamonds!

Davinia: But why is the word 'Rob' written on the card?

Spud: That's very simple. 'Rob' is P.C. Banks' first name.

Davinia: Rob Banks? But that's a ridiculous name for a policeman!

Spud: Not really, madam. Just an incredible coincidence.

Davinia: Why, that's amazing! But tell me, Mr. Ferret how does all this prove the existence of an interstellar time warp?

Spud: Well, as you said yourself, Miss Flimsy always expect the unexpected

(A sudden Black Out. DAVINIA gasps. The Lights come up again: SPUD FERRET has disappeared).

Davinia: But he's gone disappeared into thin air! Goodness!

(Enter SEBASTIAN)

Davinia: Oh, Sebastian! Isn't this exciting? Another delightful weekend at Blip Mansion, Lady Blip's delightful country house in the heart of rural Wastemorland!

Sebastian: RaTHER.

Davinia: Do you know, they say the ghost of Sir Montmorency Blip still stalks the grounds at twilight, searching for the miscreant who caused his untimely death?

Sebastian: RaTHER.

Davinia: And look, Sebastian! Outside the full moon shines brightly, sending dark shadows across the face of the house But am I mistaken? Or could one of those shadows be moving? Could it be the spirit of Sir Montmorency Blip? Or could there be a murderer on the loose?

Sebastian: Don't be ridiculous, Davinia! You'll be telling me next that a private detective is about to arrive, fresh from being trapped in an interstellar time warp! Come on, you silly girl! Let's go through and have a drink with the others!

Davinia: *(Deflated)*. Oh all right, then. Sorry, Sebastian

(Exit DAVINIA and SEBASTIAN. LADY CYNTHIA revives and slowly speaks to the AUDIENCE).

Lady Cynthia: The Case of the Stolen Diamonds. By Davinia Flimsy. In your bookshops now. Price, three pounds ninety-five pence

(LADY CYNTHIA nods off again. The Lights slowly fade).

THE END

