

VIOLET. I'll say!

BILLY. We could use a miracle!

GERRY. Saint Genesis – pray for us!

OTHERS. Saint Genesis – pray for us!

GERRY. Okay, places, everyone – I'm going offstage.

SMITTY. Saul – who's Saint Genesis?

SAUL. The patron saint of actors – he performed for the Roman emperor and they had him put to death.

SMITTY. Oh, boy. I hope there are no emperors out front tonight!

SAUL. Amen!

(Music starts; at climax, curtain opens on Act One tableau of Murder Most Foul as before.)

SMITTY. *(Featherdusting safe like crazy.)* "Lord Dudley, will there be anyone at dinner tonight besides Sir Percival the famous archaeologist, Doctor Rex Forbes the famous scientist, and Stephen Sellers the famous millionaire?"

HENRY. "Other than myself and Lady Margaret, my wife, and the lovely socialite Diana Lassiter, here...no, Doris."

SMITTY. *(Starts toward doorway, right.)* "That's what I thought."

(Exits, and from offstage, we hear her give a loud:)

Who!

HENRY. *(Reacts slightly, then plunges onward.)* "I say, Diana, have you yet located that book on famous jewels of India that I told you must be there on the shelf?"

VIOLET. *(Finding book she has been deliberately overlooking.)* "Ah, yes! Here it is!"

(Faces him, flips book open, reacts.)

"Oh, I say, Lord Dudley – you didn't tell me there was a curse on the Ranchipur Delhi – I mean the Darjeeling Ruby – *Diamond!*"

HENRY. *(Trying to save her.)* It is known by many names, my dear!

VIOLET. It is? ... Oh, yes, it certainly is! Lots of 'em.

HENRY. *(Reverts to his normal line, not realizing it no longer fits, especially as a response to VIOLET.)*

"Fiddlesticks! A lot of hogwash!" *(Realizes.)* That curse, I mean! ... "Damned superstitious rot!"

(VIOLET, by now totally "up," just stares at him; he desperately reverse-feeds her line to her.)

But – doesn't the book distinctly say – ?

VIOLET. *(Home at last.)* Yes! "But the book distinctly says that Lord Clyde Fortescue, the first owner of the – the Darjeeling Diamond! – was found floating in his tub – !" Uh – I don't mean the diamond was found floating in his tub!

HENRY. No-no, of course not. But – what was? Eh?

VIOLET. He was! "In his own blood!"

(Stops.)

HENRY. *(Prompts.)* And the next owner – ?

VIOLET. *(Back on the track.)* "And the next owner, Sir Giles Renfrew, had no sooner purchased the ruby – the diamond – from Lord Clyde's estate, when he was found floating in his own stables by his favorite horse! ... *Trampled, I mean!*"

(In front row, PHYLLIS gives an audible moan;

VIOLET flashes a frantic look that way, then slogs onward:)

"And the next owner – "

HENRY. *(Forgets he's supposed to interrupt; belatedly remembers.)* "Balderdash! Nonsense! A lot of old wives' tales!"

VIOLET. *(Eliding her line a bit.)* They're all dead, aren't they? ... The owners. Not the old wives.

HENRY. "Yes, but consider: I bought the ruby this morning – and I'm fine!"

(Starts to put hand to his head, realizes and corrects:)

HENRY. "The diamond!"

(Hand to head again, sways.)

VIOLET. "Lord Dudley – is anything wrong?"

PHYLLIS. (Just audibly.) Everything! Everything!

HENRY. (As if he hadn't heard – but we can see he had.)

"No-no. Nothing. Just one of my beastly attacks."

VIOLET. (Jumping ahead two speeches.) "You don't suppose – ?"

HENRY. (Determined to get his line in.) Don't you wonder how long I've been having them?!

VIOLET. Oh! "How long have you had them?"

HENRY. "Since this morning."

VIOLET. (Totally lost improvises.) That long, huh?

HENRY. (Controlling his rage.) Do you suppose that

I suppose – ?!

VIOLET. "You don't suppose – ?"

HENRY. "Ridiculous! Sheer coincidence! Merest chance!"

(SMITTY bolts onstage, and since their panic is contagious:)

SMITTY. Doctor Dud is here, Lord Forbley!

HENRY. (Staggered, inflects as though naming the fiancé:)

"Ah! It is your fiancé Diana!"

(Both WOMEN stare at him.)

" – your fiancé, Diana!"

(PHYLLIS sighs audibly.)

VIOLET. "Yes, being engaged to the world-famous scientist has made me the envy of all the girls in London – in England – in London, England!"

HENRY. ("Up.") Uh.

SMITTY. (After a moment, tries to help by saying his line.)

"Ah, but a lovely belle like you deserves to be rung!" (Thinks.) " – to have a ring!"

VIOLET. (To SMITTY, naturally.) "You flatter me, Lord Dudley?"

HENRY. Uh.

AGGIE. (Off. Giving him his line, in a hoarse whisper.)

"Doris-will-you-show-the-gentleman-in!"

SMITTY. (Before he can even echo the cue.) "At once, milord!"

(She exits; no one enters.)

AGGIE. (Offstage.) Saul!

SAUL. (Offstage.) Coming!

(Dashes onstage, gives clumsy bow.)

"Lord Dudley, Diana."

HENRY. "I'm sure you young people will want to be alone. I'll just toddle off to my room and putter about."

(As in earlier error, moves to upstage doorway, starts to exit right, but stops as we all hear:)

GERRY. (Offstage.) You're going the wrong way!

HENRY. Oh!

(Turns full about and exits left, instead, so that we see him passing upstage of the window as he goes.)

SAUL. (Who has seen this of course.) He – he must be going to use the outside stairway!

VIOLET. (Likewise.) Yes. That must be it. (Pause.) Well –

SAUL. (Galvanized back into character, shouts window ward.) "Really, Lord Dudley, you needn't go."

HENRY. (From in back of garden backdrop, where he is working his way toward stage right wings – and will wobble the upstage corridor wall in the process.)

"Nonsense. I was once in love, myself!"

(We hear him stumble and fall.)

Damn it!

SAUL. (Rushes to VIOLET, quickly.) "My dearest darling!"

VIOLET. "My sweet!"

(They kiss lightly, then stand apart.)

SAUL. "My darling, I have a little surprise -"

(Starts frantically feeling his empty pockets.)

PHYLLIS. Oh, dear!

(Jumps up, exits up aisle, and while she is making her way to the backstage area, our duo ad-libs desperately.)

VIOLET. I like surprises.

SAUL. I kinda thought you did.

VIOLET. I can't wait to find out what it is.

SAUL. It's really worth waiting for.

VIOLET. I'm so excited.

SAUL. I knew you would be.

VIOLET. Can't find it, huh?

SAUL. *(Inspired.)* I know! I must have left it in my coat! Excuse me!

(Rushes out right doorway; VIOLET, nothing to do and nobody to talk to, stands awhile swinging her arms back and forth, and whistling, all the while we hear.)

The necklace! Where the hell's the necklace?!

AGGIE. *(Offstage.)* Phyllis has it! I forgot to get it from her!

(We hear footsteps, and:)

PHYLLIS. *(Offstage.)* Here it is! I'm so terribly sorry!

SAUL. *(Offstage.)* Just give it to me!

(Rushes onstage, then realizes he holds:)

PHYLLIS. *(Offstage.)* My evening bag!

SAUL. *(To VIOLET.)* Whoops! Wrong surprise!

(Dashes off, and we hear:)

I hope you're satisfied! Now they think Doctor Forbes is a sissy!

(Dashes back on with necklace, waves it wearily.)

Surprise! " - the White Ruby of Ranchipur!" Or whatever it is!

VIOLET. "Oh! How incredibly lovely it is! Might I - try it on?"

SAUL. *(Slowly sliding into character.)* "Not afraid of the curse?"

VIOLET. "Well - not very much... May I - please -?"

SAUL. "Certainly you shall. Here, allow me..."

(She turns, he hangs it about her neck, but does not quite get the catch in place, and it slides right out of sight into the bosom of her dress as he turns her around to face him and says his line "on automatic":)

"It is lovely - in such a lovely setting!"

(Realizes he can't see it; without thinking, leans forward to peer down into her cleavage; VIOLET slaps both palms to the area and turns desperately away.)

VIOLET. "Oh, Rex, what a thing to say -!"

SAUL. *(Staring at the back of her head.)* "I cannot decide which is lovelier, you or that fabulous gem."

(PHYLLIS will come down the aisle and regain her seat, tiptoeing so as not to disturb anyone, during:)

VIOLET. *(Both hands frantically groping in her cleavage.)* "I simply - must see - myself in it - let me - go find a mirror!"

(Starts toward right doorway, still groping, but stops and drops her hands as POLLY enters.)

POLLY. "Diana! That necklace -!"

(Doesn't see it, and doesn't know where it is, either.)

Where is it?

VIOLET. (*Points demurely into depths of her cleavage.*)

In here.

POLLY. (*Dazed, but dogged.*) "How dare you! Take it out at once! ... - off at once!"

SAUL. (*Desperately trying to get necklace, while VIOLET just as desperately tries to keep his hands off her.*) I'll get it!

POLLY. (*Improvising.*) Well, hurry it up!

VIOLET. (*Gets necklace out with an effort, extends it to*

POLLY.) There! "Lady Margaret! I was only -"

POLLY. "Take it off, I say! This instant!"

SAUL. (*Grabs it from VIOLET.*) "Here, now, Lady Margaret, there's surely no harm done...?"

(**PHYLLIS** gives an audible moan.)

(*Note: This neat bit is tricky, so pay attention: We must indicate that first act get finished, but we of course do not have time to do an entire play in this remaining act, so here is how it is accomplished: From here on, dialogue is pre-taped and will be hip-synced by PLAYERS - at double speed - simultaneous with a strobe-light being used to illustrate stage, so that the PLAYER's sped-up movements will look even jerkier - and - at the indicated spot - the curtain will close, even though the action and dialogue continues. Ready? Here goes.*)

POLLY. "No harm, you say? How could you endanger the life of this dear girl - and your own fiancée?"

VIOLET. "Oh, I don't believe in that silly curse, Lady Margaret! After all, this is the twentieth century!"

(*Places back of hand to forehead, sways.*)

SAUL. "Diana! Are you all right?"

(*Curtain starts to close, slowly.*)

VIOLET. (*The volume of pre-taped speech will dwindle, fast, to total silence, during her line.*) "Yes - yes, I think so."

It was just momentary - the room seemed to dip - my head started to spin..."

(*In the silence, we hear:*)

AGGIE. (*Offstage.*) Places for Act Two, everybody!

(*Music starts, and curtain opens on VIOLET, seated on sofa; BILLY enters as music fades; pace and voices are "live" and normal, now.*)

BILLY. "Oh! Diana. I was seeking Lady Margaret."

VIOLET. "Lady Margaret is cutting roses in the garden, Stephen."

(*Demurely, folds hands in lap.*)

"She - may not return for some time."

BILLY. "Would you mind if I waited for her...here?"

VIOLET. "Naturally not."

BILLY. "Might I...sit?"

(*Goes to step forward from doorway - and his coat is snagged on frame [i.e.: someone backstage holds onto end of it till his release] - and he ends up leaning forward and swaying like a loose ship's figurehead.*)

VIOLET. (*With eyes demurely downcast, has not seen.*)

"If you are so inclined!"

(*Looks up, sees him, gapes.*)

BILLY. (*Abruptly frees coat [let it go, here] lurches sofaward, sprawls across right arm of sofa and lands with his face in VIOLET's lap; he raises his head for:*)

"Diana -"

VIOLET. "Yes, Stephen -?"

BILLY. "Would you take offense if I were to - to -?"

VIOLET. "Stephen, what are you trying to say?"

BILLY. (*Will squirm into sitting position beside her, during:*)

"Oh, dash it all, Diana, must we play at words?! You know the message that longs to cry out from within my heart!"

VIOLET. "Is it possible – do I dare for a moment imagine – that the message in your heart is the selfsame message that cries out from within my own?"

(Then she looks down, reacts to what she sees, and – if delivering that message – whispers hoarsely:)

Your fly is open!

BILLY. *(Frantically claps both hands onto his lap, and in his panic jumps two speeches ahead.)* "And yet – you do not draw away...?"

(Once more, we go to pre-tape speed-up, strobe, and slow curtain, during:)

VIOLET. "Oh, Stephen – can you not reason out *why?*!"

BILLY. "I – I am almost afraid to!"

VIOLET. "Then cease your noble trepidations, Stephen Sellers. For – though I am a high-born lady – I am also a woman!"

BILLY. "Oh, Diana!"

(Kisses her lightly – and fast, with the speed-up – on the lips.)

VIOLET. "Oh, Stephen!"

(They kiss again, and the curtain is closed, now as we hear an accelerating speed-up alternation of "Oh-Diana-Oh-Stephen-Oh-Diana-Oh-Stephen-etc.]" until the pitch is higher than bats or dogs could hear it, and then music starts, and we hear:)

AGGIE. *(Off. Normal speed and voice.)* Everybody ready for Act Three! Places! Places!

GERRY. *(Offstage.)* You know, Aggie, maybe I should have gone to that bar, after all!

AGGIE. *(Offstage.)* If you change your mind, I'll join you!

The Paratroops was never like this!

LOUISE. *(Offstage.)* You know the difference between a play and a parachute?

AGGIE. *(Off. Warily.)* What, Louise?

LOUISE. *(Offstage.)* When a parachute opens, you have nothing to worry about!

(AGGIE and GERRY groan.)

GERRY. *(Offstage.)* Oh, open the damned curtain!

(Curtain opens as music stops, on final act tableau.)

VIOLET. "Ah, Lord Dudley; you give the most charming parties in the whole of England!"

HENRY. "You are too kind, Diana. A pity Sir Percival could not be here."

POLLY. "Do you know – I'm worried about Percival! He's never accepted an invitation to one of our parties and then not shown up – at least, not without sending word."

BILLY. "Ah, but Lady Margaret, he might have had motor trouble."

VIOLET. "Yes, indeed. I do hope he hasn't had – " Uh. " – I do hope he hasn't had – hasn't had – had an accident!"

(Other PLAYERS, who had tensed during her struggle, now relax, and are taken unawares by her Freudian slip:)

"These words can be treacherous at night...roads!"

POLLY. "Don't say such a thing! It would make one think that perhaps there was some truth, after all, in that story about the curse!"

HENRY. "Nonsense, my dear. There's no such thuring as a keest – king as a thirst – thing-as-a-curse!"

BILLY. "And yet – everyone who has ever owned the – Darjeeling Diamond – has always met with a dreadful demise!"

(PHYLLIS gives an angry grunt of frustration.)

VIOLET. (*Determined not to make an error again.*) "But Percival doesn't own the di-a-mond anymore – not since he sold it to Lord Dudley for Lady Margaret's collection."

(*Sinks back in armchair with sigh of relief.*)

SAUL. "Nevertheless –"

(*It is slightly "nevertheless," and he is over-enunciating just enough so that our suspicions match those of:*)

GERRY. (*Offstage.*) Has Saul been taking a nip between acts?!

LOUISE. (*Offstage.*) Wouldn't you?

SAUL. (*Has taken a dramatic pause, now continues:*)

" – Percival did own it – and that mi' be uh-nuff!"

(*Smiles drolly and sways ever-so-slightly.*)

BILLY. "See here, Doctor Forbes – you are a man of science – soorly you don't believe in curshes?"

AGGIE. (*Offstage.*) Louise! Has Billy – ?

LOUISE. (*Offstage.*) Saul hates to drink alone.

GERRY. (*Offstage.*) Oh, dear God!

SAUL. "I only know there are strange things in the hishry of Inja – things which defy rashnul esplanation."

(*Note: At no time will SAUL or BILLY actually stagger, stumble, or sway beyond the merest slight rocking-in-place; they are not falling down drunk; they merely find the world a warm, funny and fuzzy place to be, and are pleased by this sensation.*)

HENRY. "Nonsense. Sheer cockycock. Superstitious dribble!"

SAUL. "Quite posply, Lordudley – an' yet –"

POLLY. "And yet – ?"

SAUL. (*Holds up a finger as if to speak, then peers around the room a second, then says with deep significance:*) "Where is Sir Percival?"

VIOLET. "Frankly, I'm glad he's not here!"

POLLY. "Why, Diana, what a thing to say!"

SAUL. Yes, indeedy!

BILLY. I'll say!

(*Both smile inanely at one another.*)

VIOLET. (*A little staggered by their improvisations.*) "I mean it, Sir Percival is – no gentleman."

HENRY. "Here, now, what are you saying?"

VIOLET. (*Obviously with her mind elsewhere than on her line.*) "When he looks at me – I feel as though my hands were moving all over his body."

PHYLLIS. (*Just audible.*) Oh, dear. Oh, dear-oh-dear!

POLLY. (*Has almost laughed at VIOLET's line, but manages to force her line out amid near-convulsive twitches from the mirth bubbling up and trying to escape her lips.*) "But he is a knight of the przzetti!"

(*This last is a laugh raspberryying through pursed lips.*)

VIOLET. (*At sea, since she didn't hear her own line at all.*) "He is a disgusting toad. And such toads can be lecherous at night!"

(**SMITTY** hastens onstage on cue, but must wait her line for:)

SAUL. Yes, indeedy!

BILLY. I'll say!

(*Same smile business at one another.*)

SMITTY. (*Slightly shaken.*) "Begging your pardon, milord, but should we delay dinner any? Longer?"

HENRY. "Mmm – no, I think not. Can't wait for Percival forever."

(*Moves toward POLLY.*)

"Shall we, my dear?"

POLLY. "I suppose so. But – don't you think someone should call Percival's flat and ascertain the reason for his absence?"

BILLY. (*Moves around VIOLET's chair to take her arm as she rises, but she takes his arm to steady him.*) "Do you know – that might be a sound idea. There is something distinctly odd about all of this."

VIOLET. "All of what, Stephen?"

BILLY. "This business about Percival and the neckulace. Neckulace. He *did* say he was bringing it tonight, Lady Margaret?"

POLLY. "Well, actually, I never spoke with him directly – but there was a message delivered this morning on the post – *in* the post – *on* the post – the *mailman* brought it!"

SMITTY. (*Fuddled by the reworded cue.*) "What, on Swithin's Day? ... *Saint Swithin's! ... Day!*"

HENRY. "By Jove! Never thought of that! Margaret – are you *certain* about that – uh – that mailman – or whatever you said?"

POLLY. "Why – come to think of it – no."

VIOLET. (*Trying to follow the alterations.*) "You didn't receive a mailman?"

POLLY. Message!

VIOLET. That, too.

POLLY. "Oh, yes – I did – but now I wonder if it were actually from Percival!"

BILLY. "But it did come on a post?"

POLLY. "I – I assumed it had – but –"

HENRY. "Assumed? You mean, you didn't actually see it – him – the message *or* the mailman?"

POLLY. *Whatever* it was – *no!*

VIOLET. "Then how do you know its *contents*?"

POLLY. "Why – Doctor Forbes told me what it had said."

SAUL. Yes, indeedy!

BILLY. (*The soberer of the two, sees that SAUL is not about to give him his cue, so reverses his line to his own.*) Is there any reason why you *shouldn't* have?

SAUL. (*Altered.*) "Is there any reason I shouldn't have?"

BILLY. "No, no, of course not, old chap. Only –"

SAUL. (*Interrupts.*) Then why'd you ask?

BILLY. (*Getting a grip on himself.*) "On-ly...if there was no delivery of the post, today, then how –"

SAUL. "It was not a letter. It was a telephone. Cable car. *Telegram!*"

(*Aware of his own inadequacies for the first time, he is starting to regain some control.*)

BILLY. "I should like very much to see that telegram!"

SAUL. (*Starts searching pockets, takes out pistol, shakes his head, replaces pistol, then remembers.*) Hey! I haven't got it! ...uh... "As a matter of fact. The message was phoned from the telegraph office."

BILLY. "Doris – have there been any telephone messages this evening?"

SAUL. "See here, you innocent young punk! Are you doubting my word?!"

POLLY. "Of course he isn't, Rex! ..."

(*Goes "up."*)

"Of course he isn't, Rex..."

AGGIE. (*Off. Cuing with next word.*) "Stephen –"

POLLY. (*Thinking she's flubbed the name.*) "Of course he isn't, Stephen!"

BILLY. (*Helpfully.*) Should I apologize to Doctor Forbes?

POLLY. (*Sincerely.*) Yes, thank you!

BILLY. "Oh, I shall. As soon as – as –"

SMITTY. I'm Doris.

BILLY. " – Doris answers my question."

SMITTY. (*Got lost while helping.*) ...What was the question?

(*PLAYERS all look desperately at one another.*)

POLLY. *Someone must remember!*

SAUL. *(Almost sober, now, but just as lost as the rest.)*
Dammed if I do!

VIOLET. Me, neither!

HENRY. Doesn't anyone know?

SMITTY. *(Suddenly remembers her line.)* "No, sir!"

BILLY. No, what?

SMITTY. That's the answer to the question!

POLLY. *(Without thinking, says the right line by accident.)*

"What, are you quite sure?"

SMITTY. "The telephone has been out of order since this afternoon: *Mum!*"

BILLY. "Aha! And what do you say to that, Doctor Forbes?"

(Silence; PLAYERS covertly look toward phone, and we hear galloping footsteps backstage, and:)

AGGIE. *(Offstage.)* Oh, damn it!

(Phone rings.)

SAUL. "Does that answer your question?"

POLLY. "Stephen, I believe you owe Doctor Forbes an apology."

(Phone rings again.)

HENRY. "You had best answer that, Doris..."

SMITTY. *(Hesitates, reverse-feeds him his incompleting line.)*
Before we owe the caller an apology, too?

HENRY. *(Anything to get to the final curtain.)* Yes, damn it, yes!

SMITTY. *(Leaps to phone.)* Yes, sir, you bet!

(Grabs it up, and in her anxiety forgets to pause for the supposed caller's part of the dialogue with her.)

"Hello? Who? Why, yes, he is. Just a moment."

(Thrusts phone at HENRY.)

It's for you.

(Starts away, turns swiftly back.)

Sir!

(Moves away.)

HENRY. *(Flustered, forgets his line to SMITTY, speaks right on phone.)* "Hello? ...What? ..."

(Then remembers, goes wide-eyed, shouts after SMITTY.)

"Who is it, Doris?"

SMITTY. "Sir Percival."

(Before SAUL can say his line, a confused HENRY gets right back on phone, with:)

HENRY. "Ah! Yes, I see... Yes, thank you! Thank you very much!"

SAUL. *(Better late than never.)* "It can't be! ...I mean -"

HENRY. *(So shaken, he sets phone down on stand beside cradle.)* You mean it can't be Sir Percival, right?

SAUL. Uh. Right!

BILLY. *(Dismally plunges into his own line.)* "Yes, Doctor? Exactly what do you mean?"

SAUL. "Why - I - I -"
(PLAYERS look at HENRY, since it is now he is supposed to go to the phone, but of course he's already been there.)

HENRY. Uh - I'm off the phone, Polly - Margaret!

POLLY. Off the - ? But - ? Oh! "Why-Dudley-you-look-so-strange-what-did-Percival-say?"

HENRY. *(Relieved to be back on the track.)* "That was not Sir Percival!"

POLLY. "Then - who was it?"

BILLY. *(Calmly.)* "That was - " *(Less calmly.)* " - uh - a good friend of mine..." *(Sincerely.)* I can't quite remember his name!

SAUL. (*Helpfully.*) Miles Taylor!

BILLY. Right!

VIOLET. Stephen, I do not understand."

POLLY. "Nor I."

BILLY. (*Still panicky, skips eight speeches.*) "I can explain what it means! It means that this man, after murdering Sir Percival for the necklace –" (*Half-realizes.*) Did – did I say he was struck dumfounded?

HENRY. (*Trying to help, but just as lost.*) "I saw – observed – the selfsame reaction – I think."

SMITTY. (*When other WOMEN stand there, lost, skips their lines.*) "Yes, what can it possibly mean?"

HENRY. (*Joyful to recognize a cue, jumps in.*) "Doris, you are forgetting your place!"

AGGIE. (*Offstage.*) She's not the only one!

GERRY. (*Offstage.*) Where the hell are they?

AGGIE. (*Offstage.*) Search me!

(*PLAYERS have heard, and reacted, and look very forlorn to realize they're unlikely to be prompted.*)

HENRY. (*For want of something better, repeats.*) "Doris, you are forgetting your place!"

SAUL. (*The scene seems familiar, so he comes in, not realizing he's skipped BILLY's accusation, so that it now sounds as if he's chiding HENRY.*) "How dare you, sir! I'll have you in court for this! Such accusations are actionable! To tarnish my good name – it's libelous!"

PHYLLIS. (*Jumps to her feet.*) Oh! Oh, dear!
(*Turns and rushes frantically up aisle to get backstage.*)

BILLY. (*Has paused and squinted out into theatre to seek the source of the disturbance, gives it up, and.*) "I cannot be sued successfully for libel if my accusations should prove true!"

SAUL. (*Sneers.*) "And just how do you intend to prove them true?"

BILLY. "Quite easily, after a look at that necklace. Would you mind getting it, Doctor Forbes –?"

SAUL. "The necklace? There is no proof on that necklace. I'll show you!"

(*Goes to safe, dials combination, reaches inside – and his face goes ghastly when he finds nothing.*)

Uh – I'm sure it's in here somewhere! ...

(*Removes his hand from safe, and we can hear – but he doesn't – footfalls backstage as PHYLLIS arrives.*)

Are – are you sure that's where you put it – Margaret – ?

POLLY. (*Not much good at ad-libbing, does a large shrug.*)

Like, where else?!

BILLY. Uh – why don't you have another look?

SAUL. Oh, all right!

(*Turns, opens half-closed safe door – and out comes PHYLLIS's hand, holding the necklace, to the elbow; he slumps, but takes it, waits till her hand is withdrawn, then slams safe door and turns.*)

"There! Now show me your ridiculous proof!"

BILLY. "You yourself have shown the proof, Doctor Forbes! For – if you are not the murderer – how did you know the combination to that safe?!"

POLLY. "Great heavens! He's right!"

SAUL. "Blast you, Stephen Sellers!"

(*Tries to whip out pistol – it is snagged in his pocket.*)

"But there – there is one thing – you did not – did not take into account –!"

(*And with a ripping noise, pistol comes out, half a pocket lining dangling from the barrel.*)

"I am armed!"

HENRY. "You, sir, are a scoundrel!"

VIOLET. "And I should very much like to sunder our engagement this moment!"

BILLY. "In that case - will you marry me, Violet?"

VIOLET. (*Overjoyed.*) Oh, Billy!

(*Flings her arms around him.*)

BILLY. (*Terrified.*) I mean "Diana"!

VIOLET. (*Releases him.*) Oh, darn!

(*Remembers it's her line, grabs his hands.*)

"With all my heart, Stephen!"

POLLY. "Doris - telephone at once for the constabulary!"

SAUL. (*Finally manages to get pocket lining off pistol.*) "Do so and you are dead, my dear!"

SMITTY. "Oh, mum, what shall I do?"

SAUL. "Just raise your hands. And the rest of you do likewise!"

(*PHYLLIS will come down aisle and regain her seat, during.*)

HENRY. (*Wondering why the phone didn't ring, but not looking at it.*) Did you say - (*Loudly, toward AGGIE backstage.*) "And the rest of you do likewise!"?

AGGIE. (*Off. Hoarse whisper.*) Hang up the phone!

(*HENRY looks blankly into his empty palm, dazed.*)

GERRY & AGGIE. (*Off. A bit louder than a whisper.*) Hang up the phone!

(*All PLAYERS save SAUL - since they are all facing away from the phone - now look similarly into their empty palms, just as dazed as HENRY; SAUL suddenly sees, beyond them, what the problem is, and finds himself in a trio, on.*)

SAUL, GERRY & AGGIE. (*Off. A very audible shout.*) Hang up the phone!

(*SMITTY turns, quickly hangs it up, and no sooner is receiver back into cradle than phone rings.*)

SAUL. "Damn and blast! Who's that?!"

BILLY. "It is my friend, Miles Taylor. I told him to ring us back shortly after his first call. If I do not answer - he shall summon the law, and they shall arrive here with a warrant for your arrest - Stanley Grimes!"

(*Note: We are about to "cheat" a bit; your audience has already heard the finale-to-the-inner-play in its entirety, but unless they have memories like a computer, they won't notice that we are about to shorten that ending quite a bit, to get to the real ending of the real show. So here is how the inner-play-finish goes from here on.*)

POLLY & VIOLET. "Stanley Grimes!"

BILLY. "So put down that pistol and surrender!"

SAUL. "Never! I shall take this necklace, sell it for a fortune, and move wealthily to another country!"

(*We hear police sirens nearing, outside French doors.*)

POLLY. "Oh, curse you, Stanley Grimes!"

SAUL. (*Clutches his heart.*) "Oh! Oh! Oh!"

POLLY. "It's the curse! The curse of the Delhi Diamond!"

VIOLET. Ranchipur Diamond!

BILLY. Darjeeling Diamond!

HENRY. (*Disgusted with the whole thing.*) All of them!

(*Moves to SAUL, lifts his wrist, but SAUL has not dropped the gun this time, and it fires; HENRY jumps a foot away.*)

POLLY. (*Who has raised her forefinger to say her actual line, has reacted at the same time, and instead says:*) What the hell was that?!