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*To Nelson and Eve Seeley for their love and encouragement*

## **Cast of Characters**

AGATHA CHRISTIE MALLOWAN, mystery writer, aged 42

MAX MALLOWAN, archeologist and her husband, aged 28

JAMES (JIM) HOLLOWAY, American millionaire and investor,  
aged 58

COOKIE TURNER HOLLOWAY, his wife, former chorus girl, aged  
25

ATHIF AMSEF, Egyptian archeologist aged 40/could be played as  
a woman

SCOTTIE MITCHELL, graduate student apprentice to Max, aged 25

MOHAMED TOMEL, hotel manager, aged 45

BYRON NICOLAI, Greek antique dealer, aged 40

ANNE ELLERY, spinster secretary to Mr. Holloway, aged 50

SALIA, an Egyptian waitress

MICHELLE, Mrs. Holloway's maid, aged 23

LT. HAMMAN, Egyptian army officer

## **The Time**

Fall of 1932.

## **The Place**

Old Cataract Hotel, Aswan, Egypt.

## **The Set**

The entire play occurs in the lobby of the Old Cataract Hotel. The main entrance is through an archway center right. Another matching archway center left leads to the dining room and kitchen. A larger archway up center leads to the bedrooms. There are small groupings of chairs and end tables up right, up left, down right and down left. The set is adorned with Egyptian artwork on the walls and pottery on the tables. The effect is simple, yet elegant.

## **Synopsis of Scenes**

### *Act I*

Scene 1, Hotel lobby Thursday evening

Scene 2, Friday morning

### *Act II*

Scene 1, Later that evening

Scene 2, One hour later

### *Act III*

Scene 1, Saturday Morning

Scene 2, One hour later

There is a 10-minute intermission between Acts I and II and another between Act II scenes 1 and 2.

## **Production Notes**

Although the set was modeled and painted after the actual Old Cataract Hotel lobby, it is really a simple proscenium set. Furniture is sparse and utilitarian; a few end tables, seating for seven, and a few Egyptian-like ornaments. 1930s music was used before the show, during Act I Scene 1, Act II Scene 1, intermission, and during curtain call.

## **The Old Cataract Hotel and its association with Agatha Christie**

Agatha Christie was born in 1895 to an American father and a British mother. She was educated in England and France and first achieved success writing in 1920 with the publication of *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. She wrote 94 books, 21 plays and numerous short stories and is the most famous mystery writer of all time. In 1931 she met and married Max Mallowan, a brilliant young archeologist. She accompanied Max on his many digs throughout the Middle East often sketching the excavation finds. In the 1930s, she and Max stayed in the Old Cataract Hotel while on such an excavation. It was here, that she wrote "Death on the Nile."

Queen Hatshepsut was the daughter of Thutmose 1. Upon the death of her father in 1493 B.C. she married her half brother, Thut-

mose 2. When he died she assumed the throne and ruled as Pharaoh for 22 years. Her lands and power stretched from the Sinai to the Sudan. She was a master politician and built a huge trading network throughout the Middle East and Africa. She constructed hundreds of public and private temples including her tomb in the Valley of the Kings. Her mummy was recently identified among hundreds stored in the Egyptian Museum.

The Cataract Hotel sits atop a granite hill on the banks of the Nile River in Aswan. It was commissioned as a grand tourist hotel by Thomas Cook, himself in 1899. Filled with Moorish design and vaulted ceilings, it has long been considered one of the world's premier hotels. Its guests have included movie stars, statesmen, millionaires and world leaders.

### **Acknowledgments**

The play was first performed by the advanced acting class at Jefferson High School in Boulder, Montana on November 15 & 16, 2007. Both nights were sold out. It was performed with the following cast and crew:

AGATHA CHRISTIE MALLOWAN.....	Danielle Warren
MAX MALLOWAN.....	John Fisher
JAMES HOLLOWAY.....	Victor Johnson
COOKIE HOLLOWAY.....	Cetaira Stagg
ATHIF AMSEF .....	Daniela Nenova
SCOTTIE MITCHELL.....	Denver Jones
MOHAMED TOMEL.....	John Towle
BYRON NICOLAI.....	Josh Soldiers
ANNE ELLERY .....	Amanda Wacker, Brittney Berger
SALIA .....	Ivy Taylor
MICHELLE BOOTHE.....	Lorin Sevilla
LT. HAMMAN .....	Cody George
Director .....	Mike Hesford
Stage Manager .....	Maxwell Ruppert
Assistant Director.....	Zach Banks

# **CURSE OF THE PHARAOH QUEEN**

## **OR, AGATHA CHRISTIE AT THE OLD CATARACT HOTEL**

*A Murder Mystery in Three Acts*

**by Linda Piccolo**

### **ACT I**

#### **Scene 1**

*(Thursday evening 9 p.m.: guests are returning to the lobby after dinner. At curtain, waitress brings tray of three drinks to MR. HOLLOWAY and his secretary who are sitting at a table Downstage Left going over records. She leaves a third drink for the absent MRS. HOLLOWAY.)*

*(AGATHA CHRISTIE MALLOWAN and her husband, MAX enter from the dining room and sit at the table Upstage Right. AGATHA takes a large sketch book out of her bag and discusses sketches with MAX who carries a small jewel case wrapped in a soft cloth.)*

*(COOKIE HOLLOWAY walks in from the dining room on the arm of SCOTTIE MITCHELL. She is laughing loudly and pulls him onto the dance floor. She casually drops her shawl to the floor as her maid, MICHELLE rushes to pick it up. MICHELLE moves to the wall holding the shawl. MICHELLE is holding a small dog. Cookie's husband, JIM and ANNE look up. JIM pauses, and then continues with his work, ANNE stares until he catches her attention and she snaps back.)*

*(Front entrance opens and ATHIF AMSEF enters with MOHAMED TOMEL. They are arguing and ATHIF is gesturing angrily as they walk in. MOHAMED tries to hold ATHIF back as he pushes him away and marches to JAMES HOLLOWAY. Everyone in the room slowly follows his movements.)*

**ATHIF.** Leave me alone, I told you! *(Pushing MOHAMED aside, to JAMES:)* Mr. Holloway, I wish to speak with you.

**JIM.** Well, sure. Please sit down. Can I get you an after dinner drink?

**ATHIF.** No! Excuse me, I beg you. This is not a social call. Might I speak to you alone? (*Looking pointedly at ANNE.*)

**JIM.** Ah, yes. Miss Ellery, would you complete those letters and have them ready for my signature tomorrow morning please?

**ANNE.** (*Rising and collecting her papers:*) Of course. Good evening, sir, Mr. Amsef. (*Exits off up center stage.*)

**JIM.** Please, go ahead.

**ATHIF.** (*Sitting in Anne's chair:*) Mr. Holloway, it is incumbent upon me to speak my concerns about your current expedition for the tomb of Queen Hatshepsut. When I was approached by your representative, Mr. Mitchell, over a year ago, I voiced my opposition in the most definite of terms. I told him then and you when you arrived in October that your dig was misguided at best and immoral at worst. Do you remember what your response was at the time?

**JIM.** Not the exact words, but I imagine I said something about the opportunity to discover lost treasures which would add beauty and history to the entire world.

**ATHIF.** Yes, I believe those may have been your very words. And I told you then as I tell you now. What you are doing is wrong. You are raping the national heritage of our people, our land and our culture. You are attempting to use modern excavation techniques to plunder and destroy the tombs of our sacred dead. Can you understand that opposition or is it a concept beyond your egotistic American sentiments?

**JIM.** I am sorry you feel that way. But, apparently your government shares our enthusiasm for this expedition. Would you like to see the papers issued to me by your very own minister of antiquities approving this dig?

**ATHIF.** Mr. Holloway, Egypt is a poor country. It is that poverty, not our culture that has forced our people to accept the swarms of rich Americans and British that are buying their way into our an-

cient temples and graveyards. Your fortunes may be able to buy you many things in your country, but it must not continue in mine.

**JIM.** I can appreciate your concerns, but what we do is legal. I have the highest respect for your heritage and expect to leave the bulk of our finds, IF there are any, with your department of antiquities. What we are doing is science. It is opening history and culture for the entire world. Something that has lain hidden for thirty-five hundred years will be available for study and appreciation for millions for many years to come. *(Rises and motions to MAX to join him.)* I have never had much of an education myself. I was just lucky, not smart. But I have learned so much from this expedition and from Professor Mallowan.

*(MAX rises and crosses Left Center to JIM.)*

**JIM.** Max, this is Athif Amsef. He is also an Egyptologist and wants to talk to us about this season's dig. Mr. Amsef, may I introduce Mr. Halloway? He is the resident Egyptologist on our expedition.

**MAX.** *(Holding out his hand to shake. ATHIF merely bows.)* A pleasure Mr. Amsef. I have read a great deal about your discoveries and the work you have done with Ramses II and Amenhotep III. Your paper on the sun god was brilliant. I was in the audience when you delivered it at Oxford four years ago. *(Sits.)*

**ATHIF.** *(Bows at the waist, but does not shake his hand.)* Yes, I know of you.

**JIM.** Max, Mr. Amsef wants us to go home. He feels we are, what was the word, oh, yes, raping his culture for our own selfish ends.

**MAX.** Mr. Ahsef, you must know our intentions are driven entirely by science not treasure. Do you really think we are here to enrich our bank accounts? Have you not heard of my work in Asia and Mesopotamia? Jim, have you shown him our papers from the Egyptian government?

*(All in room turn to watch as voices are raised. SALIA, the waitress, enters from Left Center and stands in doorway.)*

**ATHIF.** I don't care about your papers! Because you can does not mean you should. What you are attempting to do is a crime! These

are the graves of our ancient kings and queens. People who were worshipped as Gods during their lifetimes and buried for what they expected to be all eternity. If you continue to disturb those hallowed sanctuaries as common grave robbers you will surely suffer the same curse they did, thousands of years ago. You can not, and will not, take another shovel full of Egyptian soil or you, and all your descendants; will suffer the wrath of those you awaken.

*(He turns and rushes out Right Center door.)*

**MOHAMED.** *(Crossing quickly to MAX and JAMES:)* I am very sorry for these intrusion sirs. I tried to dissuade him outside but was not persuasive or forceful enough.

**MAX.** It is quite alright, Mr. Tomel. I am not unused to his attitude. I have heard it before, and, in several different languages.

**MOHAMED.** You are very gracious. Good evening sirs. *(He exits.)*

**AGATHA.** *(Crossing to her husband:)* What a dreadful man. I hope he didn't upset either of you.

**MAX.** No my dear, but thank you.

**JIM.** Please, join us Mrs. Mallowan. I need a drink. Waitress! *(Motions for SALIA.)*

**SALIA.** Yes sir?

**JIM.** I'd like a double bourbon, please straight up. You, Mrs. Mallowan?

**AGATHA.** Perhaps a small pot of tea with milk.

**MAX.** Bring another cup for me if you please.

**SALIA.** Thank you.

*(She bows and exits.)*

**JIM.** A curse! How you do like that, the man actually called me a grave robber and threatened us with a mummy's curse. Can you believe that! And I thought Texas had some rough characters!

**MAX.** It is not an unusual reaction, although I think he is a bit fanatical about it. I wouldn't take that curse business seriously

though. If all archeologists lived in fear of ancient curses, nothing new would ever be found and world history would continue with huge gaps in knowledge.

*(SALIA returns with drinks, bows and exits.)*

**AGATHA.** *(Toasting with her tea cup:)* Hear! Hear!

**JIM.** I just don't want any trouble, you know? This whole excavation has been a real kick; but I don't hold any illusions that I am a scholar. I know what part I play in all of this...the money. And that's fine with me. You and your team are the experts and I am happy to leave all the decisions to you. After 40 years in the Texas oil fields it is a pleasure to sit back and play in the dirt in someone else's back yard.

**COOKIE.** *(Rising and crossing to them:)* OOOOH, what's going on darling? I saw that creepy Egyptian yelling at you and the professor.

**JIM.** Nothing dear, nothing. Don't worry those cute little blonde curls. Are you enjoying yourself?

**COOKIE.** I guess. Scottie has been telling me about the village. I might go over there tomorrow to look at some fabric. He says they do some beautiful things with gold thread and cotton. It might make a great costume for next year's showcase.

**JIM.** What ever you like, just don't go alone. Take Scottie or one of the crew captains. I don't want you wandering in those tiny alleyways.

**COOKIE.** So you said, about a hundred times. Doesn't anything go on here at night?

**JIM.** I'm sorry Cookie. I know this isn't Paris or Broadway, but I told you we would have to stick to the hotel during the evenings to avoid insulting the locals.

*(MOHAMED enters from Left Center and stands in doorway surveying the room.)*

**COOKIE.** What do I care about the locals? A bunch of men in dresses with their heads wrapped in dish towels? *(MOHAMED*

*shakes head and exits Left Center.*) I'm going nuts! There isn't anyone younger than 40 for a 50 mile radius and the backyard is nothing but sand piles.

**JIM.** Now Cookie, I know you don't mean that. You told me you wanted to go on this dig even though I warned you you wouldn't like it.

**COOKIE.** Like it? Like it? I spend my days swatting flies and sweating in 120 degree heat watching you and a bunch of history nuts play in the dirt and go gaga over a bunch of broken pots. What kind of idiot would enjoy that? And for this I give up top billing on Broadway!

**JIM.** Now darlin' you know you don't mean that. Why don't you hustle up to your room and take a long bath? I'll join you later.

**COOKIE.** Don't bother. I'm planning on going to bed early with a headache. Come to mommie, Pookers.

*(She takes dog from MICHELLE and begins to exit Upstage Center. Stops, turns back stamps her foot.)*

**COOKIE.** *(Demandingly:)* Michelle!

*(MICHELLE rises and follows Upstage Center.)*

**JIM.** I am sorry. She just isn't suited to this climate. She needs more excitement, more night life...you know?

**AGATHA.** Please don't apologize. This really isn't the place for a young, vibrant girl. It takes years to accustom oneself to the heat and, if she has no background in archeology there really isn't anything to interest her.

**MAX.** Jim, Agatha and I have something to show you. You know Agatha makes very elaborate sketches of every find? *(JIM nods.)* Look at this drawing of the jewelry box we found last week. Now, look at the box itself. Do you notice anything?

**JIM.** *(Surveying the box and comparing it to the drawing:)* It looks the same to me. I just can't tell. Can you Scottie?

**SCOTTIE.** Let me see that. Something isn't right here. This lid has a break in design. See here, just where the lid bends? That's wrong. Not with the workmanship we've seen from this tomb.

**MAX.** Exactly, this isn't the artifact we recovered last week. It appears someone among us has substituted a clever replica and taken the real thing; an article worth two to three hundred thousand pounds on the black market.

**JIM.** Are you saying one of us?

**AGATHA.** But whom?

**MAX.** And how?

*(Fade to black.)*

## Scene 2

*(The following morning. MOHAMED enters from Left Center with SALIA. He appears to be giving her directions for cleaning the lobby. They walk slowly through the room straightening cushions, moving accessories, removing the drinks, newspapers, etc. MOHAMED checks everything, then, satisfied, he exits Left Center. Slowly the cast enters from Upstage Center. They are in working clothes, khaki shirts, cotton slacks, boots and carrying hats. AGATHA and MAX enter and move to a table Downstage Right on which they displayed several pieces of pottery from the recent excavation. AGATHA is double checking the items against her inventory and her drawings. MAX is working with her. JIM enters arguing with SCOTTIE. ANNE follows.)*

**JIM.** I don't care what she says. I can't just drop everything and head up to Cairo just because she's bored. I told her what things would be like before we came. She insisted on coming anyway and now all I hear is how hot it is, how much she hates the food, the smells and that there is nothing for her to do. It's backwoods Egypt, not Broadway.

**SCOTTIE.** I know sir and I'm sorry. She asked me to talk to you about it before we started today. I'm sure she'll find something else to fill her day.

**JIM.** Don't I wish? Naw, she won't give up she's like that feisty dog of hers with a bone. Ann, (*Opens wallet:*) Take this up to Mrs. Holloway and tell her to go shopping.

**ANNE.** (*Coming to take the money:*) Yes sir.

*(She starts up the stairs.)*

**JIM.** Wait! Tell her to bring Michelle with her and to take one of the hotel porters I don't want her wandering through the streets by herself. That girl's got more dollars than cents if you know what I mean.

*(ANNE takes off.)*

*(Walking to the MALLOWANS:)* Morning Agatha and Max. Find anything?

**MAX.** Nothing yet. We started with the Queen's jewel chest. We wanted to go over it again in the light of day. We kept hoping it was just a mistake, a trick of light. Unfortunately, that doesn't seem to be the case. Here, I'll let Agatha sort it out for you.

**AGATHA.** (*Walks forward with the box.*) If you look carefully at the lid, just here, you can see where the ornamental beading is breaking off. It almost appears to be deteriorating. I scrapped this small piece off and look what happens when I drop it into a bit of water.

*(She drops a section into a glass. Everyone leans in watching.)*

See? It dissolves almost completely.

**JIM.** You're right. Is it chalk?

**AGATHA.** No, paste. Easy to manipulate and form, takes color well and can be molded into almost any shape.

**JIM.** I'll be damned! I would never have noticed.

**MAX.** Oh, I think you would have. This is a pretty good job, but nothing spectacular and eventually it would have been discovered.

**AGATHA.** Whoever made the change was taking a big risk that it would hold up until they had a chance to sneak out with the real one. When was the last time someone worked with this piece?

**MAX.** I haven't touched it for at least a week, maybe a fortnight.

**JIM.** Me neither.

**SCOTTIE.** I was studying the hieroglyphics Monday.

**AGATHA.** Excuse me Mr. Mitchell. I think you may be mistaken. I was editing a sketch just two days ago and saw you working on this piece. That would make it Wednesday.

**SCOTTIE.** Wednesday you say? Well, I must have been mistaken.

*(MOHAMED crosses into the room from the kitchen Left Center.)*

**MAX.** So, that tells us the substitution must have been made yesterday before dinner.

Mr. Tomel, could you please join us?

*(He motions him over.)*

Mr. Tomel, please repeat what you told me and my wife this morning about the room we keep the excavation finds in.

**MOHAMED.** Certainly. From the day you booked these rooms I have made them restricted from my staff. We installed new locks in both doors and gave the only keys to you, Mr. Holloway and Mr. Mitchell. Please, allow me to say how deeply upset this discovery has made me. We, at the Cataract Hotel, pride ourselves on our service and discretion. I cannot express the depth of my regret. I am ashamed it has occurred in my hotel.

**MAX.** No one doubts your integrity and the standards of the hotel. We know you had nothing to do with the robbery. But we need to ask you several questions to help us in our investigations.

**MOHAMED.** Certainly, sir. I am your servant. *(Bows.)*

**AGATHA.** I have never seen anyone cleaning the room, although I have noticed fresh glasses replace the old, soiled towels are removed as is the rubbish. Mr. Tomel, who is responsible for those services?

**MOHAMED.** I am. As your husband can attest, once daily, with your husband's permission, I enter the room with one staff member and supervise while the cleaning is completed. I never leave them

alone and can assure you nothing was taken from the room while under my observation.

**AGATHA.** What about the windows? Do they lock from the inside?

**MOHAMED.** We had the windows sealed to insure security for your group. They have neither been opened nor broken since then.

**AGATHA.** There are only two doorways; one to the outside corridor and the adjoining room to our suite. Darling, is it possible you may have left that door unlocked?

**MAX.** Most unlikely. I always keep the key on my person and relock it upon entering and exiting as a matter of course.

**AGATHA.** James? Who has had access to your key, if I may ask?

**JIM.** Myself, certainly and Miss Ellery, but only when she has been sent there on my request.

**AGATHA.** Mr. Mitchell? Mr. Mitchell?

**SCOTTIE.** *(Deep in thought:)* What? Oh, my key? Well, no one really. I have taken Mrs. Holloway in occasionally to show a particularly interesting piece.

**AGATHA.** Just the two of you? I mean, was she accompanied by her maid?

**SCOTTIE.** Yes, a couple of times.

*(Suddenly the sound of a hawk is heard offstage, then the sound of screaming. MRS. HOLLOWAY struggles inside. She seems upset, nearly fainting. Her hair is messed. She is followed by her maid, MICHELLE who is carrying a mound of packages.)*

**JIM.** What's going on here? *(Crosses to her.)*

**SCOTTIE.** *(Rushes over.)* Are you alright?

**AGATHA.** *(Rushing over:)* Quickly, help her to one of these chairs.

**MOHAMED.** Salia, get madam some cool water and a wet towel.

*(She dumps packages on him and exits.)*

**JIM.** Cookie, what's going on? Was that you screaming?

**MICHELLE.** Yes, it was her. We were on our way back into the hotel. We had just left the carriage when a large bird circled above and actually seemed to attack Mrs. Mitchell. The porter threw a package at it to scare it away.

**JIM.** Cookie, are you ok? Did it hurt you? Are you cut?

*(SALIA enters carrying a tray with a towel and a glass of water. She looks around and MICHELLE motions her to MRS. HOLLO-WAY.)*

**COOKIE.** *(Takes a sip of water.)* No, I don't think it hit me. But it tried. Really, Jimmy, it was diving right at me. It was huge, black and very fast.

**SALIA.** It was a hawk; I saw it myself this morning when I checked the front entranceway.

**MOHAMED.** A hawk. It cannot be. Not here.

**SALIA.** A bad omen. A bird of death. The ancient symbol of the underworld. It is said to mark its victims from above.

**MOHAMED.** *(Screaming in Arabic:)* Remove yourself!

*(SALIA rushes to the kitchen.)*

Please forgive me; a superstitious local girl. I will send porters out to chase it away.

*(He exits Left Center.)*

**JIM.** Come on darling'. Let's get you upstairs. You'll be fine after a nice cool bath and a rest.

**COOKIE.** No I won't. I won't be fine. I won't be fine until we leave this sand pile and go somewhere civilized. I don't know how I ever let you talk me into this. Fun! Excitement! Ha! Try six months of heat and heathens! No movies, no plays no nightclubs. What am I supposed to do all day, hang around and play in the dirt with this bunch of old stiffs? I'm 25 years old! I need life not death!

*(She matches off Upstage Center with MICHELLE following. MOHAMED follows with the packages.)*

**JIM.** *(To others:)* Please excuse her. She's pretty darned upset. It probably was a mistake to bring her to Egypt with me, but I thought she would enjoy it and we'd just been married a year when this dig came through.

**AGATHA.** No apology necessary. The heat is difficult and it must be very dull for a young girl. I understand she was quite a star in New York before your marriage.

**JIM.** You know, she sure was something when I saw her on stage the first time. All blonde and fluffy, wearing a poofey white dress covered in feathers. I thought I was looking at an angel.

**AGATHA.** What an interesting allusion.

**JIM.** She wasn't a real star, I mean a leading lady, you know. But she was getting better parts, some with actual speaking lines and she had a solo in a big dance number. I fell hard. It took some convincing, but she seemed happy to give it all up and move to Texas with me. But ranch life bored her and she didn't have any friends her own age. That's hard on a girl like Cookie.

**AGATHA.** But I thought she told me Michelle, her maid, was one of the girls she performed with on Broadway. Aren't they friends?

**JIM.** Yep, that's true. They were both hired at the same time for one of Mr. Ziegfeld's shows. Sad story, really. Michelle looked to hit it first, got pulled from the chorus line for a special role and then, at the last minute, lost the role to Cookie. Just one of those quirky things that happens, I guess. Anyway, she took it hard. Kinda went off the deep end. When we got married Cookie offered her a job. I didn't think it was a good idea, but surprisingly, Michelle took it. She does her work, fine, but the bond is gone. I had hoped she might strike up a friendship with Anne, my secretary. She's a great girl, you know? Devoted to this dig. I don't know, maybe there is just too much of an age difference between us after all.

**AGATHA.** I'm sure it is just the heat and the shock talking. It must have been quite a scare. I wouldn't have expected to see a hawk here, certainly not around such a busy hotel.

**JIM.** Is it true what that waitress said? That the hawk was an omen? A symbol of death?

**MAX.** Yes, according to ancient beliefs. The hawk is said to mark its next victim. But I wouldn't worry about that. It is surely a freak incident and the porters will have scared it away by now.

**JIM.** I don't know...this whole thing has got me rattled. First, the robbery of the Queen's box, then that crazy Egyptian and his curse, now this. I'm usually a pretty cool character but this is just too much, even for my Texas nerves.

**MAX.** I don't think we can group the three together. One is clearly a theft, nothing more. We can investigate its loss and better prepare for any new attempts. Mr. Amsef, while sincere, is simply misguided. He's made his point and has gone on. The curse was just a last attempt to drive us away. Even, he doesn't believe in it. The hawk, while shocking, is nothing more than a bird of prey misdirected into an urban area. It is probably miles away by now.

**AGATHA.** Perhaps a short excursion to Cairo might help both you and Mrs. Holloway. You could fly up this morning and spend three or four days shopping and relaxing. They have some lovely hotels with a lively night scene.

**JIM.** That's a mighty good idea, and it just might get her back on her feed, so to speak. But are you sure this is a good time to be gone? I would hate to leave here when so much is going on. We are close to some major discoveries in the excavation. I just don't feel right about leaving now. I'd go nuts worrying about what was going on around here. Maybe I should just send her up there with Michelle or Ann?

**AGATHA.** I really couldn't say. Although Cairo is a cosmopolitan city it is still an Arab one and ruled by certain religious conventions. It can often be unsafe for an unaccompanied woman. Especially someone so young and modern in her views.

**SCOTTIE.** (*Jumping up:*) I could go. I mean, if that is what you'd like me to do. I could accompany Mrs. Holloway, and Michelle, of course. And, it would give me a chance to do that research at the Cairo Museum on the tomb funeral decorations we've been talking about.

**JIM.** You wouldn't mind leaving the dig?

**SCOTTIE.** Not really. I'm anxious to get into those archives and, to tell the truth, I could use the break. It's getting a little intense here.

**JIM.** Then it's settled. I'll talk to Cookie this evening. You can leave tomorrow.

Anne, here will get it all set up.

**MAX.** Right. Now that's sorted, I'd like to show you an inscription I've transcribed. Do you have a moment?

**JIM.** Lead the way, Chief.

*(They start Upstage Center. JIM turns back.)*

You coming Scottie?

**SCOTTIE.** Yes, certainly.

*(He starts off with them.)*

**AGATHA.** Mr. Holloway seems to place a great deal of trust in you. Have you been in his employ long?

**ANNE.** Twenty-eight years. He hired me right out of secretarial school. I've been with him since the early days, when he had next to nothing. I've watched him turn the company from bankruptcy to one of the largest oil firms in Texas and the U.S. I know he comes across as a rough edged country boy, but don't be fooled. He may not be well educated, but he's as sharp as a tack and an avid reader. I can't tell you how excited he was when this opportunity to work with you and Mr. Mallowan came up. He has been following news reports of this excavation for months and was dying to get involved.

**AGATHA.** Twenty eight years, so you have spent your entire career with Mr. Holloway. You must have seen some interesting dealings with his work in the Texas oil fields.

**ANNE.** Yes, I have. I could tell you many stories that would curl your hair. Texas, and America, for that matter, is a very new country. Independent men have every opportunity to rise to great heights if they work hard enough. Mr. Holloway is an inspiration to others. He could easily run for Governor or even state senator.

**AGATHA.** Is Miss Turner his first wife?

**ANNE.** No, he was married quite young to the sister of one of his business partners. It was never really a happy union and more of a business arrangement than a marriage. She failed to understand his ambition and hated Texas. She spent most of her time with a sister in Santa Fe. (*Leaning in:*) Later, we found out she was seeing someone. She divorced him two years ago.

**AGATHA.** Is that when he met Miss Turner?

**ANNE.** Not quite. Just over a year ago, Mr. Holloway and I went to New York for a trade meeting. One night he and a group of friends attended the theatre. They had arranged to meet several of the performers at a cocktail party after the performance.

**AGATHA.** And Cookie was one of the performers?

**ANNE.** Yes, although she was never really much of an actress. Skimpy costumes and big hats, if you know what I mean. It was shameful, really the way she pursued Mr. Holloway.

**AGATHA.** I don't really know her but she seems unsuited to his interests.

**ANNE.** She tries to appear educated, cultured, but she is nothing but a gold digger. She uses Mr. Holloway like a walking bank account. Why, she treats that nasty little poodle better than her husband. Just look at the way she insults him by flirting with your husband's assistant? Shameful! She has no friends, no class and no morals. It's just too bad that bird didn't do more damage, if you know what I mean.

**AGATHA.** I think I do. You have seen Mr. Holloway through some difficult times, haven't you? You've made several personal sacrifices for his benefit, haven't you?

**ANNE.** I wouldn't call it a sacrifice. Everything I have done was by choice. It has been an honor and a privilege to work for and with such a great man. I can't imagine any other life.

**AGATHA.** What a kind thing to say. Yet, you never married?

**ANNE.** No, there really has been no time for a life outside my relationship with Mr. Holloway. I live in an apartment in his home. Mr. Holloway, I mean my job with him, is my life, and always will be.

**AGATHA.** He is a very fortunate man to have so dedicated an employee. Much of his success might be attributed to your help and support.

**ANNE.** Thank you, you are very kind. But I've stayed too long. I must begin the travel arrangements if we want them to leave tomorrow.

**AGATHA.** Isn't that a bit premature? What if Mrs. Holloway chooses not to go?

**ANNE.** Oh, she'll go alright, and good riddance. We can all use one less distraction here.

Excuse me. *(She exits Upstage Center.)*

*(AGATHA watches her go, pauses, and then begins to work on her sketches. MICHELLE enters from Upstage Center with the dog on a leash. She crosses toward the outside door Right Center.)*

**AGATHA.** Michelle, could I speak with you for a moment, please?

**MICHELLE.** I was just about to take the dog for a short walk.

**AGATHA.** Surely you can sit for a moment. It's quite a warm day. I could call the waitress and order a cool drink for you?

**MICHELLE.** Oh, that's very kind, but I couldn't possibly. Cookie expects me back in just a few minutes. She wants me to wash her hair before her afternoon nap. She doesn't like to be kept waiting, you know.

*(MOHAMED walks into the room from dining room toward Upstage Center. AGATHA calls to him.)*

**AGATHA.** Excuse me, Mr. Tomel, could you please take this dog outside for just a moment? Miss Boothe will retrieve him in just a minute or two.

**MOHAMED.** This dog? Certainly, Mrs. Mallowan. I will do my best.

*(Exits outside Right Center with dog on leash.)*

**AGATHA.** Yes, I think I do know. This can't have been an easy time for you. I notice you have very little free time to yourself.

**MICHELLE.** That's true, but Cookie has a lot of things she needs done and, she doesn't like to be left alone. Mr. Holloway is so busy with the dig that she naturally wants companionship. I don't mind it really. It's not like I have anything else to do here.

**AGATHA.** Forgive me for asking, I don't want to pry, but weren't you also on stage in New York?

**MICHELLE.** Yes, I was. But that seems like a long time ago now.

**AGATHA.** Were you in shows with Mrs. Holloway?

**MICHELLE.** Yes, I was, in several, actually. We were in the chorus together. That's how we met, auditioning.

**AGATHA.** And you achieved some success, I heard.

**MICHELLE.** *(Softening and moving a bit toward center:)* Yes, I did. I had an opportunity to sing a short solo in one of the big chorus numbers and one of Mr. Ziegfeld's talent scouts saw me. The very next morning I was called to audition for Mr. Ziegfeld, himself!

**AGATHA.** How fascinating! What happened at the audition? Was it successful?

**MICHELLE.** *(Moves the center stage, reliving her "moment":)* It was wonderful! They brought me into this huge theater, backstage, you know. Then the piano player helped me warm up and suddenly the spotlight hit me and I was asked to sing. Well, it was so exciting! I couldn't see anyone in the audience, I was blinded by the spotlight, you know? Anyway, the song went great. I stood there for a minute...it was absolutely silent. Like no one was actually there. Then all of a sudden I hear someone clapping and a voice in the dark says "Thank you Miss Boothe, please leave your number with us and we will be in touch."

**AGATHA.** You must have been thrilled.

**MICHELLE.** I'll say! I went home and waited by the phone all that day and most of the next. I was sure he would call. I was so sure this was my big break. I called my parents, my boyfriend and my pals in New York. But he didn't call...ever.

**AGATHA.** That must have been very disappointing for you; to be so close after working so hard.

**MICHELLE.** It was. But, that's show business for you.

**AGATHA.** And yet you continued on the stage?

**MICHELLE.** Yes, for a while. Then I got offered this job with Cookie and it seemed like a good time to give up, to try something else.

**AGATHA.** Did Cookie meet Mr. Holloway while she was on stage?

**MICHELLE.** Yes. Cookie got a lucky break. She ended up getting the part I tried out for!

**AGATHA.** How interesting. That must have been very difficult.

**MICHELLE.** Yes, it was. *(Pause.)* But theatre is like that sometimes. She just got a lucky break.

**AGATHA.** And then she met Mr. Holloway and moved to Texas?

**MICHELLE.** Yes. She was happy, marrying a rich guy with a great big mansion and just about anything she wanted. She called me about six or seven months later and asked if I wanted a job as her "companion" as she called it.

**AGATHA.** And you took it?

**MICHELLE.** I figured, why not? I wasn't getting anywhere in New York and was just about broke. I thought it had to be better than pounding the pavement trying to get my break, you know?

**AGATHA.** Do you enjoy working for Mrs. Holloway? She seems a bit, I don't know, high strung.

**MICHELLE.** Yeah, that's a good way to put it! It's ok. It's a living and it's not like people are beating down my door with job offers. I'm sorry Mrs. Mallowan, I have to walk the dog and get back to Cookie. Excuse me.

*(She exits outside Right Center.)*

*(AGATHA watches her leave and resumes her work on her sketch-book. MOHAMED enters from Upstage Center looking frazzled and*

*exits to dining room. Several seconds pass as AGATHA works on her sketches. Then, BRYON NICOLAI enters from the main hotel door Right Center. He pauses, sees AGATHA, crosses to her and bows.)*

**BYRON.** A thousand pardons, madam. I am Byron Nicholai, perhaps you have heard of me?

**AGATHA.** Oh, Good day Mr. Nicholai. I am sorry I have not.

**BYRON.** Nicholai Antiquities and Treasures? I own perhaps the greatest antiquities gallery in all of Egypt. Most of my pieces are museum quality. All are authenticated and of superior condition.

**AGATHA.** Yes, of course. I have heard of you or rather your business dealings.

**BYRON.** And I have heard of you madam. In fact, I am one of your greatest fans. I own a first edition of *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* and *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. I would be deeply in your debt if you would consent to visit my humble shop and perhaps autograph those books.

**AGATHA.** I look forward to it sir.

**BYRON.** Madam is most kind. I only ask a moment of your time.

**AGATHA.** Yes, please do. May I order tea or coffee for you?

**BYRON.** No, please do not disturb yourself. I know you and your husband are employed in the excavations of the tomb of the Pharaoh Queen, Hatshepsut. She is most captivating, is she not? A woman, ruling Egypt herself without the benefit or name of a husband. Dresses as a man, rules with the skills of a man and buried in one of the most undisturbed tombs in the Valley of the King.

**AGATHA.** I share your high opinion of the lady. She was truly a woman before her time. But what brings you to here today?

**BYRON.** How perception madam is. Yes, I have come for another reason. As you know, I have a significant reputation in Egypt and, from time to time, am given the opportunity to purchase an exceptional piece. Something that could only be appreciated by the most educated of collectors. I have been fortunate enough to be offered

just such a piece. I know you and your husband would find it especially interesting.

*(He reaches into bag and pulls out a knife wrapped in velvet.)*

**AGATHA.** *(Reaching for the knife:)* It is exquisite.

**BYRON.** Do you recognize the markings?

**AGATHA.** Yes! The ones here, the cartouche of Tuthmose 11, her brother and husband.

**BYRON.** *(Pointing:)* And here, see those of her father, Tuthmose 1?

**AGATHA.** And here she is depicted wearing the shendyt kilt and beard of all Egypt's kings.

This is incredible. Could it possibly be genuine?

**BYRON.** Madam, I can assure you it is most genuine.

**AGATHA.** How did you acquire it? My husband has been researching this dynasty and Queen for several years and nothing has been written of its existence.

**BYRON.** I like to conduct my life much like one of your Catholic priests; I never reveal the details of my business dealings. It would suffer irreparable damage if I began now.

**AGATHA.** If this is genuine, and I don't doubt it is, it is has most likely been stolen from the excavations? That is theft. Since our dig is working under the auspices of the Egyptian government, this is state property. You cannot sell something that does not belong to you, Mr. Nicholai, you must know that.

**BYRON.** Forgive me Madame, who can talk of ownership? Ownership lines can blur considerably over sixteen hundred years. Does it belong to me, Egypt or even Hatsheput herself? One could argue that question for another sixteen centuries.

**AGATHA.** I fear we shall never reach an agreement on that question, but here is my husband and I know he would appreciate viewing the knife.

*(MAX enters from Upstage Center with JIM.)*

**AGATHA.** Max, Mr. Holloway this is Mr. Nicholai. He is an antiquities dealer and has brought a most interesting piece to show us.

**MAX.** Good day, sir. Yes, this is very interesting. Do you mind? *(He takes a magnifying glass from his bag.)* Look at this Jim.

*(JIM looks through the glass.)*

**JIM.** I'm new at this thing but is this what I think it is?

**MAX.** I think it is. It appears to be genuine and from the correct dynasty. Where did you acquire this piece Mr. Nicholai?

**BYRON.** As I shared with your lovely wife, I am unable to disclose that information.

**MAX.** Are you aware we hold exclusive rights to the Hatsheput tomb excavation site?

**BYRON.** I am most definitely aware of that fact. This piece has been in my source's possession for over a year. It has just recently become available to me. That would predate your agreement with our illustrious department of antiquities.

**MAX.** It is beautiful but it is my policy to only purchase pieces with verifiable providence. Since you are unable to provide that information I would have to regretfully decline your item.

**BYRON.** Such a pity. I am often confused by the standards of archeologists who scour the landscape for ancient treasures and call it legitimate, yet are offended when the poor of this nation attempt to supplement a meager living selling the same item. But that is another tale. I do have some lovely pieces of jewelry from several dynasties.

*(He unrolls another piece of velvet with necklaces, earrings and a bracelet.)*

**MAX.** Yes, these are quite nice, but we are only interested in legitimate items from Hatshepsut's tomb.

**BYRON.** Perhaps Mr. Holloway would be interested in one of these pieces for his lovely wife?

*(JIM is holding up a necklace and the bracelet. From offstage comes a woman's scream and MICHELLE comes running in. She is hysterical.)*

**MICHELLE.** Come quick Mr. Holloway. The dog, it's gone.

**JIM.** Gone, what do you mean gone?

**MICHELLE.** Taken! Picked up by that hawk!

*(JIM drops jewelry and heads out followed by MICHELLE, AGATHA, MAX, and later, BYRON.)*

*(Seconds later SALIA runs outside from kitchen area Downstage Left.)*

*(Moments pass. JIM and MICHELLE enter first followed by the rest. JIM is holding part of the leash.)*

**BYRON.** This is very bad. The Hawk is the omen of eminent death. Very bad, very bad indeed.

**MICHELLE.** I was walking Pookie when suddenly the hawk dove down and swooped him up. I had no warning at all. I chased it and realized I needed help. I am so sorry

**JIM.** I know it isn't your fault. Michelle. I just don't understand it. Curses, hawks grabbing poodles, I mean, what's going on here?

**BYRON.** What curse?

**JIM.** Never mind. I'm going upstairs. Someone has to tell Cookie and she's not gonna take it well.

**BYRON.** As no one is interested in my treasures, I will leave you as well. Good day.

*(He heads out taking his goods with him.)*

*(Lights fade to black.)*

*(Ten minute Intermission.)*

***End of Act I***

## ACT II

### Scene 1

*(Later that evening before dinner.)*

*(AGATHA and MAX enter from Upstage Center They pick up a drink from SALIA and cross to Upstage Left.)*

*(JIM enters behind them and crosses to the Mallowans.)*

**AGATHA.** How is Cookie?

**JIM.** It wasn't good, let me tell you. She pretty much went crazy; yelling about the dog, the heat, the hotel, the curse, you name it. I finally called the hotel manager and he sent a doctor up who gave her a shot. She slept all afternoon. She seems better now. She'll be down in a minute.

**MAX.** Will she be going to Cairo tomorrow as planned?

**JIM.** You bet. After this she needs it more than ever.

*(SCOTTIE enters from Upstage Center and joins the group.)*

**SCOTTIE.** Jim, Max are you sure you can spare me from the dig for the next two days? I mean, after all this, maybe it would be best if I stayed here and sent Cookie, and I mean Mrs. Holloway, and her maid up alone?

**JIM.** It's fine. It'll really help us out. We'll be able to concentrate and get some work done.

**MAX.** He's right. You can come back fresh next week. I'm sure we'll have plenty of work waiting for you.

**ATHIF.** *(Enters from main door; walks to the Mallowans, bows.)* Good evening Madame, Sirs. I was told there was some excitement here today. A hawk, I understand? Incredible, a nomadic bird of prey in a populated area. Astounding incident. I am thankful no one suffered any injuries. The ancient Egyptian's understood the character of the Hawk and its aggressive behavior. Perhaps that is why they chose it as a symbol of death.

**JIM.** How dare you? Who do you think you are, coming in here after yesterday? What? Is this all part of your “get out or the curse will get you” threat? I ought to use my boot to hustle you out of this hotel and down those steps. For two bits I could try knocking you straight into the Nile.

**ATHIF.** Temper, temper Mr. Holloway. This is a public building and, as many others, I have come to enjoy a lovely dinner. It is odd you should associate my appearance with the curse. Is that paranoia or guilt speaking?

**JIM.** That’s all I can take. You’re out of here mister.

*(JIM moves to push ATHIF.)*

**MAX.** *(Stopping him:)* No! Mr. Amsef perhaps you ought to join your dinner companions.

**ATHIF.** I will say good evening then Madame, sirs.

*(Exits to dining room.)*

**JIM.** The nerve of that guy! He really enjoyed that! I wouldn’t put it past him to have arranged the attack himself, although I’ve got no idea how.

**SCOTTIE.** He was all puffed up and gloating. He did it alright. Anything is possible here. I’ve seen Arabs train cobras to dance out of a basket, why not a hawk?

**AGATHA.** Interesting concept, certainly, but it is probably just an unfortunate coincidence. Here is Mrs. Holloway. Perhaps it would be best to change the subject to something more cheerful.

*(COOKIE enters with MICHELLE from Upstage Center. She’s been crying but looks great and is wearing the bracelet we saw MR. NICHOLAI bring in earlier.)*

**JIM.** Darlin’ you look prettier than a Dallas sunrise.

*(He takes two cocktails from SALIA.)*

**AGATHA.** How are you my dear? You’ve had a terribly upsetting afternoon.

**COOKIE.** I'm alright, I guess. *(To AGATHA in private:)* I hate this place, you know?

**AGATHA.** Yes, I am afraid you aren't suited to appreciate its unique charms.

**COOKIE.** The heat, the bugs, nothing to do. I can't even get a decent manicure. Look at my nails? Now a curse! A mummy's curse...a real mummy's curse! It's like something from a horror movie. I half expect to see Boris Karloff, you know?

**AGATHA.** Who? What? Oh, yes, certainly.

*(JIM approaches COOKIE and AGATHA. He carries a cocktail in his hand for COOKIE.)*

**COOKIE.** Oh, thank you darling. I love it!

*(Throws her arms around JIM.)*

**JIM.** I'm glad, Love what? The cocktail?

**COOKIE.** This bracelet! It's fabulous. I love it. So exotic, so intricate so expensive looking. It is absolutely perfect.

**JIM.** That's nice honey but I don't know what you are talking about.

**COOKIE.** Didn't you buy this bracelet for me? It was on my bed this afternoon right after Pookie died. I thought you must have put it there to make me feel better.

**JIM.** No Honey, I didn't. But it is nice. Looks real expensive.

**AGATHA.** Yes it is. In fact, I think I've seen it before; this afternoon. Max, isn't this one of the pieces Mr. Nicholai showed us today?

**MAX.** I believe you are right. It certainly looks like one of his items.

**JIM.** Hey! It is! It was one of the pieces I was looking at. Michelle do you know anything about this?

**MICHELLE.** Nothing. I helped Cookie into the bath and when I returned to her room the bracelet was laying on her bed. I thought it was a gift from you, just as she did.

**JIM.** Well someone put it there.

**MAX.** May I see it Mrs. Holloway?

**COOKIE.** *(Trying to get it off:)* Yeah, sure. *(She struggles to slide it down her arm.)* Oh, that's tight. Really tight. I can't get it to budge. Jim, it hurts! It burns! Help me!  
Oh, my god, it's burning! Get it off! Get it off!

*(Everyone rushes to help her.)*

**JIM.** I can't get it to move. It's stuck!

**AGATHA.** Quick! Michelle gets some warm water from the kitchen...hurry!

*(MICHELLE exits Center Left.)*

**COOKIE.** *(Moaning in pain:)* It's burning! Get it off me!

*(She screams and drops to the floor.)*

**MICHELLE.** *(Returning:)* Here's the water!

**AGATHA.** Pour it directly on the bracelet. Yes, right there. Michelle, get the hotel manager to call the doctor, immediately!

*(MICHELLE runs off Center Left.)*

**JIM.** She's passed out.

**MAX.** At least we've got the bracelet off. Let's get her up to her room. Scottie, can you help me?

*(SCOTTIE jumps up. They carry her upstairs.)*

**JIM.** What's going on here?

**AGATHA.** I don't know, but I intend to find out.

*(They follow upstairs.)*

*(Slow fade.)*

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**Scene 2**

*(One hour later.)*

*(JIM, AGATHA, MAX, and SCOTTIE come downstairs from Upstage Center. Everyone looks exhausted.)*

*(MAX is holding the bracelet.)*

**JIM.** Are you sure? Do you really think it was acid?

**AGATHA.** Absolutely. Whoever left that bracelet had a plan; a plan to burn Mrs. Holloway, perhaps kill her.

**JIM.** But how?

**AGATHA.** The bracelet was soaked in caustic acid. That acid is harmless until activated by heat or water. They placed it on Mrs. Holloway's bed knowing her love of jewelry and that she couldn't resist wearing it. With this heat and her nervous condition from the death of her pet, she was guaranteed to heat up the acid, perhaps sweat enough to trigger the chemical. It was a sure thing, the only variable was how long it would take for the chemical reaction to kick in.

**JIM.** Do you actually think they planned to kill Cookie? But why?

**AGATHA.** Assuredly. We were fortunate the hotel had hot water readily available. Things would have been much worse if they hadn't I have no doubt she would have died here, in the lobby, within minutes.

**JIM.** But why? Who would want Cookie dead?

**SCOTTIE.** Queen Hatshepsut's curse!

**MAX.** Don't be ridiculous. I've seen this bracelet. It was in the collection of treasures Mr. Nicholai showed us this afternoon. Remember, Jim? Agatha?

**JIM.** I remember. I had it in my hand when the dog was killed. I dropped it and ran outside. I don't remember what happened to it after that.

**AGATHA.** Actually everyone ran outside. In the confusion anyone could have taken the bracelet. It is small enough to slip into a

pocket or pocketbook. Next you soak it, place it in your wife's room and wait.

**JIM.** I can't understand why anyone would want to hurt Cookie. She can be a little hard to take at times, but she's young and sweet.

**AGATHA.** Perhaps it isn't about Mrs. Holloway at all.

**MAX.** What do you mean?

**AGATHA.** This may all be a trick, a ploy to stop the excavation.

**JIM.** I don't get it. You mean something like you write about in your books?

**AGATHA.** Let me just put the pieces together. First, Mr. Amsef comes to the hotel and speaks passionately about abandoning the excavation. Failing in that, he threatens an ancient curse. Shortly afterward Cookie is burned.

**SCOTTIE.** And don't forget the hawk attacking Mrs. Holloway and then the dog.

**AGATHA.** I think the hawk was simply serendipitous. No one could either control or predict that attack.

**MAX.** And let's not forget the counterfeit jewel cask. Perhaps these events were designed to distract us. It is possible more than one piece has been stolen. This may have been going on for a long time. After all, we've been so busy lately with the new excavations we have spent little or no time with those pieces found earlier in the dig. First thing tomorrow we'll begin a detailed look at each artifact. Sealed windows and only three keys; if we can discover how they gained entrance, maybe we can find the thief. Agatha, we'll need all of your sketch books.

*(AGATHA nods in agreement.)*

**SCOTTIE.** Do you still want me to take Mrs. Holloway to Cairo tomorrow? I hate to be away when you might need me most.

**MAX.** We'll be able to begin without your help, although I'd appreciate your returning as soon as possible.

**JIM.** There'll be no keeping Cookie here after this. I must have been loco to bring her along in the first place. I should have followed my guts. A girl like her just isn't suited to a place like Egypt. The sooner I get her home the better. Besides, I want her to see a good doctor about that burn.

**AGATHA.** I think that is a wise decision. Cairo is hardly London or New York, but the hotels are first class and they have some excellent English trained physicians.

**SCOTTIE.** I could actually help the excavation while I was there. I could bring up a few of the better pieces and have them examined by the antiquities department at the Cairo Museum. That would save your time and you could devote yourselves to the excavations.

**MAX.** I'll give that some thought.

**ANNE.** *(Comes down from Upstage Center and crosses to them.)* Mr. Holloway.

**JIM.** How is she? What did the hotel doctor say?

**ANNE.** The burn is not deep. He's administered a dose of morphea and she should sleep through the night. I've asked the hotel manager to book you another room for the evening. I've also arranged for the flight tomorrow and the hotel. Thomas Cooke's office in Cairo has located a doctor who will meet Mrs. Holloway at the hotel shortly after she arrives. Cunard has a ship departing from Alexandria next Wednesday for Dover. Would you like me to book a suite for Mrs. Holloway and Michelle?

**JIM.** One step ahead of the game as usual. You are amazing, Anne. I don't know what I would do without you. *(To the others:)* Isn't she great? I like the idea of Cookie spending some time in London. She can get a flight to New York from there, see a few shows, visit some friends then head back to the ranch.

**ANNE.** I've moved your clothes to the other room. Would you like anything else from the suite?

**JIM.** No, thanks it is only for the one night. I can rough it.

**ANNE.** I'll return with the key in just a few minutes.

*(They exit Upstage Center.)*

**AGATHA.** What an extraordinary woman.

**JIM.** Isn't she? I really don't know how I could run my business or life, even, without her. You know, in many ways, she made me the man I am today. She gave me a loan back in '28 that kept me afloat. I owe a lot to her.

**AGATHA.** Yes, I spoke with her earlier today. She has devoted a large portion of her life to your business. A very dedicated employee indeed.

*(Scream comes from upstairs. MICHELLE runs to the center. She is wearing a nightgown.)*

**MICHELLE.** Come quick! Mr. Holloway! Murder!

*(All run toward the rooms upstairs. MICHELLE comes running down.)*

**MICHELLE.** She's dead! Murdered!

**JIM.** Who? Not Cookie?

**MICHELLE.** Cookie! Stabbed! Stabbed in her bed! Blood everywhere!

**JIM.** Oh, My God!

*(He heads upstairs.)*

**AGATHA.** *(Putting her arm around her and moving her to the chairs:)* Michelle, let me help you. Sit here.

**ANNE.** Certainly.

*(She crosses to the left.)*

**MICHELLE.** I can't believe it. How could this happen?

**AGATHA.** Take a breath; it will help you to calm down. Now, slowly, tell me what you saw and the order in which it happened.

**MICHELLE.** I found her! I was the one to come in and find her like that!

**AGATHA.** Thank you Miss Ellery. Do you feel strong enough to continue?

(MICHELLE *nods.*)

**AGATHA.** When did you leave Mrs. Holloway's bedroom?

**MICHELLE.** I'm not sure of the time, exactly. The doctor gave Cookie a shot, which put her to sleep almost immediately. He stayed a few minutes more and checked her breathing and pulse. Then he gathered his things and left. I stayed to pick up her evening clothes and jewelry. She was sleeping so peacefully, I thought it was safe to go to my room. I'm so sorry. I should have stayed with her all night. I asked Mr. Holloway if he wanted me to stay up with her. I would have stayed. I could have slept in the lounge chair. I would have done it. I would have done anything for Cookie. It's my fault she was killed! I left her when she needed me most. (*She begins to cry.*)

**AGATHA.** Michelle, no one could have predicted this. You did nothing wrong. I am sure you were a dedicated friend and companion to Mrs. Holloway. What time do you think you finally left her to go to your room?

**MICHELLE.** Perhaps half an hour ago, maybe 45 minutes. I went to my room, took a short bath and prepared for bed. I had just fallen asleep when I heard something that awakened me.

**ANNE.** What? What did you hear?

**MICHELLE.** I don't know. It was a sharp, fast sound, like something falling.

**AGATHA.** Falling and breaking? Like glass?

**MICHELLE.** No just falling. A thud, like something dropping to the floor. I put on my robe and went next door to check on Mrs. Holloway. I thought maybe she had dropped something from the bedside table. I don't know.

**AGATHA.** Go on. Was the door open or closed when you reached Mrs. Holloway's room?

**MICHELLE.** Closed. It was closed, but not locked.

**AGATHA.** Who has a key?

**MICHELLE.** Mr. and Mrs. Holloway and me.

**AGATHA.** Did you lock the room when you went to your bedroom?

**MICHELLE.** Yes! Maybe! I don't know! There were so many people in and out after the accident with the bracelet. Hotel personnel, the doctor, you were in several times Miss Ellery.

**AGATHA.** Yes. Now, what did you see when you entered the room. Concentrate, tell me everything you can remember, sights, sounds smells, everything.

**MICHELLE.** I knocked and called for Mr. Holloway.

**ANNE.** Why did you do that?

**MICHELLE.** I thought he may have gone into the room. That he may have made the noise and I didn't want to barge into the room if he was there, after all.

**AGATHA.** Go on. Were the lights on or off?

**MICHELLE.** Off. I opened the door and walked to her bed. She looked asleep and I thought everything was fine. I couldn't see anything wrong and was going to leave when I found the statue on the floor. I reached down to pick it up and saw the blood.

**AGATHA.** What statue?

**MICHELLE.** The Egyptian one. The statue of a goddess, or woman. I don't know. It was laying on the rug on the right side of the bed. I picked it up and was putting it on the night side table when I saw the blood. There was Mrs. Holloway laying there with blood all over and a knife in her chest. The note was next to her pillow. I picked it up and read about the curse! I saw blood everywhere. I knew she was dead; there was so much blood she couldn't have been alive. I tried to move, to get help but I felt frozen. Someone was screaming. I guess it must have been me. I dropped the note and ran to get help.

**AGATHA.** You said you read the note. Did you take it into the hall or turn on the night side lamp?

**MICHELLE.** No, why?

**AGATHA.** You said earlier that the room was dark. How were you able to read a hand written note?

**MICHELLE.** It wasn't totally dark. I had left a light on in the bathroom and had the door slightly open. That gave me enough light to read by.

**AGATHA.** I see. Can you remember what the note said?

**MICHELLE.** I don't remember exactly. It said something about the queen's curse and that you were all warned to stop.

**AGATHA.** Did you see any signs of someone other than yourself, having been in the room?

**MICHELLE.** What do you mean?

**AGATHA.** Something moved; furniture out of place or a scent in the air?

**MICHELLE.** No, nothing. Just that horrible sight on the bed. Poor Cookie.

*(MAX enters. MAX is carrying the note which he holds with a handkerchief.)*

**MAX.** She's dead.

*(ANNE helps MICHELLE to chair.)*

Maybe just a short time; her body is still warm. This is the note. *(Hands it to AGATHA.)*

**AGATHA.** Hotel stationary; how interesting. Basic black ink, printed. Nothing unique or identifying about that. "You were warned to stop. Now suffer the Queen's curse." How very melodramatic! Anonymous, of course.

**SCOTTIE.** *(Entering:)* Blood. So much blood.

*(ANNE seats him.)*

**ANNE.** You're very pale. Sit down.

**AGATHA.** What weapon was used?

**MAX.** It appears to be a long, slim, dagger. I can't be sure but I think it is the ceremonial knife Mr. Nicholai tried to sell us.

**ANNE.** But he took it with him.

**AGATHA.** Has anyone contacted the authorities? Are police available?

**MAX.** Not really. There are a few civil officials, but nothing like a public or even state police force. The hotel manager has notified the government in Cairo and he thinks they will want the body transferred up there. But for now, we're on our own.

**ANNE.** Amazing, no police. It's as though we have stepped away from civilization and back into the 18th dynasty. Did anyone call for the doctor?

**SCOTTIE.** Why? She's dead, isn't she? No one could lose that much blood and still be alive.

**MAX.** We'll need the doctor's official report. His description of the body and the cause of death. With or without the proper authorities, the formalities of a murder investigation must be followed. Otherwise, we'd be facing a bureaucratic nightmare when we finally arrive in Cairo. I think the thing to do is record the scene, photograph the room and collect written statements from everyone who has had access to Mrs. Holloway since dinner last evening. Agatha, I'd like you to look at the scene. You have an eye for details that others often overlook.

**AGATHA.** Certainly. How is Mr. Holloway?

**MAX.** He's quite upset as you can imagine.

**ANNE.** I should go to him. He'll need me.

*(She rises and exits Upstage Center.)*

**MAX.** Yes, of course. I've asked him not to disturb the body, touch or move anything in the room.

**AGATHA.** I'll go up with you as well. Scottie: Would you wait here for the doctor? Mr. Holloway may need assistance.

*(MAX goes upstairs.)*

**SCOTTIE.** You bet! There is no way I want to look on that sight again.

*(He sits.)*

**MICHELLE.** Cookie murdered! Who is going to be next? I'm telling you it won't be me. I'm getting out of here and back to civilization tomorrow.

*(Ten minute intermission.)*

***End of Act II***

## ACT III

### Scene 1

*(The following morning.)*

*(Hotel Lobby.)*

*(MOHAMED is visiting with the EGYPTIAN ARMY OFFICER and SALIA. The OFFICER gives telegrams to MAX.)*

**MOHAMED.** Never has this happened in our hotel, never in an establishment like the Cataract. Our guests are royalty, government leaders even celebrities. People come from all over the world and expect a premiere hotel. A murder at the Cataract Hotel, I cannot take it in!

**OFFICER.** Will I be meeting the victim's husband here? I have the reports that were requested.

**MOHAMED.** Yes. Salia, please notify Mr. Holloway and the Mallowans of the officer's arrival.

**SALIA.** Yes sir.

*(She exits Upstage Center.)*

**MOHAMED.** When do you expect the body to be removed? Naturally I will assist the authorities with the investigation, but you must understand my desire to return to the normal operations of this hotel. Although I have attempted to keep the disruption at a minimum, this news will spread throughout the hotel and I am afraid guests will begin to leave.

**OFFICER.** My orders are unclear at this time. I have been told to assist in the removal and to gather whatever information I can before accompanying the coffin to Cairo. The Chief of Police in Cairo has asked the Mallowans to direct the investigation.

**MOHAMED.** Ah, the famous mystery writer will use her considerable talents. I pray to Allah she will have the answers before the day is done.

*(AGATHA, MAX, JIM, and SCOTTIE enter from Upstage Center.)*

**MOHAMED.** Madame, how is the discovery going? I am most anxious this be cleared up with great discretion, as I am sure you are as well.

**AGATHA.** I've made some inquiries both this morning and last evening. *(To OFFICER:)* Were you able to acquire any of the information I requested last evening?

**OFFICER.** Yes, Madame. Two came this morning and we are expecting the other later today.

*(Hands her several telegrams.)*

**AGATHA.** *(Opening and scanning the telegrams:)* Max, look at this.

*(He joins her.)*

**MAX.** How curious. I didn't expect this.

**AGATHA.** Both my husband and I were intrigued when Mr. Nicolai arrived trying to sell us a genuine artifact from Hatshepsut's tomb. As you know, we are the only group to have entered the sealed tomb. Everything we have located is upstairs, locked in our examination room. Yet, we had never seen the dagger before. How could Mr. Nicholai gain possession of an artifact when he wasn't involved with the dig? There are only two ways for this to occur. Could Mr. Nicholai have discovered the artifact in the tomb after our crew had left the dig? That, of course, was impossible. We have reliable, experienced guards around the excavation site. They would never have let that go on undetected.

The other option is someone in our actual crew discovered the dagger, smuggled it out of the tomb undetected and sold or gave it to Mr. Nicholai.

**JIM.** What do you mean? One of us is a thief?

**MAX.** It appears that way.

**JIM.** But who?

**SCOTTIE.** That tall digger, the dragoman. He is in charge of the buckets of soil as they are carried outside. He could have spotted something, covered it in the bucket, taken it out and hidden it in his

robes or the sand. And, he hasn't been to work since last week. He could have sold it to Nicholai and taken off.

**MAX.** Interesting. You are correct; he hasn't reported to work in over a week. Did you notice that Jim?

**JIM.** Hey, you might have something there. He was that tall drink of water with the grey turban, right?

**AGATHA.** I'll have the officer put out some inquiries this morning. He lives in Aswan. It should be possible to find him or one of his relatives. Good idea, Scottie. Mr. Nicholai may be much more difficult to find. I suspected he might have something to do with this affair and sent for him last night. He was gone; his home empty and in disarray. He clearly left in a hurry. This (*Holds up paper*) telegram delivered by the officer here, tells me he left Alexandria this morning probably by ship. They were unable to trace the vessel.

**JIM.** I'm confused. What does this have to do with Cookie? She was nuts about that curse, the hawk, the dog the bracelet. She was terrified it was coming true and blamed me for funding the dig and bringing her here. Oh God, tell me that's impossible.

**MAX.** Of course, it is. All tombs were inscribed with such curses two thousand years ago as a threat to tomb robbers. Even the priests knew it was a futile attempt. No, there is no curse.

**JIM.** That visit from Mr. Amseth made it sound real enough to me.

**MAX.** As he hoped it would.

**AGATHA.** Although the gentleman was quite intense, he was sincerely concerned about his national treasures. I am convinced he had nothing to do with the attempts on your wife.

**JIM.** Well who then?

**AGATHA.** That is what we need to discover. Someone hated Mrs. Holloway, enough to attempt murder a second time when the first failed. I think the answer lies not in Egypt, but in Cookie's former life, in New York City. How long did you know Mrs. Holloway before your marriage?

**JIM.** Not long. Maybe a month. That gal swept me off my feet. I know a little about the theatre and what a cut throat business it is. I expect she may have done some things to get ahead, I'd rather not know about. I didn't ask about her past, I just planned our future. I thought she was happy to give it all up and live a life of luxury with me.

**AGATHA.** Was she living with anyone before you married; a roommate or relative?

**JIM.** About three months before I met her she had just gotten that big new part. It gave her enough money to move into an apartment on West 55th. Before that, she had been living with another actress. I never got the details. Cookie told me her parents died in the late 20s. She has an aunt and a couple of cousins in Los Angeles, but I've never met them.

**AGATHA.** We need to look at several elements here. Mrs. Holloway died last night shortly after the doctor left her room. The murderer entered through a door that may have been left unlocked, killed Mrs. Holloway and was able to leave unseen.

**MAX.** The only clue was a noise the maid heard. It turned out to be a statue of Hatshepsut found by her bedside, knocked to the floor. That statue was one of the pieces we discovered and had stored in the excavation room just down the hall from the Holloway's suite.

**SCOTTIE.** The murdered must have left it there. Did anyone check for fingerprints?

**AGATHA.** Yes. The prints were those of Michelle, the maid. That was to be expected as she had picked it off the floor and replaced it on the nightstand. There were no others.

**JIM.** I can't get the sight of her lying there in that pink silk nightgown covered in blood. Do you think she suffered?

**AGATHA.** Not a bit. The doctor had recently given her a sedative to bring on sleep. I imagine she felt nothing. The murderer was counting on that.

**MAX.** Which means the murderer must have seen the doctor arrive and then leave.

**AGATHA.** True, but that doesn't help us in identifying the killer. He or she could have been anywhere in the hotel; upstairs, here in the lobby, even watching the front steps from one of the upstairs windows.

*(ANNE enters from Upstage Center. She is carrying a folder full of papers.)*

**ANNE.** Excuse me Mr. Holloway; I have made the arrangements for the body to be transported from Aswan to Cairo once it is released. I have also booked a seat on the same train for you and will hear back from the airlines this afternoon to set your flight home.

**JIM.** Anne, what would I do without you?

**AGATHA.** Miss Ellery, your room is directly across the hall from the Holloway's is it not?

**ANNE.** Not quite. I am across and to the left.

**AGATHA.** Where were you after the doctor arrived to treat Mrs. Holloway?

**ANNE.** I was in my room putting the final touches on Mrs. Holloway's travel arrangements to Cairo. I went to bed shortly afterward.

**AGATHA.** Did you hear anything from Mrs. Holloway's room after the doctor left?

**ANNE.** Nothing. It had been a difficult day and I took a valarium to sleep.

**AGATHA.** Not the drop of the statue onto the carpet?

**ANNE.** Nothing until the maid screamed. I threw on my dressing gown and went into the hallway.

**AGATHA.** I see. You didn't care for Mrs. Holloway did you, Miss Ellery?

**ANNE.** I beg your pardon?

**JIM.** Be honest, Anne. It doesn't matter anymore.

**ANNE.** No, I didn't. I'm sorry Mr. Holloway, but I found her spoiled, selfish and common.

**JIM.** Yes, she probably was all of those things. At first the glamour of her stage personality was dazzling and very, very fun. Lately, well, not so much so.

**AGATHA.** That may be a common sentiment. I've noticed her maid, Michelle, seems less than a devoted servant.

**JIM.** I don't understand that; Cookie told me they were friends on Broadway. They worked their way up the ladder together from chorus girls. When we married and Cookie offered her the job Michelle seemed grateful for the money and the chance to travel.

**AGATHA.** Murders are committed for money, love, hate or envy. We need to discover the motive to find the criminal.

**JIM.** Cookie didn't have any money of her own. Of course, when I died she'd be a very rich woman.

**AGATHA.** Don't discount blackmail. It is possible Cookie saw or knew something that put her in harm's way. Max and I must look at a few additional areas and make more inquiries. Might we all meet here, in the lobby, in one hour's time?

**ALL.** Certainly, sure, you bet.

**AGATHA.** Mr. Tomel, could you contact these additional guests and ask them to meet us here as well?

*(She hands him a list.)*

**MOHAMED.** Certainly Madame.

*(He leaves to use the house phone.)*

**AGATHA.** All of you please stay in your rooms with the doors locked or in the company of two or more people until we meet. Until someone is brought to justice, no one is safe.

I will station the officer here to make sure no one leaves the hotel.

*(She exits with MAX.)*

*(Left Center: Slow fade as the others look at each other in shock and suspicion.)*

**Scene 2**

*(The lobby.)*

*(One hour later.)*

*(The room has been arranged for this final meeting. A long table is set up Downstage Right. The table is covered with a sheet but is obviously holding several items of different sizes. Chairs have been set up Downstage Left in a semi circle. AGATHA motions the actors into them as they arrive downstairs.)*

*(The guests begin to enter first JIM, ANNE, SCOTTIE, then MOHAMED, SALIA, and the OFFICER.)*

**AGATHA.** Thank you all for joining me. I know this is a difficult time but I think we may be able to come to a satisfactory resolution. Where is Michelle? *(Others turn and look.)* Mr. Tomel, did you contact Mrs. Holloway's maid about this meeting?

**MOHAMED.** Assuredly, Madame. I attempted to alert her, but I received no answer to my knocking. Shall I ask this gentleman *(Indicates ARMY OFFICER:)* to escort the young lady to the lobby?

**AGATHA.** Yes, if you please, sir.

*(He exits Upstage Center.)*

**MAX.** *(Enters from outside.)* I have it, Agatha.

**AGATHA.** *(Looks at the paper, folds it and places it on the table.)* Excellent! My husband and I have been in contact with officials in Cairo and in America. This information is the final piece of the puzzle. The events of the last few days have been disturbing and dangerous. Threats, both verbal and physical, have been received. Stolen artifacts, mummy's curses, poisoned bracelets and raptor attacks put everyone on edge and eventually culminated in murder. In order to discover the murderer, one must first dissect the crime. Why was the victim killed? Who benefited most by her murder? We must know why, to discover who. The poisoned bracelet leads directly to the actual murder that night. Yet, how did the curse, hawk attack and artifacts fit into the plan?

*(OFFICER returns from upstairs. He crosses to AGATHA.)*

**OFFICER.** (*Visibly shaken:*) Forgive me, Madame, I found the young lady in her room. She is dead. I found her lying on the floor, strangled with a woven scarf. She appears to have been dead many hours, perhaps since last evening.

*(Others reacts i.e.: "How, Why, Oh my God, Not another.")*

**AGATHA.** (*Crossing Downstage Left:*) I was afraid this might happen. I had hoped to have finished my investigation before anyone else suffered. (*Turning in to group:*) These murders will stop now!

**ANNE.** It's crazy. Why would anyone want Michelle dead? A maid?

**AGATHA.** It wasn't about Michelle. From the beginning I erroneously believed the crime centered on Mrs. Holloway. Yet, clearly she had nothing to do with the stolen and substituted artifacts. Was it possible two separate crimes were being committed and they simply intersected last night? Why Mrs. Holloway? Did she witness or know something about the missing artifacts? Was she killed to stop her from telling what she knew? I had lots of questions but no answers. That's where Max came in.

**MAX.** Thank you my dear. It is our belief murder was not the main objective, robbery was.

Hatshepsut's tomb is the first undisturbed royal burial site since Carter's discovery of Tutankhamen's in 1922. Hatshepsut was a unique ruler, perhaps one of the greatest women leaders of all time. Anything pertaining to her life or death would be practically priceless. Mr. Holloway and I had discussed the security of this dig several times before and during the excavation. We hired reliable guards to patrol the dig 24 hours a day. We, personally, transported artifacts to our hotel lab. The room itself was prepared with sealed windows and new locks on the doors. Only three keys were made for those doors. Those keys were given to Mr. Holloway, Scottie and me. The hotel manager, Mr. Tomel. didn't even have a copy. And yet, even with those precautions, Mr. Nicholai obtained a piece from the excavation that none of us had ever seen.

**JIM.** And don't forget that counterfeit jewel box you and the misses discovered in our lab.

**AGATHA.** Exactly. Someone had access not only to the excavation site but also our lab. One could presume the artifact was smuggled out of the dig by one of the workers and later sold to Mr. Nicholai, yet it seems impossible for one or even two workers to execute such a plan with so many of us actively involved in the dig. I was perplexed. Were the two thefts related? Did the same person who masterminded the theft of the dagger directly from the excavation also substitute the clever forgery? And finally, how did they gain access to the examination rooms?

**JIM.** I'm stumped. I thought there was no way anyone but us could get in there.

**AGATHA.** Of course Max and I were the first to be taken off the list of possible suspects in the thefts. Mr. Holloway was also beyond reproach and gained nothing by the forgeries or theft. That left you, Scottie.

**SCOTTIE.** *(Shocked, he quickly turns toward them slightly rising from his chair:)* Me? You suspected me?

**AGATHA.** Yes, but only for a moment. Your credentials and references are impeccable. You came to us with glowing recommendations from influential members of the international archaeology community.

*(SCOTTIE falls back down into his seat, very much relieved.)*

**MAX.** And so, as our friend Mr. Holloway might say, that left you off the hook.

**AGATHA.** We had reached a dead end and decided to look in an entirely different direction.

**MAX.** It was time to discover who killed Mrs. Holloway. Who would have benefited from her death?

**AGATHA.** In order to answer those questions it was necessary to discover who disliked, possibly hated Mrs. Holloway. We came up with three possibilities.

**JIM.** Three! Three people who wanted Cookie dead?

**AGATHA.** We began with you, Mr. Holloway.

**JIM.** (*Rises.*) What? Me?

**AGATHA.** Yes. Although we have seen you as a most generous and amiable husband, it has not escaped our attention that your wife was often unhappy and verbally abusive. She disliked Egypt and hated the entire excavation experience. She demanded a great deal of emotional and financial support. Mrs. Holloway was beautiful but, as you said yourself, she could be difficult. A man in your position, an industry and civic leader, is not accustomed to being treated with that lack of respect. The stress of the last few days coupled with the desert heat could snap the composure of the most stoic of individuals.

**JIM.** Okay, part of what you say is true, but I didn't kill Cookie. I could never kill anyone, much less her. I felt sorry for her. She was so unhappy and I couldn't please her, nothing I did could.

**AGATHA.** Precisely. That is why we eliminated you and focused on Miss Ellery.

**ANNE.** Me? You must be joking!

**AGATHA.** Why not you? You, yourself called her a "gold digger." You told me she had no class and no morals.

**ANNE.** (*Angrily rising:*) A lady would not repeat that!

**AGATHA.** Excuse me, but a lady should not have said it! It was clear you disliked, even hated Mrs. Holloway; that you saw her as an unsuitable wife for such an important man. It was obvious to me that you were more than a dedicated employee. You had given the bulk of your adult life to a man you clearly admired, perhaps loved. You saw him make two mistakes in marriage. You had made yourself the bedrock of his life and yet he was unable to realize that. It is not difficult to imagine the anger you must have felt as you watched Mrs. Holloway ignore her husband and shamelessly flirt with Mr. Mitchell. You must have been absolutely seething.

**ANNE.** You're right, I did hate her! I hated the way she spoke to Mr. Holloway, the way she demanded money, attention and the spotlight. She could never make him happy. Anyone could see she was preparing to leave him and run off to Cairo with Mr. Mitchell like some alley cat! Yes, I hated her, but I didn't kill her.

*(She drops to her seat to crying in anger and frustration.)*

**AGATHA.** Perhaps not. But, you, yourself, said you were alone in your bedroom when Mrs. Holloway was killed. That leaves you with an unverifiable alibi.

**ANNE.** I was alone in my room. I am a highly respected woman and my word should be adequate alibi. I demand an apology.

**JIM.** Please, don't put Anne through any more of this questioning. I trust her with my business and my life. If she says she had nothing to do with this mess then I believe her.

*(He hands her his handkerchief and sits near her.)*

**ANNE.** Thank you so much Mr. Holloway.

**AGATHA.** If we are wrong I will certainly beg your apology. This is a murder investigation and we must question anyone who may have the least reason to want Mrs. Holloway dead.

**MAX.** Finally we came to Mrs. Holloway's maid, Michelle. After eliminating the three of you, she seems the logical choice. We began with a cable to New York City and a friend of Agatha's who is associated with the theatre. This is the response to that wire.

**AGATHA.** Mr. Holloway, you told me your wife and Michelle had been friends in New York and had worked their way up in the musical theatre. You alluded to an event that gave a plumb part to Cookie, a part that was to have gone to Michelle, a part that would have made Michelle a star, not Cookie. You said she seemed distracted and depressed afterward and was happy to accept your wife's offer of a job.

**JIM.** Yes, that is what Cookie told me. Michelle seemed happy enough working for us.

**AGATHA.** I believe you are quite wrong there. Michelle was not happy. According to my friend, Michelle's star was on the rise. She had been spotted by the producer, Mr. Ziegfeld and was to have been featured in his new review. This show meant a great deal to her. Not only would she be successful in a field she had worked hard at for years, but the money would allow her to marry her long

time boyfriend, a struggling graduate student. When the job fell through, so did her future.

**JIM.** I didn't know that. No one told me anything about that.

**AGATHA.** Of course they didn't. Cookie was unlikely to admit to her shabby treatment of a good friend and Michelle didn't want anyone to know her true feelings.

**JIM.** Since when is getting a part in a musical a reason for murder?

**AGATHA.** It goes much deeper than that. Your wife manipulated the circumstances. She presented false information to the producer which implicated Michelle in an attempted robbery in the theatre. The management allowed Michelle to escape jail by backing out of the show. Cookie made sure the information spread throughout Broadway and Michelle never worked again. Remember when I asked you if your wife had had a roommate in New York?

**JIM.** Yes, I remember. I told you she lived with another actress for a while before we met. Wait...was that Michelle?

**AGATHA.** It was. Once Mrs. Holloway received her new part and new salary, she moved out of the small apartment they shared and left Michelle destitute. She literally lost everything. A month later she attempted suicide.

**JIM.** Oh my God! I had no idea.

**AGATHA.** Only three people knew about it; Michelle, Mrs. Holloway and her fiancé. You thought she was happy to accept your wife's offer of employment. Can you imagine the anger, hatred and resentment she felt toward your wife? She must have kept these emotions simmering as she plotted revenge both for her lost career and dreams of a future with her young man.

**JIM.** But how could she have arranged all of this? It is impossible.

**AGATHA.** Certainly difficult, but not impossible Michelle didn't work alone, she had an accomplice. It was her accomplice who supplied the poisoned bracelet. Michelle simply left it on the bed when she was laying out Mrs. Holloway's evening clothes. That same accomplice supplied the sacrificial dagger used to kill Mrs. Holloway. It was Michelle who did the actual stabbing. Mrs. Hol-

loway had been heavily sedated by the doctor making it all but impossible for Mrs. Holloway to defend herself against the attack. Her considerable acting skills came in handy as she feigned shock at the discovered death, moments later.

**ANNE.** But if Michelle killed Cookie, who killed Michelle?

**MAX.** We're coming to that. This crime wasn't just about revenge. It was about financial gain. It was about starting a new life; a life of wealth and ease for two people who had lived in poverty all their lives.

**AGATHA.** She relied on her accomplice for that. And who better to provide for her than her fiancé, you, Mr. Mitchell.

**SCOTTIE.** You must be crazy. I hardly spoke to the girl; ask anyone.

**MAX.** That's correct. It was part of your well rehearsed plan. You had plenty of time to develop it; over a year in fact. Michelle did her part in Texas playing the grateful devoted servant. You needed a project that would give you access to great wealth. I imagine at first you thought of killing Mr. Holloway, allowing Mrs. Holloway to inherit, then robbing and killing her. But then something happened that made it all fall into place; this Hatshepsut project. You had a degree in archeology and supplied excellent references. Once hired, you appeared to be the perfect assistant; intelligent, hard working and dedicated.

**AGATHA.** You were the one who smuggled the dagger from the dig, probably in your clothing. You obtained the bracelet from Mr. Nicholai, your accomplice, and soaked it in acid, then passing it on to Michelle who left it for Cookie.

**MAX.** And finally, you are the one who replaced the real jewel box with the counterfeit one. I had suspected you earlier and had actually found three other pieces you had meddled with.

**SCOTTIE.** You're nuts! You can't prove any of it!

**MAX.** Actually I can. This telegram is from Professor Merquist, the man who gave you such a glowing recommendation. He doesn't know you and never wrote the letter.

**SCOTTIE.** So what? Lots of people fake references. That doesn't make me a murderer.

**AGATHA.** You're right it doesn't; but this does. This wire came tonight from Athens. The police arrested Mr. Nicholai as he disembarked a ship from Alexandria. It took very little time before he gave the interrogators the information we suspected. He was in possession of several of our stolen artifacts and happy to tell them everything about your business association in return for certain considerations during his future incarceration. He turned you in, Mr. Mitchell.

**MAX.** I can understand the allure of the money, but why Michelle, the woman you loved and planned a life with? How could you kill her?

**SCOTTIE.** I have no idea what you are talking about. I didn't kill her. You said it yourself, why would I?

**AGATHA.** Mr. Mitchell, the temperature is well into the high 90s and yet I notice you are wearing long sleeves. What are they covering up? What is that on the back of your right hand? Scratches?

**SCOTTIE.** *(Sticking right hand into pocket:)* I don't have to explain my clothing choices to you.

**AGATHA.** Michelle helped us identify her killer. She fought back and must have scratched violently at the hands that were around her throat. The authorities will take samples from under her fingernails and discover they match the scratches on your hand and arms. It's over, Mr. Mitchell. You will be arrested and found guilty. And for what? A little bit of money? You murdered the woman you loved, the woman who planned and single handedly executed the murder of her rival. Michelle was a strong, intelligent woman. Did that strength scare you? Is that why you killed her?

*(SCOTTIE crosses quickly toward the doorway Left Center, where MR. HOLLOWAY crosses to stop him. He then turns toward the archway Upstage Center and finds MAX blocking it. Finally he rushes to the outside door Right Center and finds the OFFICER there.)*

## **THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!**

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