

LIVING WITH AN ALIEN

By
Esme Waters

LIVING WITH AN ALIEN

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for my parents

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AWARDS

Top Ten Finalist in The Larking House Playwright's Intensive 2023

Finalist for the 2024 summer and 2025 winter season for The Deport For New Play Readings

CHARACTERS

MICHAEL: A freelance journalist. A handsome, dark young man in his mid-twenties with an easy, indolent air.

LARA: Michael's wife. A young woman in her late twenties with an otherworldly frozen beauty – white blonde hair and very pale skin.

FREDERICK: Michael's uncle. Foisting himself on Michael and Lara, he has firmly installed himself in the household. An elderly, petulant ex-army man, confined to a wheelchair, who evidently enjoys his ill-health and invalid status.

GRAHAM: A local asylum owner. A severe, distinguished, middle-aged man who wears a well-cut suit, every inch the professional.

ALISHA: A beautiful, confident young woman in her early twenties. She has an energetic, resolute manner which lends her an air of vitality and vivaciousness.

SIMON: A local doctor, in his mid-thirties. Kindly natured, he is quiet and studious.

ADRIAN: A freelance journalist and a friend of Michael's. In his mid-twenties, with a lively, sardonic manner. He wears old and faded clothes with total disregard.

POLICE OFFICER: Male, middle aged.

TIME: The present

SETTING: The living room of Michael and Lara's home. Set in the countryside.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT 1: Late afternoon.

ACT 2: Scene 1: The following morning.

Scene 2: A few minutes later

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ACT 1

The room has a comfortable if shabby feel. Down Centre is a settee with armchairs and a coffee table. The front door is up Centre, a doorway up Left, and a door down Right to Frederick's bedroom.

At Rise: Running footsteps are heard. LARA enters. She is holding a steak knife in her hand, stained with blood, and wearing large, muddy boots. Lara moves with a harassed air before, at the sound of someone approaching the front door, thrusting the knife in a vase of flowers. She exits quickly up Left.

MICHAEL enters, carrying a suitcase. He hangs up his coat and scarf and puts his suitcase down.

MICHAEL. I'm home! Return of unemployed writer from holiday! Come and greet! (*FREDERICK enters from down right. Michael sits.*)

FREDERICK. Oh, you've eventually turned up, have you? About time too, I've been woefully neglected. Really, it is shocking the way you allow your poor, elderly uncle to be treated.

MICHAEL. What's happened this time, Frederick? Was your bath too bubbly? Was your steak too tender? Was there a pea in your mattress?

FREDERICK. For your information, I've been positively starved. If you hadn't arrived back today, I doubt I would still be here. I've been wasting away!

MICHAEL. You'll outlive all of us, Freddie.

FREDERICK. My name is Major Frederick Wilberforce Edmund Astley.

MICHAEL. Very illustrious. (*Michael looks around.*) Isn't Lara in?

FREDERICK. I presume so. I've been left to suffer alone.

MICHAEL. Oh dear. (*Michael rises and moves towards the arched opening. He pauses at an electric fire.*)

FREDERICK. That hasn't been mended either.

MICHAEL. I'll try and do it soon. (*Michael moves towards the arched opening.*) Lara? Are you in? (*Lara enters.*) Ah, there you are. I thought you might be out.

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LARA. Oh, no, I've been in all day. I'm so glad you're back. I've missed you so much, darling.

MICHAEL. I've missed you too (*A beat*), darling. (*There is an awkwardness between them. Michael moves away. Lara picks up his suitcase.*) Any post for me? (*Michael sorts through some envelopes on a table.*)

LARA. I don't think so. (*Lara exits.*)

FREDERICK. Oh, a letter arrived yesterday morning from a fellow called Colin Martins at Long Beeton Farm.

MICHAEL. Colin Martins? Don't know him. What does he want?

FREDERICK. He wants to meet you; says he has urgent business to discuss.

MICHAEL. What urgent business can he have to discuss with me? I'll deal with him later. (*Michael smiles.*) Do you always read my post, Frederick?

FREDERICK. Often it isn't worth reading. Just endless letters to and from Alisha. (*Michael shoots Frederick a look. Frederick looks guiltily from him to the arched opening. Lara enters and begins tidying.*)

LARA. Remember, we're having company later, Michael.

MICHAEL. What?

FREDERICK. Oh, yes, I've invited one or two people round to hold a meeting.

MICHAEL. Oh, right. Well, of course, you're always welcome to invite people round, Frederick. Don't bother to ask or anything.

FREDERICK. There have been some damn odd things happening lately. Strange cries and calls in the village at night. (*Lara drops some books.*) Some of the farm workers have sworn they've glimpsed a horrible, misshapen figure in the fields. You know Adrian's been investigating, and I mean to get to the bottom of it.

MICHAEL. You know what people are like, Frederick. There's probably a perfectly rational explanation for everything.

FREDERICK. I know, but the locals are starting to get unnerved; someone needs to take charge, and I am clearly the obvious person. So I've organised a meeting, and you're going to head it.

MICHAEL. Me? Why can't you do it? I've just got back from abroad.

FREDERICK. I need to have my rest. A lot of talking and arguing will just upset me. I'm very sensitive.

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MICHAEL. Fine. Who's coming round?

FREDERICK. Adrian's representing the press, Simon's coming round once he's finished his surgery and playing in his lab –

MICHAEL. Oh, has he finished building his lab now?

FREDERICK. Oh, yes, he spends all his free time cooped up in there setting off minor explosions with brightly coloured smoke, delighting in all his jars and test tubes. He's got some high-tech stuff though, it is pretty impressive, but don't let him hear you say so otherwise you'll get the full guided tour.

MICHAEL. Anyone else coming?

FREDERICK. Graham's putting in an appearance too.

MICHAEL. Graham?!

FREDERICK. I'm afraid so.

MICHAEL. Why did you invite him for?

FREDERICK. I didn't. He invited himself round. Seemed to think any meeting would naturally be incomplete without him.

MICHAEL. Never mind. Anyway, I'll like to hear all the news.

FREDERICK. News? What do you expect to hear about in a quiet place like this? A machete wielding chicken? A delinquent duck? A rampaging caterpillar?

MICHAEL. Might be some excitement, especially with all these peculiar reports. Adrian usually has something interesting to say at any rate.

FREDERICK. I don't want excitement. Not at my age. I've got very strict orders: absolute rest. Nothing trying on my nerves. In fact (*Frederick moves down Right*), I'd better have a lie down now. Please don't disturb me. (*Frederick exits.*)

LARA. Does Frederick have to live with us?

MICHAEL. He is my uncle, and we need the money. We're not likely to have anyone else as a lodger in these parts. There are few people who'd want to bury themselves away down here.

LARA. He's a nightmare. We've had to convert the downstairs room into a bedroom for him – you should see the stuff he has in there – countless little bottles of pills and ointments. He snoops...I don't like him and I'm sure he doesn't like me.

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MICHAEL. I know he reads our letters but he's an invalid and it's probably one of the few real pleasures he has in his life. His heart's in the right place.

LARA. I don't like him snooping.

MICHAEL. (*Jocularly.*) Why, have you got something to hide?

LARA. (*Smiles inducingly.*) Oh, no. You know me, Michael. We're married.

MICHAEL. (*Uneasy.*) I don't know you at all. Sometimes I look at you and you're totally alien to me. (*Lara starts, then recovers herself. She moves alluringly, feline, towards Michael. Michael tries to move away but, despite himself, he is fixed by her.*)

LARA. But isn't that exciting? Isn't that (*Lara twines her arms around Michael's neck. Michael recoils instinctively*) intoxicating. (*Lara moves to kiss Michael and Michael, against his will, starts to be pulled in. There is a knock at the front door and Michael, thankful, moves swiftly away. Lara looks after him, frowning, then exits up Left. Michael opens the front door. GRAHAM and ADRIAN enter.*)

GRAHAM. Well, it's nice to see you're back, Michael. You've brought some horrible weather with you. Very cold and gloomy. (*Graham passes his coat dismissively to Michael.*) You can hang this up. See that it doesn't crease.

ADRIAN. (*Hands his coat to Michael with an exaggerated bow, in a comic imitation of Graham.*) Yes, here you go, my good man. Now take good care of it – that's vintage junk, that is. (*Adrian moves away.*) Have a nice holiday? Get much writing done? (*Graham sits, very formal.*)

MICHAEL. Good holiday. Didn't get any work done. How about you? Have you progressed with your writing assignment?

ADRIAN. (*Carelessly sits.*) Nope. I'm starting to think it's a dead end.

GRAHAM. What writing assignment is this?

MICHAEL. (*Sits.*) Adrian's got a job investigating the rumours of strange activity in this area.

GRAHAM. Oh yes, Frederick mentioned it. By the way, where is Frederick?

MICHAEL. Recuperating from another strenuous day. He's asked me to step in.

GRAHAM. (*Looks at Michael without favour.*) Oh. Well, I haven't heard all the details; such banal nonsense doesn't interest me.

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MICHAEL. There have been reports of strange sightings – people glimpsing an unearthly figure – and hideous, non-human noises. You know, all the usual supernatural rubbish.

ADRIAN. And being the person who usually gets dumped with all the rubbish, I've been sent to investigate. And it's given me a chance to catch up with Michael and see his new house. *(To Michael.)* I haven't seen you since Lara decided to leave the excitement of London and relocate you both to a god-awful hole in the back of beyond, for reasons only known to herself.

GRAHAM. But you haven't made any progress?

ADRIAN. None. It's just the usual village superstitious nonsense.

GRAHAM. That doesn't surprise me. Most people are sadly deficient in their mental capabilities.

ADRIAN. Honestly, I don't know why people write, it's such frightfully hard work.

GRAHAM. Well, you don't exactly knock yourself out, do you?

ADRIAN. Not in the way you mean, and the only way you value. I don't work 9 to 5 in a nice plush madhouse like you do –

GRAHAM. It's a psychiatric establishment.

ADRIAN. – with air-conditioned rooms, gleaming desks and a rigidly organised filing system. But *(Adrian gestures at his poor attire)*, I'm willing to pay the price for my degenerate lifestyle. I don't claim to be anything greater than I am: a man making the grand, symbolic gesture of renouncing the predestined path of a life working for some lifeless, inhumane corporation. Instead, I live by the pen – with the result being that I have an alarming shortage of money in the bank and will soon be taking to sleeping in hedges and trying to endear myself to the local wildlife unless I can continue to exercise my charms on my landlady.

MICHAEL. You can always sleep on our sofa as a lodger.

ADRIAN. What, and live with *(Pompously)* Major Frederick Wilberforce Edmund Astley? I'd rather take the hedge. At least the mice won't start lecturing me in the middle of the night on how it's clear I've never done a good day's work in my life and how the army would soon lick me into shape.

MICHAEL. *(Rises.)* Anyone fancy a drink?

ADRIAN. Something strong. And large.

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GRAHAM. *(Looks disapprovingly at Adrian.)* Sweet sherry. *(Michael moves to a drinks cabinet and prepares the drinks.)*

MICHAEL. *(To Adrian.)* So, what are you going to do?

ADRIAN. Oh, something will turn up. I'm the cat with nine lives. I'd be more worried about yourself if I were you. You've done nothing since you were fired from your last writing assignment for failing to write anything.

MICHAEL. *(Puts the drinks down and sits.)* I'm taking a break from my career.

ADRIAN. *(Laughing.)* Is that what you're calling it?

GRAHAM. Idleness has a terrible effect on the brain, Michael. *(Michael throws Adrian an irritated look and leans heavily back.)* Mind and body are interconnected and, when one is not being properly cared for, the other likewise suffers. In the case of idleness, the brain stagnates without stimulation and, correspondingly, the body becomes lazy and lethargic. It is like all things in life – a well-oiled machine will run efficiently and be productive; one that is neglected and rusty will run slowly and, eventually, won't run at all. *(Meaningfully.)* Probably the most damaging instance of all is where a person has fallen into deep idleness. One day, the brain will suffer from a reaction – exploding into a nervous, all-consuming burst of energy which can bring the person to the brink of a breakdown, quite often with catastrophic results.

MICHAEL. I feel quite sane at the moment, Graham. No sudden urges to strip naked and run around the room. *(Adrian laughs.)*

GRAHAM. Insanity isn't always as obvious as that. Quite often a madman appears eminently sane, and it is possible to hold a normal conversation with him – the madness is hidden inside.

ADRIAN. What a delightful thought! *(Adrian gestures at the electric fire.)* Is it possible to get that fire going? It's rather cold in here.

MICHAEL. It's broken.

ADRIAN. I can have a fiddle around with it if you want.

MICHAEL. I'm not letting you anywhere near it unless I want the house to burn down. *(Overly casual.)* By the way – er – is – er – Alisha coming over? I thought she might be with you.

ADRIAN. *(Smiles knowingly.)* I think she's busy. I'm afraid you'll have to wait for another night. *(Lara enters.)*

LARA. Hello, Graham, Adrian.

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ADRIAN. Hi, Lara.

GRAHAM. It's a pleasure to see you again. I do hope you are well.

ADRIAN. (*Mocking.*) Yes, it's absolutely spiffing. Simply glorious to behold your features. (*Adrian rises and exaggeratedly shakes Lara's hand. There is a knock at the front door. Michael rises and opens the door. Lara sits. SIMON enters, carrying a doctor's bag.*)

MICHAEL. Hello, Simon.

SIMON. Sorry I'm late. Had a dreadful day. (*Simon hangs up his coat. Michael sits.*)

LARA. What happened?

SIMON. Young chap called Colin Martins has been found dead at Long Beeton Farm – stabbed in the back and strangled. Done today, about mid-afternoon, I would say.

MICHAEL. Stabbed *and* strangled?

SIMON. (*Sits.*) It happens. You try to strangle someone and panic because it is harder than you thought and the person is fighting back, so you end up sticking a knife in them. Nasty business. Had a look of absolute terror on his face, seemed petrified.

ADRIAN. Well, I suppose if someone was busy stabbing and throttling him, he would be a trifle nervous.

SIMON. This was abject terror though – pure fear. There's something about the look on his face that sends chills up your spine. (*A beat.*) There's something else that's strange too. The marks on his throat – they didn't seem human. (*A beat.*)

LARA. What do you mean?

SIMON. I've never seen marks like them. They weren't made by any living creature I know – not a human, not an animal – something unknown. I won't bore you with the medical details, but the marks of the fingers are too long, they show unnatural strength, the finger pads are of a peculiar shape... (*Dryly.*) We're looking for someone with exceptionally strong hands and very long and peculiarly shaped fingers.

GRAHAM. I don't quite understand why you are discounting the possibility of human involvement though, Simon. In moments of panic and intense emotion, a person can act with unusual – and apparently unnatural – strength. If a man was strangling someone, for example, in the grip of a violent emotion, he may quite easily display great strength; finger marks may thus become distorted in the process. A doctor

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examining the victim (*Graham gestures to Simon*), such as yourself, would be at a loss to understand the matter, but one who studies the mind (*Graham gestures self-deprecatingly*) can easily understand.

SIMON. Do you understand how a man could double the length of his fingers?

MICHAEL. Double?

SIMON. The murderer's fingers were twice the length of a normal man's.

LARA. I suppose he could have been wearing some gloves over his hands which would make his fingers bigger.

SIMON. But why? Even if that's possible – which I don't believe – why?

GRAHAM. Why does anyone do anything?

MICHAEL. Oh, come on, Graham, give all this mumbo jumbo stuff a break. (*Adrian rises and replenishes his drink.*)

GRAHAM. You refuse to accord due importance to the mind. It seems to me very likely that, as Lara said, this man – this murderer – was wearing a costume over his hands, some gloves perhaps, which gave the impression that his hands were bigger than they actually were. He may have had a psychological complex, for example, that he is a monster –

ADRIAN. (*Sits.*) Seems to me the murderer's quite correct in that assumption.

GRAHAM. He feels he is a monster – very well, then – he must *be* a monster. He puts enormous gloves over his hands that give the impression of unnatural size – there, now he *is* a monster.

ADRIAN. That's the biggest amount of rubbish I've ever heard. Is that the sort of stuff you come out with at your madhouse?

GRAHAM. Psychiatry can be unintelligible to the ignorant mind. I think you'll find that's what happened.

ADRIAN. Ignorant mind? Just because I don't have a doctorate or spout a load of psychiatric nonsense doesn't mean I'm ignorant. I'm with Simon – there have been strange reports in this area, maybe there is something here that we don't understand. I'd favour my mind over yours any day.

GRAHAM. (*Looks Adrian up and down.*) Is that so?

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ADRIAN. It doesn't take much to run a madhouse with a load of poor suckers inside, but it takes something to live by your wits with a few pounds in your pocket. *(Graham and Adrian glare at each other.)*

LARA. Regardless of the marks on the throat, if Colin Martins was stabbed too, surely that demonstrates some level of human involvement?

SIMON. I suppose so. But the strangulation wasn't done by a human.

LARA. What about footprints? Were there any footprints around the body? Long Beeton Farm is very muddy.

SIMON. There were some footprints, such as those made by boots. Rather an unusual make of boot too, I would say. But no matches have been found so far.

MICHAEL. What I don't understand is: why Colin Martins? Why kill a harmless farm worker in this isolated, out-of-the-way spot?

GRAHAM. Probably the murderer felt the urge to kill, to assuage some deep-seated emotion. The victim was immaterial as long as the lust was relieved.

ADRIAN. How convenient. When there's something you don't understand you say "Oh, that's just chance."

GRAHAM. I think that's the most probable explanation, young man.

ADRIAN. Don't "young man" me. And I'm betting it's not chance. There was some reason it was Colin Martins who was killed.

MICHAEL. *(Slowly.)* You know, I got a letter from Colin Martins yesterday morning, asking to meet me as soon as possible about some urgent business.

LARA. I didn't see it.

MICHAEL. Frederick told me.

LARA. Frederick probably got it wrong.

SIMON. Well, where is the letter now?

MICHAEL. *(Waving a hand behind him.)* The post is kept on the table by the front door. *(Adrian rises and sorts through the envelopes.)*

ADRIAN. It's not here now.

MICHAEL. *(Rises.)* What? *(Michael moves to Adrian.)* Where did it go? *(Simon rises and follows.)*

GRAHAM. Are you sure that Frederick was quite correct? He is an elderly man; he may have been confused.

MICHAEL. Frederick may be old, but his mind is sharp.

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ADRIAN. Well, let's ask him. (*Michael knocks on the door down Right. Simon and Adrian follow Michael.*)

MICHAEL. Frederick? Frederick? (*Frederick enters.*)

FREDERICK. What is it? Waking me up when I'm having my rest! The doctor said it's very important that I'm not disturbed from five o'clock to –

MICHAEL. We know, Frederick. Listen, where's that letter from Colin Martins?

FREDERICK. (*Gestures.*) It's on the table.

MICHAEL. It's not there now.

FREDERICK. Well, how am I supposed to know what you do with your things?

MICHAEL. Someone must have taken it.

GRAHAM. Aren't you jumping to conclusions rather fast?

MICHAEL. Well, where is it?

LARA. (*Rising.*) Frederick – er – may have made a mistake...

FREDERICK. I am quite capable of remembering a simple thing like a letter, thank you. My mind is perfectly intact, regardless of the sufferings my body puts me through.

LARA. Well, the letter must have been simply misplaced. I really don't think you can make a connection between this letter and Colin's murder. (*A beat.*)

GRAHAM. (*Rises and moves to the front door.*) I think I'll be going now, Michael. Lots of work to do. (*Graham puts on his coat. Frederick exits down Right.*)

MICHAEL. Goodbye, Graham.

GRAHAM. I advise you all to stick to the facts. Wild speculation is singularly unprofitable. (*Graham exits.*)

ADRIAN. I better head off too. Sounds like I have some work to do.

MICHAEL. Wait a second, I'll give you our new phone number, it's on my mobile. (*Michael reaches into his pocket, mutters.*) Damn, I left my mobile at Alisha's.

ADRIAN. Alisha's?

MICHAEL. I mean, I left it abroad.

ADRIAN. Don't worry, I won't need to get in contact with you for a while. (*Adrian puts on his coat.*) I'll go and start work on my landlady.

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If I'm not successful, you'll find me in the corner of a wood, attempting to erect a tent and forming an alliance with the mice against the rats.

LARA. *(Laughs and moves to the arched opening.)* Remember, you'll always be welcome here, Adrian. *(Lara exits.)*

MICHAEL. Good luck. Don't freeze to death.

ADRIAN. Knowing my luck, I'll run into the murderer and spend a happy night running around the wood with him trying to jam a knife into me.

MICHAEL. At least that'll keep you warm. *(Adrian exits.)*

SIMON. I think I'll call it a night too.

MICHAEL. What do you think about Colin's letter?

SIMON. It's suggestive. He wants to speak to you, is murdered, and the letter disappears. But I shouldn't jump to conclusions, Michael. There may be an innocent explanation. *(Michael is silent.)* But you don't think so, eh?

MICHAEL. No, I don't. It's strange – the marks on Colin's throat, the look of terror on his face...

SIMON. *(Puts on his coat.)* It's very strange. There's something at work here that I don't understand. *(Simon puts his hand on the door handle.)* You better take care, Michael.

MICHAEL. Why?

SIMON. Colin was trying to contact you – he may have been murdered in order to prevent him speaking to you. Whatever's going on, you're in the thick of it. *(Simon exits. Michael moves away. The front door slowly opens, and ALISHA cautiously enters. She hangs up her coat and moves into the room.)*

ALISHA. Michael!

MICHAEL. *(Turns sharply.)* Alisha! What on earth are you doing here?

ALISHA. Freezing myself to death waiting for everyone to leave in order to see you – that's love for you! I wanted to see how your return went. Did everyone buy your story of going away on holiday?

MICHAEL. Oh yes. No one suspected I was with you at your house. *(Michael and Alisha sit.)* You're so beautiful, Alisha; so alive, so real. I can touch you; I can understand you; I know your thoughts. I couldn't believe it when I came to this god-forsaken place and found you teaching here. God, how I wish we could always be together. None of this skulking around. We could have our own place in the countryside –

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a little cottage with a white picket fence and oak beams and roses around the door. We could sit together in the evenings, with maybe a dog asleep in a basket by the log fire. We could cook meals together and eat at a little wooden table by candlelight. We could go shopping and buy furniture for our house and watch it come alive – *our* house, belonging to *us*. We could watch TV together and laugh at the same jokes and get the same quiz show questions wrong. We could *live* together and *be* together.

ALISHA. Then why don't you divorce Lara? Then we could have that little cottage in the countryside with the dog, and the white picket fence and oak beams and roses. We could do all those things.

MICHAEL. (*Glances towards the arched opening.*) We've been through this. I will divorce Lara – at the right time. We don't have the money yet, Alisha. We can't afford those things. But we will. When I make good, we will marry.

ALISHA. Are you sure you *are* going to make good, Michael? You're not the sort. You haven't got the drive, the discipline, the ambition.

MICHAEL. I will make good for your sake. You're like the touch of flame – liquid hot fire that licks a man into shape. I'd do more than write some sundry articles for your sake, my little firefly. (*Michael rises.*) You know, Simon came round with a strange story this afternoon. Apparently, a fellow called Colin Martins from Long Beeton Farm was found murdered a few hours ago. Stabbed and strangled. The marks on his throat were unusual, and showed unnatural strength and finger length – apparently not human. And he had an expression of absolute terror on his face.

ALISHA. So I heard. Word spreads in a village.

MICHAEL. There's more. Frederick said I got a letter from Colin Martins yesterday morning asking to meet me urgently.

ALISHA. Why do you think he wanted to meet you?

MICHAEL. I've no idea. I didn't know the guy. He had no reason to meet me. (*Thoughtfully.*) Maybe he knew something affecting me which he wanted to discuss; maybe there was something he felt I ought to know. He wanted to speak to me urgently, so it must have been something that alarmed him. But someone didn't want Colin to speak to me. So they murdered him.

ALISHA. That's not a reason to commit murder.

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MICHAEL. It depends what Colin was going to tell me – what he knew.

ALISHA. Can't you read the letter?

MICHAEL. It's vanished. If it wasn't for Frederick's habit of reading our post, I never would have known about it. It arrived yesterday, Frederick read it, and it vanished.

ALISHA. Who could have taken it?

MICHAEL. (*Gesturing to the front door.*) The front door isn't kept locked. In theory, anyone could have taken it. The only people who for definite came here – from the time the letter arrived yesterday morning to the time it was found missing – were Graham, Simon, and Adrian. They all came round late this afternoon. I suppose one of them could have quickly taken it.

ALISHA. What were their views on Colin's murder?

MICHAEL. Graham came out with his usual psychological talk. Simon was worried, I could tell. Adrian joked about it, but that's just his manner – he never takes anything seriously, except his bank balance; ironic really considering he's a socialist.

ALISHA. I can't suspect any of them of murder.

MICHAEL (*Sits.*) I can't. Adrian's one of my closest friends – I've known him for years. I haven't known Simon long, only since we moved here, but I like him. Graham... I don't like Graham, he's so pretentious and conceited, but he is very respectable. I can't imagine him killing anyone.

ALISHA. (*Doubtfully.*) I suppose there's Frederick?

MICHAEL. (*Rises.*) Frederick was the one who told me about the letter. If he's taken the letter and got away with it – nobody knew about the letter, nobody had seen him take it – why would he bring it up? And, anyway, he's elderly and in a wheelchair. He'd never be able to get up to Long Beeton Farm and kill a man.

ALISHA. He does exaggerate his ill health a lot though. He's capable of more than he makes out.

MICHAEL. I know, but not murder. (*Michael sits.*) Anyway, we're forgetting that Simon said Colin was not murdered by a human. Adrian, Simon, Graham, and Frederick were all capable of taking the letter, but they didn't commit the murder.

ALISHA. I don't understand Simon. What's he suggesting?

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MICHAEL. I don't know. I don't think he knew himself. He was worried and unnerved by it all.

ALISHA. *(Rises.)* Well, I don't understand it.

MICHAEL. I suppose we'll never know. But I would like to know what Colin wanted to tell me. *(Michael rises.)*

ALISHA. Goodbye, darling.

MICHAEL. Goodnight, my little firefly. *(Michael and Alisha embrace. Frederick enters then, seeing Michael and Alisha, hastily turns to exit.)*
Frederick!

FREDERICK. Er – I don't want to intrude if you two have – er – things to attend to. Er – I'll just leave you to – er – yes...

ALISHA. Frederick, you are a dear. *(Alisha lightly kisses the top of Frederick's head. To Michael.)* I'll see you soon?

MICHAEL. *(Grinning.)* If I'm still alive. *(Alisha puts on her coat and exits. Michael sits.)* You know about Colin Martins' murder?

FREDERICK. Yes, I heard you all talking about it.

MICHAEL. *(Grinning.)* Eavesdropping, eh?

FREDERICK. Not at all. How is an elderly gentleman, such as I, supposed to sleep when people are loudly discussing disturbing things like murder? Most inconsiderate.

MICHAEL. I wanted to ask you: you haven't heard anyone come in through the front door since the letter arrived yesterday morning, have you?

FREDERICK. No one came in yesterday. I heard the front door open and close once today, about mid-afternoon, then you turned up later.

MICHAEL. You heard the front door open this afternoon? *(Michael rises.)* And Lara's been in all day. So it may have been our murderer, coming to take Colin's letter.

FREDERICK. Eh, what's that? A murderer came here?! You mean a murderer was creeping about in here when I was in bed – defenceless! I thought the front door is kept locked?!

MICHAEL. No. Do you see anything worth stealing?

FREDERICK. Disgraceful! Absolutely disgraceful! *(Lara enters.)*

LARA. What's the matter?

FREDERICK. I've been left alone in bed to cope with a raving lunatic who makes a habit of strangling people – that's what's the matter! *(Frederick moves down Right.)* I've got very highly strung nerves; all

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this is very bad for me – miracle I'm still alive – criminally neglected...
(Frederick exits.)

MICHAEL. Frederick heard the front door open this afternoon. It must have been the murderer taking the letter.

LARA. Michael...

MICHAEL. No, listen. The murderer came in here mid-afternoon –

LARA. I've been in all day. Nobody came, Michael.

MICHAEL. Well, he came while you were upstairs, and Frederick was in his room, to get the letter – the letter that Colin wrote to me because he knew something – something dangerous concerning me that caused him to be murdered.

LARA. Michael, you're being ridiculous. Why bother about it? What's it to us if some farm worker has been found killed in a barn?

MICHAEL. *(Slowly turning to face Lara.)* How did you know Colin was killed in a barn? I didn't. Simon didn't say where he was killed at Long Beeton Farm. *(A beat.)*

LARA. I – I just presumed it was in a barn. That's all. *(A beat.)*

MICHAEL. Lara... *(Frederick enters.)*

FREDERICK. I want dinner. *(Lara hurriedly exits up Left. Michael looks after her, lost in thought.)*

MICHAEL. Well, have dinner! I'm not hungry.

FREDERICK. Eh, not hungry? Anything the matter?

MICHAEL. *(Slowly.)* I don't know.

FREDERICK. *(Following his gaze.)* Romeo pining for his Juliet, is that it? And regretting he's already married?

MICHAEL. It's not that. *(Michael sits.)* It doesn't matter. It's probably nothing. It's just...strange.

FREDERICK. *(Disregarding Michael.)* I've told you before: you should divorce Lara and marry Alisha. You love Alisha, don't you?

MICHAEL. Madly.

FREDERICK. Well then, matter's perfectly simple. Don't know what all the fuss is about.

MICHAEL. Money, Frederick, money. The only person who has less money than me is Adrian, and there are dogs who are better off than he is. I can't marry Alisha as things stand – it wouldn't be fair to her.

FREDERICK. Alisha doesn't mind.

MICHAEL. *(Rises.)* Alisha doesn't know what's best for her.

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FREDERICK. *(Clears himself a space on the coffee table.)* Well, girls like her won't wait forever.

MICHAEL. I'm not asking her to wait forever. Just until I make some money writing.

FREDERICK. Isn't that the same thing? *(Frederick looks up expectantly at Michael.)* I'm ready for dinner now!

MICHAEL. I'll go and rustle something up for you. *(Michael moves to the arched opening.)* There are some odds and ends lying about that are probably still edible.

FREDERICK. Eh, what's that? I want good, hearty English cooking with plenty of flavour!

MICHAEL. Oh, it'll have plenty of flavour! *(Michael exits.)*

FREDERICK. Hmm! *(Frederick moves to the drinks cabinet and pours out a shot of whisky; then opens a drawer and takes out some cutlery. Moving back to the coffee table, he fastidiously arranges the cutlery and glass before him then sits back smiling. Looking up, he notices the vase. He moves the vase to the coffee table. Looking inside, he recoils suddenly.)* Michael! *(Michael enters.)*

MICHAEL. I'm making dinner! It's on! I'm doing it!

FREDERICK. I've had a dreadful shock! Dreadful! Don't know *what* sort of place you are running! That vase – it has *blood* in it! The water – it's all bloody! It's horrible!

MICHAEL. What? *(Michael sits and dips his hand into the vase – it comes out covered in blood. Both stare at his hand then Michael, looking into the vase, pulls out a bloodstained steak knife. Michael dries his hand on a handkerchief, then lays the knife on it.)*

FREDERICK. Is – is that the knife that Colin Martins was – was stabbed with?

MICHAEL. It must be. *(Michael rises.)* Hold on – I'll just check something. *(Michael exits up Left then re-enters a few moments later.)* We're missing a steak knife. *(A beat.)*

FREDERICK. Who can – who can have put it there?

MICHAEL. Lara!

FREDERICK. Lara?

MICHAEL. It must have been her. Listen, you heard the front door open and close this afternoon – supposing that wasn't the murderer opening and closing the door to *enter* the house and take the letter but

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was someone *leaving* the house. Lara opening and shutting the door to go out. Lara leaving to kill Colin! *She* killed him! You didn't see Lara this afternoon?

FREDERICK. No, I've been in my room resting. I imagined she was about.

MICHAEL. Exactly. She slipped out and we assumed it was someone entering the house. Lara wasn't in all day. She's lying – the knife found in the vase, the door opening – it all fits. And Lara knew where Colin Martins was killed – she said he was killed in the barn.

FREDERICK. She said that?

MICHAEL. Yes.

FREDERICK. And the letter? How did Lara take the letter?

MICHAEL. She had the best chance out of everyone. You and Lara were alone in the house yesterday and most of today – all she had to do was wait for a time when you were resting and destroy it.

FREDERICK. And the knife?

MICHAEL. She must have planned on bringing it back here, cleaning it and putting it back in the kitchen. No one would dream what it had been used for. But she didn't have time. I must have disturbed her coming back home this afternoon.

FREDERICK. What a dreadful thing to happen to me! Stuck in a house – with a murderer! I'll be surprised if I survive the ordeal! (*Frederick throws back his shot.*)

MICHAEL. Look (*Michael puts the knife back into the vase*), Lara can't know that we know. We'll put everything back the way it was. (*Michael returns the vase. He puts the bloodstained handkerchief in his coat pocket.*) I need to phone Simon – tell him what we know.

FREDERICK. Yes, put the whole matter in his hands. It's nothing to do with us. I don't see why I have to suffer just because I've been unfortunate enough to live with a crazed murderer. Call him, call him now, and tell him it's his responsibility to get us out of this mess. (*Michael hesitates, looking at the arched opening.*) Well, what are you waiting for? Phone him – phone him now! Or better still, phone the police – tell them that I demand to have police protection.

MICHAEL. No, Simon is more likely to listen to us. I'll phone him and ask him to come round. Listen, we need to get Lara out of the way before Simon comes here. Can you take her into your bedroom, say you

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want some new bed sheets or a silk pillow or something – just act up and keep her distracted?

FREDERICK. I don't "act up."

MICHAEL. While you do that, I'll phone Simon. When he gets here Lara should be busy cursing your name. I'll tell her I'm writing.

FREDERICK. Probably the idea of you working will be enough in itself to arouse her suspicion.

MICHAEL. *(Moves to the arched opening.)* Lara! Can you come down for a moment? *(Frederick moves to the door down Right. Lara enters.)*

LARA. What is it?

FREDERICK. It's my sheets – they're in a dreadful state! Dread-ful! I can't possibly sleep on them tonight. Just look at them, will you?

(Frederick opens the door. Frederick and Lara exit. Michael picks up the telephone and hastily dials.)

MICHAEL. Simon? Simon? Listen, you need to come here right away – it's about Colin Martins' murder. No, I can't tell you now, you need to come round. Okay, be quick. *(Michael puts the telephone down. He sits and rummages through a bundle of papers. Frederick and Lara enter.)*

FREDERICK. So you see the situation? It is of the utmost necessity that I have new sheets for tonight.

LARA. Okay, Frederick. I'll drive to the supermarket and get you some new ones.

MICHAEL. Thanks, Lara. *(Michael gestures to the papers.)* I want to finish this article by tonight. *(Lara exits.)*

FREDERICK. I don't even want new sheets. The ones I have are perfectly adequate.

MICHAEL. Frederick, you'll be the death of me.

FREDERICK. At the moment, it seems more likely that your wife will be the death of you.

MICHAEL. *(Uncertainly.)* Lara would never hurt me.

FREDERICK. Why have you put the knife back then? Why have you got Lara out of the way so that you can talk to Simon? Why haven't you just confronted her? I'll tell you why: because you're afraid of her.

MICHAEL. *(Rises.)* I don't know much about Lara; I don't understand her – I never have – but one thing I have always known is that there's something deep inside her I can't touch, something that unnerves me. That was part of what initially attracted me to her actually – she was like

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a block of ice; so cold and smooth and impenetrable – untouchable. But the trouble was the ice never melted; however warm my touch, she never changed. And living with ice gradually freezes you. It takes something full of fire and strength to make you see the light again and get working and progress in life. Like a firefly – my own little firefly.

(Michael sits.) I've spent too long just sitting around and not accomplishing anything. I can write, I know that, but I've just never had the willpower to actually do it. I should never have married Lara. I was too young, too impulsive, too eager to have what seemed beyond my reach. I'm older now – I see now what a fool I was. I never loved Lara – I was fascinated by her. And what basis is that to build a marriage?

(Michael rises.) But Lara can get a hold over you – even now, she can look at you and exercise her cold charm and almost hypnotise you, so that everything inside you – all your strength, all your integrity and resolution – just crumbles in the wake of her power. I swear sometimes Lara isn't human. *(A beat.)* Not human... *(There is a knock at the front door. Michael opens the door. Simon enters, carrying a doctor's bag, followed by Graham. Frederick moves to the drinks cabinet and refills his whisky glass.)*

MICHAEL. *(To Graham.)* What are you doing here? *(Simon hangs up his coat. Graham hands his coat to Michael.)*

GRAHAM. I happened to be consulting with Simon about one of my patients – rather an interesting case of psychosis – when you telephoned. I thought it probable that I would be of some assistance. *(Graham sits. Michael roughly hangs up Graham's coat.)*

SIMON *(Quietly, to Michael.)* I'm sorry. He insisted on coming. *(Simon moves away.)* What's going on?

MICHAEL. Have a look in that vase. *(Michael nods to the vase and sits.)*

SIMON. *(Looks inside the vase.)* The water's bloody.

MICHAEL. That's because there's a knife inside. *(Simon puts the vase on the coffee table and sits. He takes a sheet out of his bag and, wearing a glove, draws the knife out of the vase, carefully placing it on the sheet. Simon examines the knife.)* Frederick noticed the water was bloody and we found the knife inside. It must have been the knife that stabbed Colin – there's a knife missing from the kitchen.

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SIMON. This knife could certainly have caused the wound. It's possible and, in the circumstances, highly probable. *(Simon puts his glove in his bag.)*

MICHAEL. And I can tell you who put it there: Lara. *(Graham makes an incredulous noise.)* Frederick heard the front door open and close mid-afternoon. We thought it was someone *entering* the house, but it could have been Lara *leaving* the house.

SIMON. I see.

MICHAEL. She went to kill Colin. By the way, Colin Martins was killed in the barn at Long Beeton Farm, wasn't he?

SIMON. Yes. How did you know?

MICHAEL. Lara said so.

SIMON. A foolish mistake to make.

MICHAEL. I think Lara brought the knife back here, meaning to clean it and put it back in the kitchen where it would never be associated with Colin's murder. But she was startled and had to hide it in there. *(Michael gestures to the vase.)* What do you think?

SIMON. The fact that the knife was found in a vase in this house certainly suggests a member of the household committed the murder.

MICHAEL. So you see it must be Lara. I didn't commit the murder; Frederick is in a wheelchair – it must be Lara. She could have taken Colin's letter as well.

SIMON. Yes, and the letter itself is to some degree explained. That has confused me. Why write a letter? Why not phone or come to your house? Because a letter is the only safe way of ensuring only you are contacted and not Lara. Lara may have picked up the phone, Lara may have walked in on you together, but a letter would only be read by you, and you alone. Whatever Colin wanted to tell you, he wanted to keep it secret from Lara.

FREDERICK. What remains to be discovered is what it was he wanted to say.

SIMON. By the way, where – er – is Lara?

MICHAEL. Frederick and I managed to decoy her away.

SIMON. Good thinking.

GRAHAM. *(Rises.)* It occurs to me that there is another equally probable solution. *(Graham turns suddenly and waves a hand at Frederick.)* Frederick here. *(Frederick chokes on his drink.)* We have

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only his word for it that he heard the front door open and close at all. Who's to say that anyone entered or left? Frederick could have murdered Colin Martins then made up this story of the door to plant a false trail.

FREDERICK. Me?! You're accusing me?! Hasn't it occurred to you that I'm in a wheelchair – crippled?

GRAHAM. We all know, Frederick, that you are capable of far more than you make out. Indeed, I've often wondered how much. You served in the army, fought abroad, who knows the effects of that on a fussy, sensitive, self-obsessed mind?

FREDERICK. And now you're accusing me of being a mental lunatic – insane! It's preposterous and deeply insulting. I am hurt, Graham, very hurt. *(Frederick moves to the drinks cabinet and replenishes his drink.)*

SIMON. I think it's safe to say that Frederick has only been involved in this matter by pure chance.

FREDERICK. Believe me I wish that I had nothing to do with it!

GRAHAM. Very well then. *(To Michael.)* You believe that Lara committed the murder? Have you forgotten Simon's statement that the strangulation was not committed by a human? How do you explain that? *(Graham sits and leans back, self-satisfied.)*

MICHAEL. I can't. That's why I'm afraid. There's something we haven't realised yet. Something we've missed...

SIMON. *(Rises.)* I did warn you to be careful. I felt there was something dangerous going on – anything unknown is always frightening – but this felt especially sinister. Something that wasn't human killed Colin, just as there have been reports of non-human activity in this area.

GRAHAM. *(Laughing derisively.)* Something hiding in the shadows, you mean?

SIMON. Or hiding in plain sight. Married and living quietly in an isolated, forgotten part of the country in the guise of a human. *(Simon sits.)* And now a murderess.

GRAHAM. *(Rises.)* You know what I think?

MICHAEL. I can't wait to hear.

GRAHAM. I think you've spent too much time in your own head. *(Michael rises impatiently.)* You've spent too long being idle and you've started imagining things.

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MICHAEL. The facts speak for themselves, Graham. How do you explain the knife?

GRAHAM. Maybe you put it there.

MICHAEL. Don't be ridiculous. I've been away – abroad – for the last few weeks.

GRAHAM. So you haven't been secretly living with Alisha in a shameless show of adultery? *(Michael slowly turns. Graham sits.)* You forget that this is a village.

FREDERICK. What?! While I've been stuck here – neglected – abandoned – you've been secretly carrying-on with Alisha?! You weren't abroad at all?!

MICHAEL. We've been tired of sneaking around. We just wanted to spend some time together without constantly having to look over our shoulders.

GRAHAM. Now, you were secretly in the neighbourhood. Are you sure that you didn't put that knife in the vase after –?

MICHAEL. After what exactly?

GRAHAM. Well, after committing the murder.

MICHAEL. Is that what you think me – a murderer?

GRAHAM. One shouldn't be too premature.

MICHAEL. No, one shouldn't.

GRAHAM. But I wonder if you will perhaps let me have a little search?

MICHAEL. *(Throws himself down.)* Oh, please, go ahead! *(Graham rises and looks closely around. Taking Michael's coat, he feels inside the pockets and draws out the bloodstained handkerchief. Michael rises, alarmed.)* That isn't what you think! When we found the knife, I used the handkerchief to clean my hands and to put the knife on. That's all.

FREDERICK. That is quite correct.

GRAHAM. Really? And then you hid the handkerchief in your coat pocket?

MICHAEL. I didn't want Lara to see. She might have suspected.

GRAHAM. I presume you were wearing this coat this afternoon when the murder took place.

MICHAEL. I was wearing that coat this afternoon, yes.

GRAHAM. I see. Useful to know. *(Graham puts the handkerchief in his pocket.)* You also took a suitcase away with you, I presume?

MICHAEL. Yes.

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GRAHAM. And where might that be?

MICHAEL. I don't know. Lara took it. In my bedroom, perhaps.
(Graham exits up Left. Michael sits heavily.) I can't believe this is happening. It's like a bad dream.

SIMON. Don't worry. All Graham has to go on is his own convulsed psychology and a bloody handkerchief. Even he will soon see that.
(Graham enters, carrying Michael's suitcase. Placing it on the coffee table, he triumphantly opens it. Michael gives an exclamation of surprise as Graham takes out a pair of mud-caked boots.)

MICHAEL. What are they doing in there?

GRAHAM. Evidently, this is where you hid them after committing the murder.

MICHAEL. That's insane!

GRAHAM. Is it? Take a look at them, will you? Rather unusual type of boot, isn't it?

MICHAEL. I got them abroad.

FREDERICK. Presumably one of the times you actually went abroad.

GRAHAM. Now, I've seen the moulds of the footprints found around Colin's body. These boots seem to fit rather well.

MICHAEL. Well, I wasn't wearing them. *(Michael rises.)* It's Lara! She took my suitcase upstairs. She must have planted them on me.

GRAHAM. These are your boots, are they not?

MICHAEL. Yes, they are, but I didn't wear them. You really think that I did the murder?

GRAHAM. It's not a question of what I think, Michael. It's a question of what the evidence says.

MICHAEL. You don't understand Lara. I've lived with her for years and never felt comfortable with her, never understood her, and sometimes felt afraid of her. She has this aura of coldness and strength, an otherworldly power. You can't understand if you've never lived with her. All I can say is: she's dangerous.

SIMON. That's why we need a plan. *(Graham sits.)* Now, Michael, can you get me some strands of Lara's hair?

MICHAEL. *(Confused.)* Sure, there'll be some on her hairbrush in her bedroom.

SIMON. *(Opens his doctor's bag and hands Michael a sealed plastic bag.)* Good, put some strands of hair in here. *(Michael exits up Left with*

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his suitcase. Simon places the knife in the vase and returns the sheet to his bag.)

FREDERICK. I assume that you are going to get us out of this mess, Simon.

SIMON. I will do my very best, I assure you. *(Simon rises and returns the vase to the table.)*

FREDERICK. Hmm! I know that talk – all wishy-washy, nothing to it!

SIMON. Don't tell me that the distinguished Major Frederick is afraid?

FREDERICK. Nonsense!

SIMON. It's understandable. When you're facing the unknown, that's very different from facing something physical, something material and tangible that can be understood. When you're facing the unknown, that's when you will know real fear – not nerves that merely stimulate and sharpen the senses – but actual fear that clogs the brain and haunts you every second of the day. You are starting to know real fear.

FREDERICK. You're right. When you're facing the unknown, it's different. But we'll face it head on. Full steam ahead.

SIMON. We don't really have a choice. The danger is here whether we like it or not. *(Through the window, Lara is seen approaching the front door. She peers through the window – a look of fury appears on her face. She moves to the front door. Michael enters.)* Ah, you've got the hairs. Excellent. *(Simon takes the plastic bag from Michael.)*

MICHAEL. What's that all about? *(Michael and Simon sit.)*

SIMON. I can use these hairs to ID Lara. We will soon see what we are dealing with.

GRAHAM. You're wasting your time, Simon.

SIMON. Perhaps. But there is something strange here. You can't deny that.

FREDERICK. *(Gesturing to the plastic bag.)* That's all very nice, Simon, but what's going to happen to me *(Frederick remembers Michael)* and Michael? Shall we stay at your house for tonight? A hotel wouldn't suit me at all, I require a more homely environment – a nice, homecooked meal, warm bed and –

SIMON. I don't see how you can leave. Lara needs to be unaware of what we are doing. Everything needs to stay where it is: the knife, the boots, and you.

FREDERICK. Are you mad? I'm not staying here!

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MICHAEL. Simon's right. Lara can't know. If she comes back and finds us gone, she'll suspect. That can't happen.

SIMON. Quite right. *(Simon rises and puts the plastic bag in his doctor's bag.)* There's no immediate danger, Lara doesn't know what we're up to. *(Simon looks at his watch.)* We'd better go. *(Michael and Graham rise. Graham puts on his coat, smoothing it down. To Michael.)* I'll give you a call as soon as I get my results and we can make arrangements for the departure of yourself and Frederick. *(Simon puts on his coat and places his hand on the door handle.)*

FREDERICK. Now, hold on! I refuse to cooperate! This is going too far!

SIMON. I thought you had more courage, Frederick.

FREDERICK. I've got plenty of courage! Absolutely reams of it! But this is sheer tomfoolery, plain foolishness. Now, if you'll be so kind, you can pack my belongings and I'll be going. *(Frederick moves towards the front door.)*

MICHAEL. I'm staying. You go if you want, but I'm staying. *(A beat.)*

FREDERICK. Oh, I'll stay. *(To Simon.)* But if I die, I'm blaming you, and I warn you, I'll be very difficult in the afterlife! There won't be a cloud that's comfortable enough for me. I'll have late night parties with the angels, serenade you endlessly with my harp, and tittle-tattle to God about how you got me killed messing around with unnatural beings.

SIMON. *(Laughs.)* I'll take that risk. *(Simon nods goodbye.)* Wait for my call. *(Simon opens the front door. Lara is outside holding some packaged bed sheets. Simon and Graham both step back in shock. Lara enters.)*

LARA. Hello, Simon, Graham. I didn't know you were here.

SIMON. We – er – just happened to be passing.

LARA. Really? What a pity I wasn't here. Funny how these things work out, isn't it? *(Simon looks uneasily back at Michael as he and Graham exit. A beat.)* I'll put these sheets on your bed, shall I, Frederick?

FREDERICK. Yes – er – yes, please, thank you, Lara. *(Lara exits down Right.)* How much did she hear?

MICHAEL. Enough.

FREDERICK. What are we going to do?

MICHAEL. Nothing.

FREDERICK. Nothing?!

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MICHAEL. What can we do? We have to trust Simon. He'll do the test and get us out of here. Until then we just need to –

FREDERICK. Stay alive. *(Lara enters.)*

LARA. Your new sheets are ready, Frederick. You better go to bed now.

FREDERICK. But I'm not tired. And I haven't had dinner!

LARA. Your health is very important to you, Frederick. You want to take good care of it. Go to bed. *(Lara holds the door down Right open. Frederick looks uneasily at Michael who nods. Frederick slowly moves down Right, looking behind him at Michael and Lara before exiting. A beat as Michael and Lara look at each other.)* Get me a glass of water, Michael. I'm thirsty.

MICHAEL. Of – of course. *(Michael exits up Left. Lara moves to the telephone. In a wild fury, she attacks it, making animalistic sounds of rage. She sits back, breathing heavily, her hair disarrayed.)*

LARA. No, Simon, you will not be calling us. *No one* will be calling us. *(Lara rises. Michael enters. He places the glass on the coffee table. He notices the telephone.)*

MICHAEL. What happened to the phone?

LARA. Oh. Oh dear. It appears to have broken.

MICHAEL. Or been broken.

LARA. We're alone now, Michael. There's just us three. *(A beat.)* What are you going to do?

END OF ACT 1

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