

A Faithless Floréal

A Play for a multi-cultural audience

by

Richard Moore

‘The present as we speak becomes the past.

The past repeats itself and so is future.

,

Lady Blanche in ‘Princess Ida’

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

*(This play – based closely on a real happening - is designed in two parts, one feature being that many of the male roles appear in only one of them. It is designed so that a large number of the parts can and should be doubled, trebled or even quadrupled. Mr. Tan **must**, for instance, double Robespierre. Details of some of this overlap are suggested after the main full character list. The whole thing is an Ensemble piece with far fewer actors than characters.)*

Full Character List :

<i>1st William Proudlock</i>	)	
	)	<i>(Acting Headmaster of the</i>
	)	<i>Victoria Institution,</i>
<i>2nd William Proudlock</i>	)	<i>originally from the</i>
	)	<i>North East of England.)</i>
<i>3rd William Proudlock</i>	)	

<i>William Steward</i>	<i>(Mining engineer and murder victim)</i>
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<i>Judge Sercombe-Smith</i>	<i>(trying the case)</i>
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<i>Hastings-Rhodes</i>	<i>(Counsel for the Prosecution)</i>
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<i>E.A.S. Wagner</i>	<i>(Counsel for the Defence)</i>
<i>Dr. Edward Mc.Intyre</i>	<i>(Witness at the trial)</i>
<i>Sir Henry Belfield</i>	<i>(Resident-General)</i>
<i>Richard Winstedt</i>	<i>(Scholar and administrator)</i>
<i>Kester Ferguson</i>	<i>(Of the "Malay Mail")</i>
<i>Mr. Tan</i>	<i>(A translator working for the newspaper)</i>
<i>P.F. Wise</i>	)
	)
<i>R.C.M. Kindersley</i>	) <i>(Assessors at the Trial)</i>
<i>1st Usher</i>	
<i>2nd Usher</i>	
<i>Clerk to the Court</i>	
<i>J.G.T. Pooley</i>	<i>(junior counsel, assisting Mr. Wagner)</i>
<i>Servant to the Resident-General</i>	
<i>Servant to the Proudlocks</i>	
<i>Sir Edward Grey</i>	<i>(the British Foreign Secretary)</i>
<i>Lady Pamela Tennant</i>	<i>(his mistress)</i>

<i>Arnold Griffiths</i>	<i>(one of his advisors)</i>
<i>Walter Corrigan</i>	<i>(a planter working in an outstation)</i>
<i>Bennett Shaw</i>	<i>(headmaster of the Victoria Institution)</i>
<i>Sultan Aluaddin Sulaiman Shah Ibni-Al-Marhum.</i>	
<i>Mr. J. O. Anthonisz</i>	<i>(the Acting Resident)</i>
<i>Sir Arthur Young</i>	<i>(High Commissioner for the F.M.S.)</i>
<i>Julia Sercombe-Smith</i>	<i>(Wife to the Judge)</i>
<i>Leonard Wales</i>	<i>(Kuala Lumpur Prison Governor)</i>
<i>Prison Orderly</i>	
<i>King George V</i>	
<i>Queen Mary</i>	
<i>Sir Henry Conway Belfield</i>	<i>(Resident-General in Kuala Lumpur)</i>
<i>Lady Florence</i>	<i>(His wife)</i>
<i>Timothy</i>	<i>(Secretary to Sir Henry)</i>
<i>Beatrice Shaw</i>	<i>(Wife to the Headmaster)</i>
<i>Gerald Harris</i>	<i>(An incoming colonial administrator)</i>

<i>Reginald Fisher</i>		<i>(A magazine deputy editor)</i>
<i>Haynes</i>		<i>(Secretary to Sercombe-Smith)</i>
<i>Lettice Quale</i>		<i>(An ex-pat. widow)</i>
<i>Mabel Marsh</i>		<i>(Head of the Kindergarten)</i>
<i>Goodman Ambler</i>		<i>(A teacher at the international school)</i>
<i>Cecil Palmer</i>		<i>(A Colonial Office Civil Servant)</i>
<i>N.F. Henderson</i>		<i>(His deputy</i>
<i>Mr. Redland</i>	)	
<i>Ms. Redland</i>	)	
<i>Clive Barrowman</i>	)	<i>(Members of the British Community)</i>
<i>Archer Fleming</i>	)	
<i>Mr. Morley</i>	)	
<i>Mrs. Morley</i>	)	
<i>Winston</i>	)	
	)	<i>(Junior government secretaries)</i>
<i>Doggart</i>	)	

Winnie Tan (onetime mistress to Proudlock)

Lily Tan (mistress to Steward)

Maximilien Robespierre (Of the French Revolution)

Servants played by member of the cast.

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Examples of Doubled and Trebled Rôles :

(If the Redlands are excluded from the last scene, Mrs. Redland can double the part of Lettice.)

Hastings-Rhodes - Sir Edward Grey

P.F. Wise - Sir Henry Belfield

R.C.M. Kindersley - Bennett Shaw

J.G.T. Pooley - Walter Corrigan - Henderon

1st Usher - Arnold Griffiths – William Morley

2nd Usher - Sir Arthur Young – Archer Fleming

Proudlock Servant - Mr. Anthonisz

Haynes - 2nd Usher – James Redland

*Prison Orderly - Gerald Harris - Clive Barrowman –
Winston*

Clerk to the Court - *King George V* - *James Redland* –
Doggart

Mr. Fisher - *Timothy – Palmer – William Morley*

Mr. Tan - *Maximilien Robespierre*

Queen Mary - *Lettice Quale*

Lady Pamela - *Mrs Morley*

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PART ONE

[Initially we are in a dark, almost featureless cavern. Two shadowy men apparently sleeping against the wall, at a distance from each other, and barely visible. Enter William Proudlock shadowy but pinpointed by a ray of light. (He may indeed carry a candle or strike a match on the cavern wall.) He is a generally brave man but now he looks about him somewhat nervously.]

1st William Proudlock : I don't think I really like caves. Though of course I understand them – understand what they symbolise. The womb, the buried life, the unconscious. Penetration into the hidden self, into the sexual cavity. But I don't like them. When I found myself in *this* cave, I could hardly imagine where I was. Which is not surprising really, for I was nowhere. In limbo. And so what does that make me? Nothing. A nowhere man. Not much more than a bubble.

(The shadowy men stir in turn) Now you see that? That is another me. And over there yet a third. The truth is, we all have more than one facet. All ill-cut jewels, however fine the quality. Though whether we shall see more than one Ethel I don't think we shall see more than one Ethel. An enigma, that's what Ethel is. More a shadow than a person. Though, there again, there was a part of her that wanted to shine.

I must go now. I must leave the cave for the jungle. Only first I must tell you where I am. For I think now I know what this cave is. It is the mind of my creator. Of the author of my woes. As also the womb of my own possibilities. And perhaps that is not so bad. In possibility there is wriggle-room – there is scope for liberation. And if *what* you are to see be not resolved, and if *I* am not resolved – if later we move into muddier waters, and identities merge and change, and truth too be lost in the tangle

2nd Proudlock (stirring and rising in shadowy form) : Let us come out from the tangle.

3rd Proudlock (ditto) : Let us come out from the tangle.

1st William Proudlock : The jungle-webs where all direction's lost. Or linked perhaps - to lead us who knows where? (Fade)

(Scene changes to the Supreme Court, Kula Lumpur. Mr. Justice Sercombe Smith on the bench, flanked by P.F. Wise and R.C.M. Kindersley. E.A.S. Wagner for the defence. Hastings-Rhodes as Public Prosecutor. Ethel Proudlock, blonde, pretty, not tall, in the dock. The 1st William Proudlock in the gallery with spectators. It is very hot and fans are in operation, whirring menacingly – though not too loudly - throughout.)

Sercombe-Smith : Mrs. Proudlock : In a moment – and in the full light of the blaze of British Justice - we are to examine the regrettable events leading to the shooting of William Steward. A shooting which you acknowledge but in which you claim the motive was self-defence. Now then. It may perhaps be that you are not fully apprised of the workings of this court. That the mechanics are unknown to you. And the first thing to say is that here in the F.M.S. we operate an assessment system. We deliberate by assessment. So what does this mean? It means that, after all the evidence has been heard – after the witnesses have been called and the closing speeches addressed - I shall consult with Mr. Wise and Mr. Kindersley. I shall then on the basis of our joint decision come to a verdict. And may I stress that that verdict could be a substantial one. Should guilt be proved – by which I mean guilt of deliberate unprovoked murder – I am empowered to impose a capital sentence. Yes, well, if you care to begin, Mr. Rhodes.

*Hastings-Rhodes (rising) : Thank you. I am grateful. Ladies and gentlemen – for I see there *are* ladies, as well as gentlemen present – this is a case of superficially simple aspect. On the night of 23rd April Mrs. Ethel Proudlock, the prisoner in the*

dock, shot to death Mr. William Steward, a mining engineer of generally retiring habits, who had visited her while she was alone in her bungalow. Mrs. Proudlock's assertion is that the shooting was a matter of self-defence. She insists that Mr. Steward – a man, as I said, of retiring habits, not much seen in the Club – had attempted to molest her – that indeed she was in imminent danger of rape. It will be my task to try to prove that there was no such danger – that in fact the discharging of as many as five or six shots suggests, not the act of a desperate terrified woman, but of a person enraged, determined, driven by hate, unmindful of the decencies –

Wise : If you will just come to the point please –

Hastings-Rhodes : My point, Mr. Wise, is that this is not nearly as clear-cut a case as the defendant alleges. For which reason if she may now be called to the stand –

Usher : Call Mrs. Proudlock –

2nd Usher : Call Mrs. Proudlock.

(Ethel is escorted from the dock to the witness box)

Sercombe-Smith : You are aware, Mrs. Proudlock, that you are already under oath.

Ethel : I am aware, sir.

Sercombe-Smith : Proceed, Mr. Rhodes.

Hastings-Rhodes : I am obliged. Mrs. Proudlock - that is your name, is it not? Your name *is* Ethel Proudlock - you live with your husband and child at your bungalow, Number 33, High Street, Kuala Lumpur.

Ethel : Yes. No.

Sercombe-Smith : No?

Ethel : We do not own the bungalow. Should I explain?

Kindersley : Perhaps a brief word -

Ethel : My husband Mr. Proudlock is a schoolmaster. He teaches at the Victoria Institution, which, as you will know, is K.L.'s premier school. Normally Mr. Shaw, the headmaster, lives in our bungalow. But he is away. He has gone on leave to England. In his absence my husband has been promoted. He is acting headmaster, and this, entitling him to live in the house till Mr. Shaw returns

Hastings-Rhodes (cutting in) : I see. Very clear. And it was in *this* bungalow that you allege that Mr. Steward assaulted you.

Ethel : Yes.

Hastings-Rhodes : And the layout – can you describe the layout?

Ethel : Oh yes. Well, obviously. It is in the grounds of the college. It is in the grounds facing High Street, and stretching down beyond a tennis court to the Klang River. The river surrounds it on three sides. It – the house - is made of wood. It is made of wood and mounted on piles which get gradually higher – they get higher and higher as the ground slopes downwards –

Hastings-Rhodes : There is a verandah, I believe.

Ethel : There is, yes. It is where I sit writing letters.

Hastings-Rhodes : It is also, is it not, where Mr. Steward was shot?

Ethel : That wasn't quite the way it was. However, if that's the way you want to play it

Hastings-Rhodes (severely) : It is the way the law requires me to play it. So then, you reside with your husband – and your child – we must not forget that you have a very young daughter – in another person's bungalow surrounded by the river –

Ethel : Almost surrounded –

Hastings-Rhodes : - with a substantial verandah on which you write letters. Could you describe the furnishings of this verandah?

Ethel : Well, I *could*. Though whether it is necessary -

Sercombe-Smith : Counsel will decide what is necessary, Mrs. Proudlock.

Ethel : Plants. I have a lot of plants. Potted ones. It's all I *do* have really. The rest of the furniture belongs to Mrs. Shaw.

Hastings-Rhodes : Furniture like tables.

Ethel : One table. Rectangular. There is a rectangular table and some chairs on a carpet and a bookshelf, and a large rattan chair – oh, and there’s a single bulb hanging from the ceiling just one little light - though why you should want to know such things

Hastings-Rhodes : Call it corroborative detail.

Ethel : Oh yes, like *The Mikado*.

Sercombe-Smith : *The Mikado*?

Ethel : Pooh-Bah. I like Gilbert and Sullivan. I was in *Trial by Jury*. Chief bridesmaid. I got very good notices.

Hastings-Rhodes : So then, here we are on a verandah, about thirty yards from the river – and Mr. Steward arrives and you shoot him. You shoot him not once but five or six times. That being established, could we perhaps now go back a little?

Ethel (who is intermittently a bit pert) : You’re the boss.

Hastings-Rhodes : On the day of the killing you had, I believe, been to church.

Ethel : Yes.

Hastings-Rhodes : You had been to church to attend Evensong.

Ethel : Evensong, yes. At St. Mary’s.

Hastings-Rhodes : You were, I think, well known in church circles.

Ethel : Oh yes.

Hastings-Rhodes : You helped with jumble sales, you had recently joined the choir And then after the service a friend invited you to dinner.

Ethel : She did.

Hastings-Rhodes : Your husband, I believe, was not with you on this occasion.

Ethel : No. William is an agnostic. He doesn’t believe. Not that he didn’t come sometimes – he even coached the church choir sometimes.

Kindersley : He coached the church choir despite being an agnostic?

Ethel : I think it was to fit in. He’s a free-thinker, yes – he’s always going on about Leslie Stephen and the *Agnostic’s Apology* – but wanting to fit in and not having the advantages of a public school background –

1st William Proudlock : Ethel.

Ethel : Well, you don't. (*To the assessors*) His father was a millwright.

Hastings-Rhodes : Getting back to the dinner invitation –

Ethel : Oh yes, if we must.

Hastings-Rhodes : You were offered a dinner invitation but you refused. Your husband was going out, you said, and it would give you a chance to write letters.

Ethel : Yes.

Hastings-Rhodes : After which you checked the hymnals, tidied the vestry and walked home and killed Mr. Steward.

Sercombe-Smith : Rather leading the witness there, Mr. Rhodes.

Hastings-Rhodes : Did you check the hymnals and walk home and kill Mr. Steward?

Ethel : Yes.

Hastings-Rhodes : The reason being –

Ethel : I told you, he made advances.

Hastings-Rhodes : He was not already your lover?

Kindersley : Oh really!

Hastings-Rhodes : You do know, Mrs. Proudlock, that there have long been rumours of such a thing. That your absence from the theatre group for months following your trophy-winning performance as chief bridesmaid

Ethel : I don't know about that.

Sercombe-Smith : No, really, Mr. Rhodes.

Hastings-Rhodes : What I am getting at is that there are many reasons why a respectably married lady might in this locality go off the rails. The pressures of colonial life, the smallness of the ruling community – people eaten up by envy, bored, hot, tetchy, devoured by spite –

Sercombe-Smith : You are not, sir, cutting much slack for your nation's imperial élite –

Hastings-Rhodes : Possibly not. But given that society in K.L. is at best something of a goldfish bowl – and that this is augmented when the temperament is naturally moody –

Ethel : Is he allowed to say all this?

Hastings-Rhodes : You deny that Mr. Steward was your lover.

Ethel : Of course I do.

Hastings-Rhodes : And that there was no motive of jealousy accounting for not just one but a whole volley of shots –

Ethel : Ridiculous.

Hastings-Rhodes : You refute that Mr. Steward was possibly trying to end the relationship – deny, for instance, that he had turned to a Chinese girl - younger, more available –

Ethel : How dare you. Making all this palaver out of missing just one show. The reason I gave up my singing was the need to look after my daughter –

Hastings-Rhodes : Ah.

Ethel : My poor little Dorothy -

Hastings-Rhodes : Ah.

Ethel : Aged only four.

Hastings-Rhodes : Three.

Ethel : Three?

Hastings-Rhodes : I have a note here, my lord, that Mrs. Proudlock personally registered the birth on March 6th, 1908. This being over a month after it occurred.

No further questions. (*He sits*)

Sercombe-Smith : Mr. Wagner?

Wagner (rising) : Thank you. Good morning, Mrs. Proudlock.

Ethel (a bit distracted; worried by what has just occurred) : Morning.

Wagner : And may I first, on behalf of British justice, apologise for Mr. Rhodes' inglorious attempts to drag in all kinds of irrelevant material. As it happens, I know Mr. Proudlock. I also knew poor Mr. Steward. We were friends. We played rugger together. But neither my personal friendship nor my client's dinner invitations, nor the checking of hymnals is of any real relevance. What *is* germane, gentlemen, is that the young lady who stands before you is not the same lady who reported the death. She is not the half-maddened wild-eyed

creature who screamed out the demise of my unfortunate friend. On that occasion she was hysterical. She was terrified. When first remanded, she cried, she trembled, she was unable to compose herself. If therefore now, in an attempt at bravado – or possibly in a misguided response to the court's latent theatrical possibilities – she appears a little flippant, a little less than *comme il faut* –

Kindsersley : You are saying, sir, that she is acting.

Wagner : I am saying that we should remember the circumstances. Mrs. Proudlock is a bewildered and unfortunate woman. She has lost the backing of friends, of family, she has been forced, like me, to suffer a deplorable lack of facilities.

Wise : And the facts? The facts, sir?

Wagner : I am coming to those. Mrs. Proudlock, when you reached home on the night of the unfortunate – on the unfortunate night we are discussing – it was, I believe, particularly quiet.

Ethel : It was.

Wagner : And that would be normal for a Sunday evening?

Ethel : Yes. No. I mean, how the *normal* can at the same time be the *particular*

Wagner : It was raining, I believe.

Ethel : Oh yes.

Wagner : Raining hard. A cloudburst. The rain muffling what few sounds there were.

Ethel : Yes.

Wagner : Murky?

Ethel : What?

Wagner : Did the fact that an earlier drizzle had turned to sheeting rain tend to blur or obscure the horizon?

Ethel : Yes.

Wagner : It obscured, for instance, the five foot hedge that divided the school grounds from the street.

Ethel : Yes. Not half.

Wagner (trying not to be disconcerted by these flashes of commonness) : What happened then?

Ethel : When?

Wise (slightly sarcastically) : When you were sitting writing letters and the rain was sheeting down from the cloudburst.

Ethel : Well, of course, I was sheltered. The verandah did have a roof. And so there I was, just through my second letter, when a rickshaw draws up. I saw this rickshaw bearing Mr. Steward.

Wagner : You saw the rickshaw.

Ethel : Well, perhaps not saw. Heard.

Hastings-Rhodes : In spite of the rain.

Ethel : There was a lull. The rickshaw drew up and Mr. Steward came in. I was surprised. I wasn't expecting him.

Wagner : And of course your husband being out –

Ethel : He was dining with a colleague. Someone in Brickfields Road.

Wagner : And so there was Mr. Steward alone with you, after arriving totally unexpectedly in the middle of a rainstorm. What did you say to him?

Ethel : What?

Wagner : Did you say anything?

Ethel : I said if he wished to speak with my husband, he might find him at Brickfields Road. I reminded him where it was.

Wagner : You advised him to leave –

Ethel : Yes.

Wagner : But he refused.

Ethel : He made small talk. We discussed the rain and its likely impact on the river. And then for something to say I mentioned religion. I asked Mr. Steward if he had been to church that evening.

Sercombe-Smith : You asked him if he had been?

Ethel : Yes.

Sercombe-Smith : Though surely, having been there yourself, you would have seen – have recognised –

Ethel : There is more than one church in Kuala Lumpur. Anyway, that's not the point. The point is he said that he attended church very rarely. To which I said, "Ah then, you're like my husband". And then I added, "If you like, I'll show you a book he's reading."

Wagner : You offered to show him the Leslie Stephen book.

Ethel : Yes.

Wagner : A book you have read?

Ethel : Lord no. It's dangerous.

Wagner : How so?

Ethel : Well, it's like tearing a cloth. The first tear is the hardest but once that's done, then the rending apart of the whole fabric - the ruination of everything that kept it together –

Sercombe-Smith : And yet you offered to show it to Mr. Steward.

Ethel : I wanted to steer clear of the personal.

Wise : By which you mean keep it generalised – generalised conversation rather than homing in on your private life –

Hastings-Rhodes (murmuring) : Private life, church hymnals, starring rôles in Gilbert and Sullivan

Wagner : And did you?

Ethel : Did I what?

Wagner : Show him the book?

Ethel : Yes, Well, I tried. I was just handing it to him when he attempted to kiss me. He accosted me. I pushed him away.

Wagner : You resisted forcefully.

Ethel : 'Pig.' That is what I said. 'You pig. What are you doing? Are you mad?'

Wagner : And his response?

Ethel : He grabbed me – grabbed my right wrist. Left hand on it. And then when he went further – when he turned off the light

Wise (with shocked incredulity) : No.

Ethel : Yes. Dark, suddenly dark. And although I tried to break free, still, when he began to lift my dress

Sercombe-Smith : He lifted your dress?

Wagner : He lifted your dress and pulled you towards him.

Ethel : Yes. Pig! Naturally I resisted. I should think he got bruises all over. But then when he stood there, panting, one arm round my waist, one on my left shoulder –

Hastings-Rhodes (sardonically, to himself) : A third on your dress

Ethel : It was a rape. If he could, he'd have rogered me. And then when he tried to force me against the wall

Wise : He did that?

Ethel : Pig! Not you : him! And that was it – that was when my hand came in contact with the gun.

Wagner : Your husband's gun.

Ethel : For crocodiles.

Sercombe-Smith : And the result?

Ethel : I told you. I reached out. I was feeling for the table – reaching and screaming - and there on the table there was this little gun. I'm used to guns. I do spoon shoots. So there I was, terrified, with this little gun and I fired – I fired twice, I think. I can't remember. My mind went blank. (*Rather attitudinizing*) Terror erased all thought.

Kindersley : And afterwards? –

Ethel : Eh? What?

Kindersley : After the shooting. The next thing you remember.

Ethel : Oh yes, I was stumbling. That's what I remember. I was stumbling on the steps of the verandah, though how I could *tell*, when I was transfixed with this

terrible terror Anyway, it turned out that the shots had struck him in the neck. Neck and chest. And that they were heard by the rickshaw-puller. He'd asked this rickshaw-puller to wait, you see, and so the rickshaw-puller rushed up, and the door burst open and he – Steward – stumbled down the steps, and this making the rickshaw-puller flee – shriek - run for the police –

Sercombe-Smith : And the *other* shots? I am sorry to interrupt but, given that we know there were at least three *later* shots.....

Hastings-Rhodes : Three Quite right.

Ethel : How do you know?

Hasting Rhodes : From the coolie. The native. He heard - looked back – and *when* he looked – when he saw the lady, gun in hand, standing over the body – leaning over the corpse, still wearing her tea-gown –

Wagner : Really, my lord, to descend to my client's clothing -

Hastings-Rhodes : It was a *tea-gown*. Meaning that she was *expecting* him – and that suggesting that she'd dolled up specially

Wise : And *under* this tea-gown? I am sorry about this, gentlemen, but in the interests of accuracy

Sercombe-Smith (to Ethel) : Answer the question.

Ethel : A chemise. I was wearing a chemise - a chemise, silk stockings –

Wise : But no drawers -

Ethel : No.

Wise : No drawers, gentlemen. A low-cut tea-gown, thin chemise, no drawers -

Ethel : But I never do. I never *do* wear drawers – or at least hardly ever. Do you really think if I were planning to murder somebody I would do it like that? Wearing a tea-gown? In the hearing of a rickshaw-puller? Oh I know what you'll say. You'll say if Steward really meant to seduce me, he would have sent the rickshaw boy away. But perhaps it was sudden. The sudden storm of a tropical passion. And then if it was like *Macbeth* an unexpected chance – the opportunity of fate

Wagner : Opportunity, yes. Well, he certainly had that. And given all the other little details...

Sercombe-Smith : Details?

Wagner : - things such as the Agnostic book – the spoon shoots, the Selangor Ladies' Rifles is it likely, gentlemen – is it *feasible* - that, in a cooked-up tale, my client would have mentioned all that? Is not that precisely the sort of tiny detail that adds – it adds (*stuck for a moment*)

Ethel : Verisimilitude. (*Quoting from "The Mikado"*) Corroborative detail intended to give artistic verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative.

Wise : You admit then that it is unconvincing? (*More forcefully*) Do you admit that your narrative is unconvincing?

Ethel : I hate you all. You're all against me here. Do something, Will. Oh get me off, I pray. (*Fade*)

(Scene changes to the Official Residence of the British Resident-General, Sir Henry Belfield. The Resident discovered with Richard Winstedt, a senior civil servant and keen student of Malay language and culture. Also present his secretary, Timothy. A servant in attendance. The two Englishmen are quite relaxed, and drinking gin pahit.)

Winstedt : And you're sure you want me present? It's Malay, I speak, you know – not Tamil, not Mandarin –

Resident : Nor I. Wish I did. Might help me understand this country. (*Pointing through the window at the view beyond*)

Winstedt : The land or the people?

Resident : Both if necessary. But I was thinking of the palms. Nibong palms. Which they are now going to plant in the Botanical Gardens, though given that their stems can be made into an efficient form of blow-pipe

Winstedt : Dangerous.

Resident : Very dangerous. I mentioned it to the Colonial Office. However, as they have no real clue as to where we are as they still address my letters merely to Kuala Lumpur, Asia *(A Malay servant enters)* Yes?

Servant : The Mailman is here, Excellency.

Resident : Show him in, yes.

Servant : Mr. Mailman and *(with disdain)* a gentleman.

(The editor of the Malay Mail enters, with Mr. Tan who is of Chinese extraction.)

Resident : Mr. Ferguson. Ah –

Ferguson (the “Mailman”) : Good morning, Sir Henry. I hope you don’t mind. Only Mr. Tan being the one who saw the Indian – saw him and took the original message

Resident (to Ferguson) : Yes, yes, very well. Do sit down.

Ferguson : Thank you, sir.

Tan : Thank you, sir.

Resident : So then, Mr. Tan is also involved. Which is as it should be. I am all for promoting the native races. The need to promote the natives, just so long as we do it calmly – we do it peacefully

Ferguson : Yes, sir.

Resident : Robespierre now – you know what Robespierre said?

Ferguson : No sir.

Resident : He said that no one loved armed missionaries. That no friend ever carried a gun. Where was I?

Ferguson : I was saying about the message, sir. Only that wasn’t the start. So perhaps if you would cast your eye over these

Winstead (as both he and the Resident look surprised) : These?

Ferguson : They are complaints, sir. Complaints, petitions, accusations, suggestions of a cover-up

Resident : There is certainly no cover-up.

Winstedt : Certainly not.

Resident : Unwell, yes. I have, I admit, been unwell - but the idea that anyone of my integrity would sanction a cover-up –

Ferguson : Yes, sir. I know, sir. On the other hand, we do have to face facts. There is a strong feeling, sir, that Mrs. Proudlock is guilty. That she is guilty but will be exonerated on some technicality. And bearing in mind the attitude of the Malays

Winstedt : You don't *like* their attitude?

Ferguson : I think it should not be relied upon.

Tan : Oh no, not relied upon.

Ferguson : It's hard to explain. The Malays, sir, are not altogether ill-disposed to us. They can be timid, conciliatory, charming even. But they are also known for vengeance – they can be very revengeful - and this combined with suspicion, wariness – scorn even –

Resident : How can we be sure these complaints *are* from Malays? They could be Chinese. They could be rickshaw-pullers. I am sorry to say this, Mr. Tan, but the way these coolies speed along, ignore pleas, jerk up the shafts, drop them suddenly

Tan : It is most regrettable.

Resident : It's an insult. And if now they are going further – if they are seeking to tip us out finally (*Seeing Timothy tottering on the edge of speech*) Yes? You wanted to speak?

Timothy : It was an observation, sir. I, gentlemen, am only a secretary. It is not for me to challenge higher authority. But I do think we are going too far. This Proudlock affair is one single case. It is a mere bagatelle. And the folly of treating one mini-trial as an incipient French Revolution

Resident : I am an authority on the French Revolution. I have written a book on it.

Timothy : Yes, sir, I know, sir.

Winstead : But?

Timothy : But the Malays are different. They are a subject race. And if this is really only about what one importunate Indian happened to say to Mr. Tan -

Tan : It was a lover, Excellency. That's what he said. An English lover visiting Mrs. Proudlock.

Resident : And you heard this from some Indian? Some unknown punkha-wallah coming barging into your office? Who was this Indian?

Ferguson : He was a night-watchman, sir. He was night-watchman on the night of the murder – and when he heard shots

Winstead : Shots?

Ferguson : He claimed, sir, that he heard shots – and then seeing a fully dressed Englishman swimming across the River

Winstead : The Klang River?

Ferguson : In flood, yes. It was in flood, it was raging. What with *that* and the number of crocodiles

Resident (cutting in) : So what are you saying? Are you saying that this fleeing man was *another* lover? That there was yet *another* lover of Mrs. Proudlock who, having found her with Steward and being driven to violence by a desperate jealousy?

Ferguson : We are not saying anything, sir. But why would he lie? What would it credit him? And if the Indian *didn't* lie and Mrs. Proudlock took the blame to save this *second* man -

Timothy : Unlikely, isn't it?

Resident : More than unlikely. It's preposterous. To label an Englishwoman – an *English* woman – as so besmeared with debauchery – so temperamentally degenerate -

Tan : Perhaps, sir, she is *not* an Englishwoman.

Resident : Not? How dare you.

Ferguson : We are not being salacious, sir. As it happens, I know Mrs. Proudlock. I both know and like her. She was delightful in *Trial by Jury*. But one has to remember that her father was not at her wedding. He deliberately absented himself. And when we recall that there is no mention of a mother on her birth certificate and that the Proudlocks never hunt, never play polo, never go to the better sort of dinner parties

Resident : Because they are minor figures. Because they are the sort always to be found lurking at the smudgy edge of the photograph. Oh I am not denying that the Proudlocks are not quite top drawer– they are not quite *my* sort of people. But to say this to dare to speculate Are you really suggesting that we should allow this to be raised in court – that it should be suggested that Mrs. Proudlock has several lovers – that she is a promiscuous woman, but that this being accounted for by the fact of her being not pure blood but a *Eurasian*?

Timothy : She does not *look* like a Eurasian.

Winstedt: No, she does not. Nor has she the background. Her father hunts tigers.

Resident : And then there's bail. There is also the matter of bail. When there was a bail option, who was it who personally provided sureties? Who offered support to the sum of a thousand dollars? Her father. Who stood up and spoke for her? Her father. And you are telling me we should besmirch this man, ruin his honour - that we should label one of his daughters a half-caste Eurasian?

Ferguson : And if it is true? If, sir, we are calling a spade a spade? She Eurasian, you English, Mr. Tan Chinese.

Resident : Ah, so that is your argument : she a Eurasian as Tan is a Chinaman. But again you are forgetting Robespierre. Tell me. Mr. Tan, have you ever *heard* of Robespierre?

Tan (not quite understanding the trend of all this) : Robespierre, sir?

Resident : He was a tyrant. A revolutionary tyrant. But he did speak some sense and even his mistakes carry lessons. And so what were those mistakes? What *were* they, Mr. Tan? Well, one of them was to decree that everything should be re-labelled. Even the months. Late April to May, for instance, became Floréal. It

became the month of flowers. It was the new reality. But you can't change reality. Not at any rate without a cost. I don't know whether this new label for Mrs. Proudlock would be accurate. I don't know whether she's Eurasian or not. But I do know that any re-naming brings risks. And so let us beware. Let us avoid that flick of a pen by which a freedom-fighter becomes a terrorist. And let us recall Robespierre. A man who was both freedom-fighter *and* terrorist, and who *did* change names and who, when his own changes outpaced him - when his own current engulfed and swept him away -

Winstedt (as a suggestion seeing the Resident has become very worked up, as well as somewhat illogical) : I think perhaps a need to stick to the facts

Resident : He changed the names, the changes ruined him. (Mopping his brow, though calming down) Well, best beware. (Including Mr. Tan in his gaze now) Cook up no trouble, eh? (Fade)

(Scene returns to the Court Room. Mr. Justice Sercombe Smith on the bench, flanked as before by P.F. Wise and R.C.M. Kindersley. E.A.S. Wagner and J.G.T. Pooley for the defence. Hastings-Rhodes as Public Prosecutor. Dr. Edward Mc.Intyre on the stand being questioned by Hastings-Rhodes.)

Hastings-Rhodes : You are Dr. Edward MacIntyre.

MacIntyre : I am.

Hastings-Rhodes : And you are here in your capacity as medical officer attending the crime scene.

MacIntyre : Quite right. Dr. Mc. Gregor is the prisoner's regular doctor, but I being present on that distressing occasion

Hastings-Rhodes : Yes, I see. Mrs. Proudlock was, however, known to you, was she not?

MacIntyre : She was known to me.

Hastings-Rhodes : And you thinking her a lightweight

MacIntyre : I beg your pardon?

Hastings-Rhodes : Oh yes. You are on record as remarking it. You said that though the *Malay Mail* does not hesitate to tell its readers when Mr. Burch is feeling sickly or Mr. Hubback has a knee-sprain, its complete failure to note any of the doings of the even *less* remarkable Mrs. Proudlock –

MacIntyre : I never said that. That was a reporter. I told a reporter that Mrs. Proudlock spends her time making cushions. That, like many English ladies, she confines herself to antimacassars, patchwork, going on shopping sprees –

Hastings-Rhodes : - sprees to John Little's millinery department –

MacIntyre : Among others.

Hastings-Rhodes : - so many sprees that many people think she actually *works* there –

Sercombe-Smith : Did you say that, Dr. MacIntyre?

MacIntyre : That was before I knew I should be called. Besides, if a lady wishes to relieve the tedium by making a few purchases –

Hastings-Rhodes : My point, sir, is that Mrs. Proudlock seems to have found life rather unsatisfying. That she lacked the excitement she required. And that therefore the possibility of an illicit liaison, a clandestine affaire –

Sercombe-Smith : That is not evidence. It is not even accurate. May I remind you, Mr. Rhodes, that Mrs. Proudlock did achieve some distinction. She was First Bridesmaid in a widely reported performance of *Trial by Jury*, she had a named role as a shepherdess in the burlesque comedy *The Arcagettes*, she would entertain at home singing arias from *The Pirates of Penzance* –

Hastings-Rhodes : - which is a charming show, though whether it matches the excitement of a *grande passion criminelle* –

Sercombe-Smith : Stick to the evidence, sir.

Hastings-Rhodes (to the doctor) : So then, Dr. MacIntyre, you knew Mrs. Proudlock. You were aware of her socially. You also, I believe, knew her medical history.

MacIntyre : I did, yes. Some of it.

Hastings-Rhodes : Not good, was it?

MacIntyre : Sir?

Hastings-Rhodes : That business after the wedding –

MacIntyre : After her wedding Mrs. Proudlock was taken to England. Her husband took her. Her health had been bad, so a fairly swift departure -

Hastings-Rhodes : Within hours, I believe -

MacIntyre : Yes, but if it had been planned.

Hastings-Rhodes (cutting in) : So then the two leave for England. And on the way she is attended several times by the ship's doctor.

MacIntyre : Yes. I know that because he wrote to me. He thought it might be germane. You must bear in mind, sir, that Mrs. Proudlock is very young. She was only nineteen when she married. And the climate being steamy and her disposition naturally nervous –

Wildev : Nervous?

MacIntyre : - easily frightened

Kindersley : She does not seem easily frightened.

MacIntyre : That is because she is rallying – it is a matter of dignity - and the limelight – she does rather enjoy the limelight

Hastings-Rhodes : She enjoys the limelight when she can get any.

MacIntyre : As do a number of lawyers.

Hastings-Rhodes : Turning now to specifics : Mrs. Proudlock had, I believe, some gynaecological problems –

MacIntyre (warily): Yes.

Hastings-Rhodes : Problems which, it has been agreed, your honour, that the *Mail* will not be reporting.

Ethel (from the dock) : Thank God!

Hastings-Rhodes : And the nature of these problems?

MacIntyre : Vaginal discharge – that is one. The technical term is leucorrhoeia. Profuse leucorrhoeia. She also suffers from excessive and irregular menstruation, relaxed genitalia, a collapsed uterus, tender ovary, malformation of the vulva, the vaginal production of an excess of pus

Kindersley (to MacIntyre) : And the treatment? All this of course is very horrible but if there has been any treatment

MacIntyre : I'm afraid not. Dr. Mc.Gregor did urge her. He did ask if she would agree to various operations but, in his own words, she prevaricated. The lady is of course of a somewhat delicate frame – I doubt that she possesses even average strength - and *that* combined with the offence to her natural feminine modesty –

Hastings-Rhodes : Yes. Not so very delicate, however. She attends a Rifle Association. She is well known as a markswoman. And when you consider her sister

MacIntyre (surprised) : Her sister?

Hastings-Rhodes : Is it not a fact that this so-called delicate lady caused a prospective brother-in-law to jilt her younger sister – to abandon her even at the altar –

Sercombe-Smith : Mr. Rhodes!

Hastings-Rhodes : I withdraw that remark. No further questions. (*He sits*)

Sercombe-Smith : Mr. Wagner.

Wagner (rising) : Good morning, Dr. MacIntyre.

MacIntyre : Good morning.

Wagner : I am sorry that my learned friend saw fit to put you through all that. Particularly as most of it is circumstantial and at least three-quarters evidentially irrelevant. Mrs. Proudlock, you say, was medically delicate.

MacIntyre : Yes. Yes, she was.

Wagner : So delicate that any kind of forced sexual activity, any attempt at unwanted or even unduly rough penetration –

MacIntyre : It would have been torture for her.

Wagner : Torture, yes. I wonder, Dr. MacIntyre, whether you know anything of the Winchester window –

MacIntyre : A window?

Wagner : It is a stained glass window in Winchester Cathedral. One in which fragments of medieval glass are put together randomly, in a manner somewhat like an abstract mosaic. The truth is that the original panes were vandalised. They were pushed out by Cromwell's forces, only at the Restoration to be gathered up and reassembled. And *that* is what the prosecution is giving us : a collage, a mosaic, in which the pieces, though they exist, are entirely wrongly re-assembled. Mrs, Proudlock fired a gun. Yes, that is one piece. She was hysterical and distraught. Yes, that is another. But *why* was she distraught? Was it because Mr. Steward was rejecting her? Or was it not, which is far more likely, that, she fired those shots, not to *kill* the man, but to rid herself of an attack – an assault - a violation? You were the first, I believe, to examine the lady -

MacIntyre : I was.

Wagner : And when was that? How did it come about?

MacIntyre : It came after she summoned the cook. She was in a state of shock, you see. She has followed Steward onto the verandah but having no recollection of shooting him –

Hastings-Rhodes (rising) : Shooting him at least three times –

MacIntyre : Yes.

Hastings-Rhodes : Leaving clear footprints –

MacIntyre : Yes.

Hastings-Rhodes : High-heeled footprints appropriate to dressing up to receive a gentleman.

Sercombe-Smith : Sit down, Mr. Rhodes.

Hastings-Rhodes : I apologise. (*He sits*)

Wagner (to MacIntyre) : So then you were summoned to the house. You went there when called. And found what?

MacIntyre : I found Mrs. Proudlock. Wearing, as he said, raised heels – black pumps with heels, silk stockings, light elegant tea-gown -

Wagner : And she looked how?

MacIntyre : Dazed. She looked completely dazed. Her eyes looked intelligent.

Kindersley : Dazed but intelligent?

MacIntyre : Not reeling from shock.

Wagner : But she *did* look horrified.

MacIntyre : It is difficult to say.

Sercombe-Smith : Try.

MacIntyre : Try?

Sercombe-Smith : Try to extrapolate. We have heard, Dr. MacIntyre, that, there was a furious struggle. That the noise penetrated even to the cook, who was in his quarters smoking opium. In your opinion was her condition compatible with any such struggle?

MacIntyre : No.

Sercombe-Smith : Was it compatible with *any* kind of struggle?

MacIntyre : Yes.

Sercombe-Smith : It was compatible with struggle, but *not* of the life-and-death variety -

MacIntyre : Exactly.

Wise : And the letters : you spoke, I believe, of some letters.

MacIntyre : That was Inspector Farrant. He searched the victim's house and found letters. They were in a bureau. They were from the dead man's mother and sister.

Wagner : And not therefore from the accused.

MacIntyre : No. No letters from Mrs. Proudlock. There were clothes. Garments of a sort belonging to a European female and child. They were in the bedroom.

Wagner : But not identified – no labels.

MacIntyre : I'm not sure. You could ask the Chinese woman.

Kindersley : No, no.

Hastings-Rhodes : Yes, yes.

MacIntyre : In tears apparently. According to the Inspector, she was the only person in Malaya ever to be caught weeping for poor Mr. Steward.

Sercombe-Smith : Which is sad, but not germane. Whereas *this* – this by contrast (*Holding up a note*)

Wagner : My lord?

Sercombe-Smith : It is a note. A note concerning an American. A Miss Marsh.

Ethel : Oh no.

MacIntyre : I know Miss Marsh.

Sercombe-Smith : Do you know that Mrs. Proudlock briefly worked for her? Were you aware that she helped in her kindergarten? –

MacIntyre : Yes. I know that.

Sercombe-Smith : Well now, this Miss Marsh has sent me a note. A note of which the mention of these foreigners reminded me. It is a note stating that in March, not long before Mr. Proudlock's birthday, the accused asked to have a few hours off. His birthday was coming up, she said, and she wanted to buy him a gun. There was nothing her hubby liked more, she said, than shooting at crocodiles –

Wagner (objecting) : Really, sir –

Sercombe-Smith : And according to this message – this note from the foreign American - Mrs. Proudlock telling you so on the murder night

MacIntyre : She certainly did *not* tell me –

Ethel : I never told anyone.

Kindersley : Prisoner will be silent.

Ethel : It's all lies. He was going to rape me.

Sercombe-Smith : There is one thing more. Something which, Mr. Wagner, if you will forgive me, I feel I must elucidate. According to this Marsh woman – who is apparently known to be very sensible – sensible at least by American standards – Mrs. Proudlock also told you that her husband was tired of her –

Ethel : No, no.

Sercombe-Smith : - that he was himself plotting to get rid of her. That there was a deliberate plan for Mr. Steward to seduce Mrs. Proudlock – and this plan having been initiated by the husband himself -

Ethel : What?

Wagner : What?

Sercombe-Smith : - and Mrs. Proudlock having got wind of it –

Hastings-Rhodes : But that is nonsense. Even I must assert that the nonsensical nature of that accusation –

Sercombe-Smith (to MacIntyre) : Did Mrs. Proudlock ever imply to you that her husband was turning against her? –

MacIntyre : Well ...

Wise : Yes?

MacIntyre : Well?

Kindersley : Well what?

MacIntyre : I don't remember.

Wagner (incredulously) : You don't remember?

MacIntyre : No I don't. And besides, the honour of a lady – an English lady - the sacred duty to respect a confidence –

Ethel : She hated me. I'm lovelier, you see. Still, if it's true well, one to me, dare say. *(Fade)*

(Lighting changes to suggest a flashback. The light is rather greenish. William Steward discovered at a table with William Proudlock. This is the 2nd William Proudlock who is more coarse-grained than his No.1. self. They have been drinking quite heavily.)

2nd William Proudlock : Pleasant night, isn't it?

William Steward : Very pleasant.

2nd William Proudlock : We two out on your balcony, Ethel warbling her way through *Trial by Jury*.

William Steward : I thought you liked *Trial by Jury*.

2nd William Proudlock : I do like it. I like most music. And of course as a way to make friends – to fit in

William Steward : Keen on that, are you, Mr. Proudlock? Fitting in?

2nd William Proudlock : My father was a mill-worker. Of course I want to fit in. I even want to know the right and wrong times for wearing a frock-coat. It's all right for the higher reaches. They can mock because they're already in. Whereas the aspiring –

William Steward : Still knocking.

2nd William Proudlock : Yes.

William Steward : And you really believe that – really think they *are* superior and everything?

2nd William Proudlock : I think it's a system worth buying into.

William Steward : In Workington we don't have systems. We have outside lavatories.

2nd William Proudlock (raising his glass) : Here's to your outside lavatory.

William Steward : Here's to yours. (*Putting drink down again rather glumly*) I suppose I'm a bit of a stiff really. Collar, tie, right hand on right hip. But whether it's shyness – whether it's *that* or just simply the safe bet for an acceptable look More drink?

2nd William Proudlock : Too right.

William Steward (calling) : Lily. (*As a Chinese girl of some beauty enters*) This is Lily. Mr. Tan's daughter, though given that we are keeping it quiet

2nd William Proudlock : I had a girl once. Name of Winnie.

William Steward : Winnie? (*As Lily darts a quick look at them*) How odd.

Gin prahit, Lily.

Lily : Gin prahit, master. (*Lily bows a little and goes*)

2nd William Proudlock : Can't do it now, of course. Or at least not so often. I'm not saying my wife isn't attractive. Pretty teeth, nice hair. But if she hadn't conveniently got herself pregnant What about you? You ever been married?

William Steward : Oh no. No experience really.

2nd William Proudlock : Except with Lily.

William Steward : I'd rather not talk about Lily.

Lily (entering with drinks) : Drinks, master.

William Steward : Thank you.

2nd William Proudlock : Different, of course, in the outstations. No goldfish bowl there. Rule the roast. Law unto oneself. Plain shorts, knee-length socks.

William Steward (with a ghost of a smile) : Showing off the muscles.

2nd William Proudlock : At least I've got muscles. Do you like my muscles? Do you, Lily?

Lily : Very fine muscles.

2nd William Proudlock : Very. And that's not the only fine thing about me (*looking suggestively downward*)..... (*As Lily looks a bit scornful*) Yes, well, never mind. (*More tentatively to Steward*) About what I wanted to discuss with you

William Steward : Yes?

2nd William Proudlock : It's a bit awkward. (*Eyeing Lily warily*) The girl and everything. Not that I dislike girls. Or boys even. Needs must when the devil drives. I'm being a bit coarse. It's the drink. Drink, heat, jolly company. You wouldn't think, would you, that I direct the St. Mary's choir.?

William Steward : Ah well, if we atheists are going to get anywhere

2nd William Proudlock : I'm not saying I don't value it. I even go to church sometimes. Churchman, president of the state band - lieutenant in the fire

brigade. Did you know that my team won the Cape Hill Cup? And the Government one? First place once. First place in the ladder competition
Yes, well, not really relevant.

William Steward : Interesting, though.

2nd William Proudlock : I would rather call it surprising. Odd, I mean, that I's so shy at getting to the point. Friend of mine - pal in the Volunteer Rifles – rather coarse - fond of indecent stories - but his assurance that I could tell you anything – that you are one hundred per cent reliable.....

William Steward : I think, yes, I *am* mostly reliable. Mind, if you wish Lily to vouch for me

2nd William Proudlock : I think not. I think perhaps if we leave Lily out of it

William Steward : I think so too. (*To Lily*) Off you go, Lily.

Lily (unexpectedly) : Win-nie.

2nd William Proudlock (rather mockingly imitating her intonation) : Lil-y. (*Lily goes*)

2nd William Proudlock : What it is, I need to be sure. No hidden snags. I can assume, I take it, that you are a man of the world?

William Steward : Well, I'm not fanciful.

2nd William Proudlock : A miner.

William Steward : A mining engineer. Dry ore. Rather successful. In April, last year we produced one hundred and twenty two pikuls. And as for the quality – the overall excellence -

2nd William Proudlock : What about you? Are you of overall excellence?

William Steward : How do you mean?

2nd William Proudlock : How do you think?

William Steward : Not clear.

2nd William Proudlock : No. Too delicate. But perhaps if I come straight out - straight out with it, as the vicar said to the choir-boy – (*Suddenly coming clean*) I am tired of my wife. That's it in a nutshell. No particular reason. She's not an

adulteress. She gives me my oats. But her heart isn't in it – and what with that and her endless moaning about her health –

William Steward : I thought your wife was a rather *vivacious* personality.

2nd William Proudlock : She can be. And she can also be a cow. She can be vindictive, hysterical, stubborn, quick to bear a grudge, slower than an elephant to give over it. And as for her family (*Indignantly*) Do you know her father refused even to come to my wedding? –

William Steward : And so you want me to do something?

2nd William Proudlock : I want you to seduce her. Pourquoi non? You're a big chap - big probably in the you-know-where department – and you're not bad looking – tall, large frame – a bit bald –

William Steward : I am completely bald.

2nd William Proudlock : Yes, but they like that, don't they? They think it's virile. A sign of being big where it counts. And if you get her going, and then I surprise you I discover you, you see. I catch you *in flagrante*. And that way I can get a divorce. I admit it's a bit unorthodox – admit, too, your Lily may not be too keen on it –

William Steward : My family won't be keen on it. May I remind you I have a mother, a sister – a very respectable mother and sister who relying, as they do, on the money I send to them –

2nd William Proudlock : Yes but, dash it all, it won't last. The scandal will be over before it's begun. And if I make it worth your while

William Steward : Rich, are you?

2nd William Proudlock : Not rich. Don't need to be. What with you living with Lily – and Mr. Tan being big in the *Malay Mail* –

William Steward : You're not threatening, are you? Because why otherwise you should mention *him*

2nd William Proudlock : Because it's a secret. And that gives us a bond. And the other reason is that you never know. *We* never know, do we? Mr. Tan *seems* harmless but is he? How do I know? How do any of us? And this meaning we must be wary of all links with the Chinese community

William Steward : Even Winnie? –

2nd William Proudlock : Winnie came from nowhere. She is a genii out of a bottle. Look, I'm not blackmailing. But I *am* clarifying. Ethel's father will do anything to avoid a scandal. He would paint himself purple if it helped. And if I catch you and her, and then persuade him to pay me off - to reward me in return for a quiet divorce – or even an agreed separation –

William Steward : You seem very sure that Ethel will play her part – that she'll go for it

2nd William Proudlock : She'll go for it. She will, if you tickle her fancy. Only I think we should meet first. A few gatherings. A little intercourse. You must come to our house. Or the club – we can meet at the club, and then if you happen to call one night when I'm out

William Steward (rather sarcastically) : Call to play cards, to sing a few songs. I haven't accepted yet, you know.

2nd William Proudlock : And then ply the charm. Turn on *that*. And then if you step up the pace - show yourself as good with the cock as the pikuls (*Noise off as of pans falling*) What's that? Is that Lily?

William Steward : I'll think on it. It's no such little thing.

2nd William Proudlock (coarsely) : Quite big, I hope. I trust you there, boy, eh?
(*Fade*)

(*Scene reverts to the Supreme Court, Kula Lumpur. Mr. Justice Sercombe Smith on the bench, flanked by P.F. Wise and R.C.M. Kindersley. E.A.S. Wagner and J.G.T. Pooley for the defence. Hastings-Rhodes as Public Prosecutor. Ethel in the dock. Ushers and clerks. The first William Proudlock awaiting his call to give evidence. He is of course much less coarse than the second whom we have just witnessed. Hastings-Rhodes about to cross-examine but first the Judge addresses the auditorium.*)

Sercombe-Smith : Gentlemen here present, I should like now to say a few words. To make a short statement. In one moment, the husband of the accused will be called for cross-examination. He will be questioned by Mr. Rhodes and then no doubt by Mr. Wagner. Now then, it has been said in some quarters that the court has failed in its duty. It has defaulted by allowing the said William Proudlock to be present during the initial cross-examinations. And therefore I should like to make a statement. To clarify our position. And the first thing to say is that this is not a fault – that here in Malaya we work to our own particular code. So what *is* that code? (*Almost a joke*) How is it codified? Well, for one thing it is a code which has abolished trial by jury. We have eliminated it, gentlemen, for the very sound reason that the pool of jurors being confined to Britons, it would be untenably small. Nor can I accept the argument that the pool should have been widened. Britons, it is generally agreed, are the one group likely to be capable of reaching a wise and judicious decision. We need only recall the increasing incidence of rubber-smuggling to be quite sure that native populations have very little sense of what constitutes moral and legitimate conduct.

There is another reason why Trial by Jury is unsatisfactory. And that is because of emotion. It is well known that lawyers, even British ones, may be tendentious and cynical and all too likely to play upon jurymen's feelings. Instead, therefore, we have, changed the approach. We have devised the assessor system. The role of the judge is to interpret the law. That of the assistants is to weigh up the evidence – to weigh it in the cold light of reason. It is true that, the assessors are members of the public. It is also true that they may lack any form of legal training. But surely any reasonable man – by which I mean any reasonable *Briton* - could easily evaluate how much Mr. Proudlock may have been influenced by anything he has listened to. To deny this would be to deny our sense. It would be to underrate our innate British integrity. And now that that is quite settled, if we may proceed please. (*Nodding to Hastings-Rhodes*)

Hastings-Rhodes : Thank you. And may I say, my lord, that your cogent words – your exceedingly lucid exposition

Sercombe-Smith (suspecting sarcasm, slightly uneasily) : Just get on with it.

Hastings-Rhodes : Call William Proudlock.

Usher : William Proudlock. Take the stand please.

(The 1st William takes the stand)

Sercombe-Smith (to Proudlock) : And if you would remember that you have already been sworn -

Hastings-Rhodes (as a formal greeting) : Mr. Proudlock.

1st William Proudlock (stiffly) : Mr. Rhodes.

Hastings-Rhodes : Good morning. I trust you slept well.

1st William Proudlock : I have slept as I always sleep.

Hastings-Rhodes : Though not, alas, with your wife. *(Kindersley looks shocked)* A point to which I shall return when it is legally appropriate. Now then. In a moment, Mr. Proudlock, I shall ask you to recapitulate exactly what occurred on the night of Mr. Steward's slaughter. But before I do I should like the court to obtain a rather better knowledge of the victim as a person. You knew Mr. Steward, I believe.

1st William Proudlock : I knew him.

Hastings-Rhodes : A point you can hardly deny, since Mr. McEwen, a friend of his, has already testified that he saw you. He saw you, Mr. Steward and your wife at the Selangor Club on the very day of the slaying.

1st William Proudlock : Yes. Though as he also said he saw nothing untoward – never, for instance, saw my wife and Mr. Steward exchanging any signals

Hastings-Rhodes : Not overt signals, no. Not signals that a casual observer might be able to interpret.

1st William Proudlock : If the signals did not exist, then the irrelevance of any sort of interpretation -

Hastings-Rhodes : True. Good point. Your wife, I believe, was wearing a hat. A rather showy black picture-hat.

1st William Proudlock : She was.

Hastings-Rhodes : She had specially dressed up for the occasion.

1st William Proudlock : My wife always dresses well.

Hastings-Rhodes : Indeed so. We have seen her here in navy blue, in turquoise, in a white straw hat trimmed with brown ribbon. So the likelihood that she is indeed something of a clothes-horse, that she likes to make a good show

Sercombe-Smith : Get to the point, Mr. Rhodes.

Hastings-Rhodes : My point, sir, is that the clothes worn by Mrs. Proudlock are themselves an indication of character. Of character and the desire to attract. I believe, Mr. Proudlock, you have already said that, when she dined alone, your wife regularly wore an evening gown.

1st William Proudlock : I said that, yes.

Hastings-Rhodes : And yet the servants, when asked, have disputed it. One need only recall the evidence of the cook – a cook who having no private interest – no possible cause to lie

1st William Proudlock : I meant something else. What I *meant* to say was that she wore an evening gown when the two of us dined alone – when we dined as a pair *without* company.

Hastings-Rhodes : Without company, I see. No servants. No waiting-staff. She was of course wearing a form of evening gown on the night of the killing.

1st William Proudlock : Apparently yes.

Hastings-Rhodes : A light green rather diaphanous tea-gown. The front low-cut -

Mr. Wise : Low-cut?

Hastings-Rhodes : Very low cut – which taken with the smart shoes, the buckles - the general appearance that she was expecting company -

1st William Proudlock : You cannot infer that.

Sercombe-Smith : No, sir, indeed you cannot. Really, Mr. Rhodes, I thought you were intending to clarify the victim's character.

Hastings-Rhodes : I *am* intending it. (*To Proudlock*) Mr. Steward was, I believe, rather a shy man.

1st William Proudlock : He may have been.

Hastings-Rhodes : Not one to socialise. And yet not only did you meet him on the night of the killing. On the night before – being a Saturday – you and your wife by her own admission met him – you ran into him at the Selangor Club -

1st William Proudlock : That is what it was. We *ran into* him.

Hastings-Rhodes : It was not pre-arranged.

1st William Proudlock : Certainly not. And if my wife then *was* forced to talk to him –

Wise : *Forced* to talk to him?

1st William Proudlock : We were passing his chair. He looked up and said hello. In the course of a short conversation my wife remarked how long it was since he had last visited. She mentioned that we had moved. When Steward asked where, then her feeling of having no choice –

Hastings-Rhodes : No choice but to say?

1st William Proudlock : As a matter of courtesy.

Hastings-Rhodes : Courtesy, yes. You were merely courteous strangers. No link, no affinity. Making it rather odd that your friend Mr. Ambler has already told us that you had known Steward for about two years, that you liked him, that you thought him a friend -

1st William Proudlock (rather caught out) : *Did* he say that?

Sercombe-Smith : You were absent at the time but the clear registration of that remark -

1st William Proudlock (cutting in) : It depends what you mean by 'friend'. I knew him, yes. For that matter, one can know the postman. But as for meaning one is intimate

Hastings-Rhodes (musing on the words) : Not intimate.

1st William Proudlock : Mr. Steward was a gentleman. Towards my wife he was always the model of chivalrous circumspection.

Hastings-Rhodes (rather suddenly switching direction) : Turning now to the night of the murder –

1st William Proudlock : Of the shooting.

Hastings-Rhodes : You were not, of course, at home when the shooting occurred.

1st William Proudlock : No, sir, I was not.

Hastings-Rhodes : You were dining with Mr. Ambler.

1st William Proudlock : Yes.

Hasting Rhodes : A friend -

1st William Proudlock : A colleague.

Kindersley (as a prompt) : In which case a little more detail

1st William Proudlock : It was in Brickfields Road. It was a kind of duty. Mr. Shaw has been gone four months. Over four. And the arrangement being that I was to live in his house – to occupy it till his return –

Hastings-Rhodes : So then, you entertain for him.

1st William Proudlock : I entertain as his deputy.

Hastings-Rhodes : But not at his house.

1st William Rhodes : Sometimes at his house. Really, Mr. Rhodes, what this can possibly have to do with the distressing accident–

Sercombe Smith : Accident? Five shots an accident?

1st William Proudlock : If there really were five.

Hastings-Rhodes : Oh there were. We know from the rickshaw-puller. He it was who saw your wife follow the victim down the steps. He who saw her standing over his body. He who heard the poor man groan. At which point, shrieking wildly and taking to his heels, he heard at least three more shots. Three beyond the original two - bang bang bang – and this being at a time when the Englishman was dying – when he was spurting red blood, and the terrified Chinese was fleeing, crying, running for his life

Ethel : Lies, all lies. It's lies – it's a terrible story! You're telling a terrible story.

(She swoons)

Sercombe-Smith : Look to the lady. Best now take a break. Tomorrow then. Ten thirty, let us say. *(Bangs gavel. All rise. Fade)*

(Scene changes to the interior of the club. Present are various members including James Redland, Lettice Quale, Lady Florence (wife of the Resident), Clive Borrowman, William and Jennifer Morley, and Archer Fleming. Redland is leading the proceedings which seem to constitute some kind of pre-arranged but rapidly organised meeting. Notably next to him is William Proudlock the Third.)

Redland : Ladies and gentlemen, ladies and gentlemen, a little hush, if you please. *(Taps teaspoon against the side of a cup or glass)* Now then. You know why we are here. You have heard the recent developments in the sad case of Mrs. Proudlock. And the committee thinking it only right to do all we can for the persons affected –

Fleming : Meaning the family of the victim.

Redland (frowning slightly) : Meaning the family of Mrs. Proudlock. The victim has no family. Or at least not in the Federated States. I am sure we are all deeply distressed at Mr. Steward's fate – I myself have been much struck. I have but to look at the manly stance in the one photograph which remains to be appalled at what we have lost. But he is gone. We can do nothing for him. Whereas in the case of Mrs. Proudlock –

Fleming (rather sneeringly) : Oh yes.

Redland : - of the lady and her afflicted husband. *This* afflicted husband. Mr. Proudlock, if you would care to say a few words –

3rd William Proudlock : Certainly.

Redland : And perhaps a little applause – *(Some applause, polite but not over-enthusiastic)*

3rd William Proudlock : Ladies and gentlemen, I am not much of a talker. More a doer than a thinker. But you know I do have a certain position - a certain status here among you - and this encouraging me to speak to you now –

Lettice (swinging an empty wine-glass) : Hear! Hear!

3rd William Proudlock : What it is, I am thinking of devising a petition. Or rather a series of them. A series to be sent to His Majesty in the Old Country. We all know how highly we colonials are respected in the Old Country. And how any wrong done to one of ours is a wrong done to our people at home. And this prompting me to urge you to write – to plead, to beg, if necessary –

Borrowman (rising) : Mr. Proudlock –

3rd William Proudlock : Yes?

Borrowman : Clive Borrowman. I designed the new hospital.

Redland : You point being

Borrowman : It is a point of procedure. I am sure, sir, that on a personal level we all highly sympathise. Your pains are without doubt deeply distressing. But to write petitions now – is that not somewhat premature? Your wife is as yet still on trial. She may be acquitted. And the possibility of damaging that process – of interfering with the wheels of justice –

Morley : It is not interference to draw attention to her plight.

Jennifer : Of course not. She is an Englishwoman.

Morley : She is an Englishwoman. And this meaning that we must surely adjudge her innocent –

Borrowman : I do not see how we can adjudge her innocent. We are not the assessors. And not having all the facts

Jennifer : It is a matter of dignity. And with our own dignity at stake

Redland : I don't see how.

Morley : The coolies. The coolies, Mr. Redland. On this very morning, I was jostled by a coolie.

Fleming : Dear, dear.

Morley : I was in a rickshaw. And this coolie – this fellow to whom I had been eminently polite – he picked up speed, ignored my cries, disobeyed traffic signals, stopped with a bump – and then when I protested –

Fleming : Oh dear!

Morley : - when I very politely and kindly protested and told him I would not be giving a tip – well, the nature of his response –

Lettice: Offensive?

Morley : Deeply. He said he didn't *want* a tip – that I could spend it on my lover. And then he told me a story. A story meant to alarm. There was this man, he said – English – an Englishman - and very regrettably he had been going about with a native. And he decided to break it off – he was going back to his wife – and would you believe, the China-woman was so aggrieved – so jealous - so ashamed at the loss of face - that she put a curse on him. A hiccups curse. Hic hic hic.

Fleming : Hic hic hic?

Morley : You may laugh but considering it eventually killed him

Jennifer : They want blood. It'll be tumbrils, not rickshaws.

Lady Florence (rising) : May I speak now?

Redland : Lady Florence?

Lady Florence : I, as you know am the wife of the Resident. And, being so, I feel I cannot greatly contribute. I occupy an official position. I have to stay neutral. But, thanks to my husband, I do know something about tumbrils. Plus a little about the man behind them. About Citizen Robespierre. Who is normally considered a tyrant, but you know what he said? He said men of all countries are brothers. We should be like citizens of the same state.

Morley : Ridiculous.

Redland : Mr. Morley!

Morley : I know. I apologise.

Lady Florence (who was not specially offended) : My point being that we cannot support her simply because she is English. We must accord her no greater and no lesser rights than we would afford to any human citizen. That said, I do understand Mr. Morley's difficulties. (To him directly) You are upset. You fear for the future.

Jennifer : We do fear for it. We fear that if we give them an inch, they'll take miles.

Lettice : It'll be foxes in a hen-run.

Fleming : Blood-lust.

Borrowman : Panic. Noise and stress causing panic.

Fleming (under his breath) : Though as to in whom

Morley : I, Lady Florence, am no scholar. I don't know much about Robespierre. And I'm none the wiser really why you quote him. But I do know one thing : I know that he got worse – that from crushing a few, he went on to the many. And my fear is that if we allow that – if we become the hens and the natives the foxes - if in the name of equality or justice or even some kind of new moral purity – we allow them to break down our walls – to gatecrash our edifice -

Redland : And the petitions? What, Mr. Morley, about the petitions?

3rd William Proudlock (losing his temper) : Yes, what about the bloody petitions?

Lady Florence : Language, Mr. Proudlock!

Echo (multi-voiced) : Language, Mr. Proudlock.

Jennifer: We don't need those. We need to clamp down fast.

Lettice : Agreed! (She claps to encourage the others to join in)

Morley : Agreed! (Turning to the men) It's us or them, men, eh? (The rest look much more uncomfortable than they had ever expected. Quick fade to black.)

(Scene returns to the Court. Mabel Marsh on the stand. William Proudlock the 1st in the public space. Assessors and lawyers as before.)

Hastings-Rhodes: Miss Marsh

Mabel : Oh yes.

Hastings-Rhodes : Miss Mabel Marsh.

Mabel (slightly coquettishly) : Mabel Victorine.

Hastings-Rhodes : I am sorry to have called you. Sorry at such short notice. But your own intervention. ... You admit you *have* intervened.

Mabel : Oh well, I guess.

Sercombe-Smith : You guess?

Hastings-Rhodes : It's an Americanism, my lord. It means roughly yes.

Sercombe-Smith : Then why on earth she fails to say so

Hastings-Rhodes : I have only a few questions. Questions, shall we say, about veracity. You have written, Miss Marsh, to inform the court of a conversation. It was a conversation that occurred, I believe, between you and Mrs. Proudlock.

Mabel : Kind of.

Hastings-Rhodes : Kind of?

Mabel : I wish it never had.

Hastings-Rhodes : And what, pray, was the substance of this conversation?

Mabel : The substance? Do I have to say?

Wise (who finds her rather appealing and attractive) : Please.

Mabel : I shall be so mortified.

Hastings-Rhodes : She said, did she not, that her husband was tired of her – that he was even plotting to remove her –

1st William Proudlock : Ridiculous.

Wagner (as a protest re the questioning) : Leading the witness.

Hastings-Rhodes : Did Mrs. Proudlock indeed make that observation?

Mabel : It was more than an observation. She said she knew it. And she didn't just tell *me*. The very fact that she'd already informed Mr. Ambler

Hastings-Rhodes : Informed Mr. Ambler? Is Mr. Ambler in the court?

Sercombe-Smith (to a clerk) : Fetch Mr. Ambler. I'm afraid, Mr. Wagner, the need now to re-examine your witness

Hastings-Rhodes : So then, this is the position. Mrs. Proudlock – the accused – she told you *and* Mr, Ambler that her husband wished to be rid of her. I mean she told you that she had previously told Mr. Ambler –

Mabel : Confusing, isn't it? Land's sakes, talk about too many cooks

Hastings-Rhodes : And how did you react?

Mabel : React?

Hastings-Rhodes : What was your response?

Mabel : Oh well, I didn't have time really. Not then. Not with all those kiddies.

Hastings-Rhodes : You were looking after your kindergarten.

Mabel : Yes.

Hastings-Rhodes : But afterwards.

Mabel : Oh well afterwards I wrote about it.

Hastings-Rhodes : After you heard about the murder.

Mabel : Yes.

Sercombe-Smith : Yes?

Mabel : I guess.

Hastings-Rhodes : You wrote about it and mentioned it to the court.

Mabel : Wish I hadn't. Lord, if I could only turn the clock back –

Kindersley : And why would you wish to do that?

Mabel : I wouldn't be here.

Hastings-Rhodes : You chose to be here.

Ethel : Jealous. She's a jealous cat.

Hastings-Rhodes : You contend that there was a deliberate plot - that Mr. Proudlock was himself plotting to get rid of his wife.

Mabel : Sure. I guess.

Hastings-Rhodes : And what was that plan?

Mabel (to Judge) : Do I have to say?

Hastings-Rhodes : It was a plan, was it not, for Mr. Steward to seduce Mrs. Proudlock – a plan which being actually initiated by the husband –

1st William Proudlock : Lies, lies. Ethel – (*appealing in her direction*)

Clerk (returning) : Mr. Ambler, sir – he has been located.

Sercombe-Smith : Bring him in. And Mr. Proudlock, be silent. You are allowed to be present but if you interrupt any further –

Mabel : He's putting me off.

Sercombe-Smith (testily) : Yes, yes.

Mabel : I need counselling.

Hastings-Rhodes : No further questions.

Sercombe-Smith : Mr. Wagner?

Wagner : Must I? Really, my lord, that the hope of getting anything further from this particular witness -

Sercombe-Smith : You may step down, Miss Marsh.

Mabel : Done, am I?

Ethel : You should be. Just because I got the part of Chief Bridesmaid

Sercombe-Smith (wearily) : Call Mr. Ambler.

Clerk (ushering him to the box) : Mr. Ambler, if you please –

Sercombe-Smith : You will recall that you have been sworn.

Ambler : I am aware of that.

Hastings-Rhodes : Mr. Ambler, we are sorry about this – sorry, I mean, to have to drag you back. However, Miss Marsh having maintained that you knew of a plot against Mrs. Proudlock –

1st William Proudlock : Ridiculous! Preposterous! (*As Sercombe-Smith glares at him*) Sorry, sorry.

Hastings-Rhodes : Mr. Ambler, I will own that I am here in a difficult position. My avowed aim is to make the case for the prosecution. It is not to incriminate the husband. That said, I must ask you to respond truthfully to all questions. The first being about Miss Marsh. And specifically whether you deny her assertions. I mean of a planned seduction.

Ambler : Categorically.

Hastings-Rhodes : There was no such plot.

Ambler : None. Indeed, the total harmony of the marriage – the fact that there was never a cross word –

Sercombe-Smith : Just answer the question.

Ambler : None then.

Hastings-Rhodes : But you do know of the violence - you were there when it happened –

Ambler : Not at the murder.

Hastings-Rhodes : Afterwards. I mean afterwards. You were one of the first to hear about the shooting.

Ambler : Yes.

Hastings-Rhodes : And what did you do? What did you and Mr. Proudlock do when you first heard about it? You were together I believe. You were dining together when up comes the Proudlock cook running, panting, yelling

Ambler : Yes.

Hastings-Rhodes : And before that? Before he arrived? Did you and Mr. Proudlock discuss Mr. Steward at all?

Ambler : No. Anyway, by that time we had finished.

Hastings-Rhodes : You had finished dining before the cook arrived.

Ambler : We had finished dining and had already chatted and smoked. It was then that I suggested Mr. Proudlock might play the piano. Which he did. He played a little Chopin and then, for light relief, a few melodies from *Trial by Jury*.

Wise (who likes this) : The operetta *Trial by Jury*.

Ambler : Yes, making it rather ironic that denying Mrs. Proudlock any such trial herself

Hastings-Rhodes : And then up comes the cook. The native cook who had been in the Proudlock bungalow but who being in his own quarters sleeping –

Ambler : I don't know whether he was asleep.

Hastings-Rhodes : But at any rate he will have heard the commotion.

Ambler : I suppose.

Hastings-Rhodes : And so off you rush - you rush to the house.

Ambler : Yes.

Hastings-Rhodes : With Mr. Proudlock.

Ambler : Of course.

Hastings-Rhodes : And found? What did you actually *find*, Mr. Ambler?

Ambler : We found Ethel looking very wild and excited. She was trembling violently. On seeing William she became hysterical - she almost collapsed. Oh and her dress was torn - it was torn below the knee, near the waist -

Hastings-Rhodes : And then?

Ambler : Then what? If you mean what did we do, we helped her into the house. I wrapped her in a shawl. William gave her some sherry. By now she was lying on the settee, only not comfortably - she kept half-rising – looking about very wildly. You *did* look about, didn't you, Ethel?

Ethel : I most certainly did. (*Judge annoyed but not intervening*)

Hastings-Rhodes : And so you tried to soothe her. You did your best. And she – her own reaction?

Ambler : She became angry. I'm afraid to say she told me to shut up. But of course her dress was torn – she was bleeding. And then William – Mr. Proudlock - he took her hand – he took it very gently and said, 'Tell us about it, Kiddie'. At which point she got up – She fetched the book – that one – (*pointing to an exhibit*) - the one by Leslie Stephen –

Hastings-Rhodes : And?

Ambler : And Mr. Proudlock kissed her.

Hastings-Rhodes : He kissed her?

Ambler : Yes. He kissed her and told her he loved her. He said, 'You're a lovely girl. I love you'.

Hastings-Rhodes (*prompting him to continue*) : At which point?

Ambler : At which point she hit him.

Sercombe-Smith : What?

Hastings-Rhodes : Quite so. We have evidence. She remonstrated – she shouted – she told Mr. Proudlock rather defiantly that she had fired numerous shots - that Steward ran for the verandah - that she had followed – stumbled – tripped down the steps -

Kindserley : And the clothing?

Hastings-Rhodes : Ah yes, that. I was rebuked earlier for discussing the clothing. But that was in regard to the lady. Whereas this relating to the deceased Tell me, Mr. Ambler, with regard to the deceased, did you notice anything at all about the clothing?

Ambler : What sort of anything?

Hastings-Rhodes : Well, tidy, wasn't it? Not dishevelled. The dead man fully dressed. The trousers still buttoned.

Ambler : I don't remember.

Hastings-Rhodes : No?

Ambler : No. Really, Mr. Hastings-Rhodes, the way you keep putting words into my mouth -

Hastings-Rhodes : I am stating what the servants have already told us. No mess, no dishevelled clothing. And no struggle either. A teapoy had been overturned, yes, but, aside from that, nothing. And so what do we have? What is the overall scenario? Here we have a victim who is fully dressed, who is shot not once but several times, who seems not to have struggled, whose killer has been proved to have suffered no sexual violation -

Ambler : Then what about Ethel? What about *her* clothing?

Hastings-Rhodes : She did that herself. Having shot the poor man, she tore at her clothes – she rumpled them – she was already devising a story –

Sercombe-Smith : Conjecture, Mr. Rhodes. Entirely conjecture. Is there anything else?

Hastings-Rhodes : Not from me. Not in the face of an obviously hostile witness.

Sercombe-Smith : Then, Mr. Wagner, if we resume after lunch Agreed is that?

Kindersley : Agreed.

Wise : Why not?

Kindersley : It seems the wisest course

Mabel : Oh, sure. Deal done. I'm up for it. O.K. (*Sercombe-Smith sighs heavily. Fade*)

(Scene changes to a government building in Whitehall. Winston and Doggart, two junior secretaries, discovered. Winston has been emptying the contents of a post-bag onto a table)

Winston : Ah yes, here they come. Here, flooding the market.

Doggart : Market for what?

Winston : Proudlock. That Asian case. More every day. Though given that it will quite soon blow over

Doggart : You think?

Winston : Such is the official position.

Doggart : And the unofficial one?

Winston : Oh well, a bit more wary. Unrest in the Empire. Turning of the proverbial worm. Have a sweet.

Doggart : Thank you.

Winston : Peppermints.

Doggart : Delicious. And the evidence? The proof of unrest?

Winston : Well, I'm not sure there is really. But of course if she gets off If she gets off, whereas a native would clearly be executed (*Pausing over one missive*) Oh this one's interesting.

Doggart : Yes?

Winston : Just a minute. Still chewing. It's a sort of accusation. Not so much a petition as an accusation. It says Mrs. Proudlock isn't British.

Doggart : Not British? Of course she is British.

Winston : Not according to this. Half-caste. Eurasian. And why not? Lots of Eurasians in the Malay States. Though whether we should investigate - flag it up

Doggett : In case she's found guilty –

Winston : If so, then the advantage of distancing her from the white community

Doggart : Including her father?

Winston : I was thinking more of the mother. Who is presumably the bad blood's source. I mean if they can do it in America

Doggart : America?

Winston : Duncan Skinner case. Plantation overseer, killed by recalcitrant blacks. And the newspapers of the time lauding the fairness of the trial, the noted impartiality

Doggart : So the blacks were let off.

Winston : Hanged to a man. But that's not the point. The point is the fairness - a fair trial, as with Ethel, whether she's executed or not. And this proving that every citizen of the Empire is entitled to equivalent rights – equal rights, equal legal representation, even if they *are* a half-breed

Doggart : I wonder.

Winston : You think not?

Doggart : I can see what you're getting at. Justice done. No stain on the flag. But the case you mentioned concerns slaves. Slaves, not natives. And if now we add miscegenation ...

Winston : Misce-what?

Doggart : Mixing of the races. What if the natives start identifying with Ethel – what if they start claiming her as one of theirs? You claim to know so much about history, but look at the Caribbean. Look at those so-called dance-parties which were really a cover for planning insurrection. All those dances – blacks giving themselves titles : General, King, Queen, Princess –

Winston : That was emulation. Emulation and parody.

Doggart : It was envy. It was a mask for preparations for massacre. And what if it spreads to the Malay-Chinese? Oh yes, they may conciliate. They may smile and bow and do the native form of a Uriah Heap, but if at the end of it all they're really just out to get us

Winston : Malay natives out to get us? Chinese coolies out to get us?

Doggart : Well, what if they *are*?

Winston : And what if they *aren't*? What if they see our rule as bringing advantages?

Doggart : And what if they don't? I heard once that it is virtuous to punish oppressors – that such is the true clemency - and if so – if the real cruelty lies in letting them off

Winston : Who said that?

Doggart : Robespierre – he said it. And if the natives get wind of that – if they start taking Ethel as one of their own – clamouring for her release - rising up violently

Winston : Never. They'd never do it. On the other hand, perhaps a little caution –

Doggart : I think we should exercise a little caution.

Winston : Keeping a lid on it –

Doggart : I think we *should* keep a lid on it.

Winston : Odd, isn't it? Here's Robespierre, an oppressor himself. And what does he do? He denounces oppressors. But of course if his wider goal was moral purity –

Doggart : Moral balderdash!

Winston : Daft, ain't it? Have a peppermint.

Doggart : Thank you. They're jolly nice. (*As a suggestion he expects to be acted upon*) Lose the document?

Winston (nodding) : Lose the evidence. Eurasian blood – it's not a nice idea.

Doggart : It's dangerous. Suppress the question, eh? (*He tears up the letter and drops the fragments into a waste-paper basket. Fade*)

(Scene returns to the Court. William Proudlock the 1st in the public space. Assessors and lawyers as before. Ethel in the dock. Mabel Marsh in the public space. Ambler about to be cross-examined by Mr. Wagner)

Sercombe-Smith : So then, we resume. We have lunched and we resume. Mr. Wagner

Wagner (rising) : Thank you.

Sercombe-Smith : You will confine yourself to matters arising from the earlier cross-examination.

Wagner : I will. I will indeed. Good afternoon, Mr. Ambler.

Ambler (wearily now) : Good afternoon.

Wagner : And I was wondering whether we might begin with sugar.

Ambler : Sugar?

Wagner : Sugar, the sweetener. You will agree that sugar *is* a sweetener. That, when added to a drink or to sweets such as peppermints, it significantly alters the taste.

Ambler : It does.

Wagner : And some people say that is what we should do. We should absorb ourselves in Malaya and alter the taste. Improve it. Add to the mixture. But of course not everybody *likes* sugar.

Ambler : No.

Wagner : Some dislike it – some rather disdain it. Besides which, once absorbed, it cannot be eliminated. There can be no unstirring You see what I am getting at.

Wise : What *are* you getting at?

Wagner : What I am getting at is that this entire case is bedevilled by an admixture of ingredients which should never have been blended. Clothing. Flirtatious signals. Lack of underwear. Irrelevant, my lord, or at any rate capable of any number of interpretations. And yet there they are, stirred in, mixed up, infused. Now we for the defence eschew all that. We deal in facts. And the facts

are these. Mr. William Steward, a somewhat socially retiring mining-engineer, goes to the home of Mrs. Ethel Proudlock at a time when her husband is absent. And he ends up shot. He is shot, gentlemen. He is not a *likely* candidate for this sort of behaviour. He has worked hard - kept himself to himself - when he poses for a single known photograph, he stands with an awkward affected nonchalance. But he is shot. And the question is *why*. It is also *by whom*, since though a coolie claims to have seen the accused with a gun, he did not actually see her shooting anybody. Now then, I have said that I am not going to deal in fanciful admixtures. And the defence concedes that the gun most probably *was* fired by Mrs. Proudlock. But this brings us to motive. It brings us to provocation. Mr. Ambler, much has been made of the fact that Mr. Steward was informed by Mrs. Proudlock of her new address –

Hastings-Rhodes : Her four-month old new address –

Wagner : And some could argue that his calling on the following night was merely a courtesy visit. But there is another interpretation. This being that he knew Mr. Proudlock was out. That he was aware he was dining with you. You were there, were you not? You were at the club when Mrs. Proudlock passed on her latest address?

Ambler : There were many people there.

Wagner : Was Miss Marsh there?

Ambler : Miss Marsh was not there. Miss Marsh is an American.

Mabel : Don't I know it!

Wagner : So then, let us agree that you were there and heard the conversation – heard it, I mean, when Mr. Steward ascertained the Proudlocks' address. He ascertained it, and, having made up his mind to attempt an intrigue – to seduce the young lady. (*Changing tack slightly*) When he met you all at the club, did Mr. Proudlock perhaps mention that he would be dining out on the following evening?

Ambler : He may have done. He certainly said about Evensong –

Wise : What *about* Evensong?

Ambler : - that she went and he didn't –

1st William Proudlock : Yes, I did say that.

Wagner : And?

Ambler : And?

Wagner : Did he add anything else?

Ambler : Letter-writing. He said that after church it was Mrs. Proudlock's habit to sit alone letter-writing

Wagner (rather annoyed but trying not to show it) : So then, he mentioned evensong. He mentioned letter-writing. And the fact that Mr. Steward knew that the wife went to evensong – that he knew *she* went and the husband didn't, and that she would then be alone writing letters –

Ambler : He did *not* know it.

Sercombe-Smith : What?

Ambler : I'm afraid, sir, that is incorrect. As if you enquire of Mr. Hastings-Rhodes or rather of his Junior

Kindersley : His junior?

Sercombe-Smith (to Hastings-Rhodes) : Is your Junior in the court, Mr. Rhodes?

Hastings-Rhodes : He has just entered.

Wagner (indignantly) : You never told me.

Hastings-Rhodes : Well, if you will insist on going out for lunch

Sercombe-Smith (to the Junior who has risen from a seat at the back) : You are Mr. Hastings-Rhodes' Junior Counsel?

The Junior : I am, sir.

1st William Proudlock : And?

Junior : And I have testimony. *(To Sercombe-Smith)* I received it, sir, during the lunch-break. Obviously it will have to be authenticated but given the nature of its assertions –

Wagner : What assertions? What?

Junior : Am I allowed?

Wise : Speak them, speak them.

Junior : The assertions are that the initiative was Mrs. Proudlock's – that it was *she* who sent for Steward. And when I add that it also draws attention to the possibility of blackmail ...

1st William Proudlock : Blackmail?

The Junior : The extreme likelihood that Mr. Steward was a blackmailer – that for some time he had been blackmailing the lady

Mabel : Blackmailing Mrs. Proudlock?

Echo : Blackmailing Mrs. Proudlock?

Junior : And of course if he *had* - if it was she who arranged their being alone..... if *she*, not *he*, was the only one able to guarantee their privacy and if, goaded by his blackmailing, she then fired –

Echo (Voice of 2nd William Proudlock) : Fired. (*gun-shot heard*)

2nd Echo : (*Voice of 3rd William Proudlock*) : Fired. (*another gun-shot*)

Double Echo : Fired.

Ethel : What's going on? What pack of lies is this?

Sercombe-Smith : Adjourn. Adjourn. What next by heavens, pray? (*Fade*)

END OF PART ONE

* * * * *

(*) *The second and third William may appear in shadowy form when they speak the echo, each firing a gun after speaking.)*

PART TWO

(Music from the opening chorus of “Trial by Jury” ‘Hark the hour of ten is sounding’. During this the scene opens on an office in London. Sir Edward Grey seated at a desk. Music fades. A knock.)

Sir Edward : Come in. *(Enter Arnold Griffiths)* Arnold.

Griffiths : Which I hope is not too disappointing -

Sir Edward : Really, Arnold, if you think I am expecting a lady –

Griffiths : I think you may *later* be expecting one.

Sir Edward : A matter on which I couldn’t possibly comment. Do sit down.

Griffiths : I can’t, sir. I’m afraid there’s a visitor. Man from the Colonial Office. Urgent, he says.

Sir Edward : Oh yes. Probably about the Durbar.

Griffiths : It isn’t only the Durbar. There’s another matter. And he also mentioned the French Revolution.

Sir Edward : He mentioned the *what*?

Griffiths : Rather curious, isn’t it?

Sir Edward : Very curious. I can give him five minutes.

Griffiths : Yes, sir.

Sir Edward : And I want you to stay.

Griffiths : Of course. *(Going to door)* Come in, please, Mr. Palmer. *(As Palmer enters)* This is Mr. Palmer – and this

Palmer (who is stiff, humourless and latently bourgeois and who introduces an extremely tall assistant) : This is my assistant, Mr. Henderson.

Sir Edward : Do sit down. I won’t offer you tea but if I may be allowed to reassure you –

Henderson : To reassure us, Sir Edward?

Sir Edward : About the Durbar. The expense of it. On top of the coronation.

Palmer : We have not come about the cost of the coronation. Or indeed of the Durbar. I am not saying they are not relevant.

Sir Edward (rather sardonically) : Oh. Good.

Palmer : But they are not our particular brief. Perhaps I should say what that is.

Sir Edward : Perhaps you should. And in the meantime if you care to sit down

Palmer (as they do so) : We, Sir Edward, are not concerned with treasury matters. We are concerned with subversion. Subversion leading to riot, to outrage, possibly revolution -

Sir Edward : Good heavens!

Henderson : You have an opinion on revolution?

Sir Edward : No. I don't have an opinion. I do think so far we have been rather lucky. When a ruling elite is outnumbered – when it is only the ritual that keeps the system in place –

Griffiths : There *are* gunboats, sir.

Sir Edward : True. I'd forgotten the gunboats. Is there anything else?

Palmer : Sir?

Sir Edward : Anything, I mean, apart from a general attempt to canvas my politics -

Palmer : I see, Sir Edward, that you choose to take the matter flippantly. And why not? Such I suppose, is the privilege of high office. We, however, are not so easily deterred. In a moment I shall inform you of a particular case that is causing concern to us. But first a little of the background. *(As if handing over)* Mr. Henderson –

Henderson : Certainly, Mr. Palmer. Good morning, Sir Edward,

Sir Edward : Which having already been settled on

Henderson : My role, Sir Edward, is to keep track of subversives. And particularly those affecting the colonies. Whether it be subversive people – subversive publications – publications, for instance, such as *this* colourful one – (*Passing over a pamphlet*)

Sir Edward (takes it and reads the title) : ‘Robespierre’.

Palmer : ‘Robespierre and the Colonies’. The full title is important.

Henderson : This pamphlet – and we don’t yet know whence it came - this pamphlet traces clear links between the French Revolution and the situation in our own South Asian colonies. The idea being that in each case there is a hierarchy. In each case an outnumbered elite is oppressing an underdog. It also says that mild reforms are no good. That they can actually increase the capacity for revolt. Do you think that likely perhaps?

Sir Edward : I haven’t thought about it. I shouldn’t think so. I would have thought that a revolution was more likely to be set alight by one little trigger. A spark to the tinderbox. One flash, following a long accumulation.

Palmer : I see. Yes, well, I suppose, that could be relevant.

Henderson : And Robespierre? Your opinions on Robespierre?

Sir Edward : You want those too?

Palmer : Since the pamphlet specifically refers to him -

Sir Edward : He was a tyrant wasn’t he? He may have started pure enough but it all got out of hand. New fires breaking out everywhere - everyone stamping ever more wildly as they try to extinguish them.

Palmer (gravely) : Possibly.

Sir Edward : You don’t like my analysis.

Palmer : I consider it superficial.

Sir Edward : How : superficial?

Palmer : To be frank, Sir Edward, in all sorts of ways. For a start, most revolutions do not start high-mindedly. They start with an outbreak of resentful rebellious hotheads. But let us for a moment pass over that. Let us stick with the high-minded. And here I would ask, is there not, Sir Edward, a case for saying that Robespierre was himself a victim? That he licensed, or at least released, a mob

which eventually even *he* could not control? He'd let the genii out, you see. Forcing him to run faster just to keep up with it. And if that is what happens to us – if our own momentum becomes our own destruction, making us turn on our friends who, to save themselves, then inevitably turn on *us*

Sir Edward (cutting in) : Mr. Palmer, stop there. That is enough. I am extremely interested in what you have to say – I have always enjoyed history - but I am a busy man. And if, as I suspect, you are come merely to engage in theoretical arguments -

Henderson : We are not here for that.

Griffiths : Well, what then? The French Revolution was an internal matter. There was no racial aspect and certainly nothing colonial. Now if you had been talking about the Durbar –

Palmer(in doubtful tones) : Ah yes, the Durbar.

Griffiths : You're not criticising the Durbar?

Palmer (his tone implying doubt) : I am saying that it was not quite the success you imply for it. Oh yes, it made a show. It provided spectacle. All those ruling princes and nobleman – all of them bowing low to their legitimate sovereigns. But they *didn't*, did they? There was the Gaekwar of Baroda –you remember what *he* did? You recall how he approached without jewellery – how he refused to dress up – how he turned his back on the King and Queen? Yes, sir, he deliberately turned his back on them, and now with the same happening in Kuala Lumpur –

Griffiths : Kuala Lumpur?

Henderson (with some sarcasm) : You do *know* the place.

Palmer (slightly conciliating) : There is a case in Kuala Lumpur. Rex versus Proudlock. A small matter but considering the repercussions – considering we now have this native unrest -

Griffiths : Unrest?

Palmer : Oh yes. We have native unrest. We have Chinese hostility. We have Malay indignation. And what with *that* and Empire ladies writing to the Queen – writing asserting that an English lady is being unjustly treated

Sir Edward : And is she?

Palmer : I don't know. Perhaps not. But that is not the point. The point is that if this Proudlock case is allowed to become an exposure – if it strips away the imperial gloss

Griffiths : Gloss, Mr. Palmer?

Palmer : I am stating how they could report it. Mrs. Proudlock is an Englishwoman. She is an Englishwoman who murdered an English lover – and the impression this could give of our ruling elite - of the pigsty life beneath the glitter –

Sir Edward : Yes, I see. I do understand. Though, there again, with so little to go on

Palmer : Mr. Shaw

Griffiths : Mr. Shaw?

Henderson (coming to the rescue again) : He is what we have to go on. He is a headmaster - head of a rather elite school where Mr. Proudlock serves as deputy. The point being that he is currently on furlough. He is in England. And so we did wonder – we did ask ourselves - if you could perhaps summon him –

Sir Edward : Summon this Shaw person?

Griffiths : Summon him as a help?

Palmer : Mr. Shaw is a man of sense. Loyal. Old School. And besides ...

Sir Edward : Yes?

Palmer : Tell me, Sir Edward, what would you say if we told you that before moving into Shaw's bungalow, the Proudlocks lived elsewhere – that they actually shared a house with a Mr. Ambler?

Sir Edward (in mock-horror) : Heavens! And the importance?

Palmer : It is important because Mr. Proudlock never said so. Not even though Ambler was with him on the murder night. And there's another thing. Ambler himself. A dark horse. Superficially reasonable but a drinker. A drinker who is also instinctively biased. So if he is unreliable - if indeed his testimony has been got at – and if Mr. Shaw could be urged to reveal more of his secrets

Sir Edward : I'm not sure. I don't know. I'm not denying there's a network. And that beneath the gloss, even the brightest reputé is likely to tarnish. But I hope it is more than that. I hope we'll find a little meat beneath the sauce. I look at our Empire, Mr. Palmer, and you know what I see? I see an enrichment. A kind of nourishment. But I also see cards. A pack of cards. And ours as thin as the rest. Take a card – take it and paint on it a king, queen - even an ace – and what is it? Is it in fact *anything*? Because if it is nothing - still a card – if it is at best just an arbitrarily painted surface with arbitrary painted values –

Palmer : That seems to me a very jaded view.

Henderson : Very. And considering that you are His Majesty's Foreign Secretary

Sir Edward : It is because I *am* Foreign Secretary that I have to be realistic. I have to see all the aspects. Don't get me wrong. I do sniff the danger. I do grant that if too many natives turn their backs – if they go in the reverse direction from these lady petitioners -

Griffiths : Better if she *wasn't* English. Better if she *were* a native. I mean if we could prove *that* –

Henderson : Oh yes, if only someone had written *that* – someone who could start the hare that she isn't properly English -

Sir Edward (to both Griffiths and Henderson, using both hands, pointing one finger at each) : Get more reports and find the truth on that. *(Another knock)* Ah, Pamela. A knock in time, dare say. *(Fade)*

(Scene changes to the Court. Judge, Kindersley and Wise on the dais. 3rd William Proudlock as witness. Ethel in the dock. Hastings-Rhodes in place.)

Sercombe-Smith : Mr. Proudlock, yesterday we were in the middle of hearing Mr. Ambler's testimony when we were stopped. There was an interruption. An interruption necessitating both a re-think and, in some cases, a re-examination. Fortunately we can now proceed. But before we do, I should like to ask, is there anything in your previous testimony that you are contemplating changing?

3rd William Proudlock : No.

Sercombe-Smith : Nothing?

3rd William Proudlock : No.

Sercombe-Smith : In which case – (*Nodding to Hastings-Rhodes*)

Hastings-Rhodes: Thank you, my lord. And may I first explain to witness how I come to be taking over. It is because Mr. Wagner is unwell. He has taken to his bed, and the need therefore to go somewhat out of sequence –

3rd William Proudlock : Very well.

Hastings-Rhodes (to Pooley) : You don't mind, I suppose?

Pooley : I shall reserve the defence.

Hastings-Rhodes : Yesterday, Mr. Proudlock, we heard about the state of your marriage. The main point being that you and your wife were on very good terms.

3rd William Proudlock : Yes.

Hastings-Rhodes : And you still maintain that?

3rd William Prudlock : Why I should be expected to change

Hastings-Rhodes : Why indeed? And of course Mr. Ambler confirmed it. According to him, Mrs. Proudlock is a model helpmate. Good but quiet, taking pride in her home, never quarrelling with her husband –

3rd William Proudlock : No, she doesn't.

Hastings-Rhodes : And this is from Mr. Ambler, with whom you are very friendly.

3rd William Proudlock : Colleagues. We are colleagues.

Hastings-Rhodes : A term which you define how exactly?

3rd William Proudlock : Look in the dictionary.

Hastings-Rhodes : I am asking you.

3rd William Proudlock : We teach together. We are in the same school. I of course am acting headmaster. But I teach too. I teach, organise the coaching – run the music - run the football - lead the gymnastics –

Hasting Rhodes (rather nastily) : Heavens! What a portfolio. Talk about Princess Ida -

Kindersley : Princess Ida?

Hastings-Rhodes : Gilbert and Sullivan, Mr. Kindersley. She boasts that she can play several instruments at once. But you see what interests me, Mr. Proudlock – what fascinates me even apart from your one-man-band capabilities – is the one fact you *don't* mention. The fact that you and your colleague Mr. Ambler actually once shared a house. That you and he and Mrs. Proudlock actually lived together.

Sercombe-Smith : Did you live together, Mr. Proudlock?

3rd William Proudlock : If you mean by that did we happen to share the same floor-space?

Hastings-Rhodes (gently gliding in) : Of course the fact that you all three lived together does help to explain one thing. It explains how Mr. Ambler knows you so well. How he can say that in six long months he never heard a cross word - never saw your wife doing anything offensive – saw her on the contrary as always extremely kind, gentle, considerate

3rd William Proudlock : So she was.

Hastings-Rhodes : If, on the other hand, his evidence is partial – if, shall we say, it is biased by friendship – by intimacy even –

Sercombe-Smith : Careful, Mr. Rhodes.

Hastings-Rhodes : So then. Here we have a marriage which is unusually warm and harmonious. A marriage which on the 23rd April was following its normal placid course. Would you perhaps tell us what you and your wife were doing on that ultimately eventful day?

3rd William Proudlock : What we were doing?

Hastings-Rhodes : Shall we say from lunchtime.

3rd William Proudlock : After lunch we took a nap. We rose at four. We then had tea on the verandah, and put in some target practice. I used a revolver my wife had given me just five days earlier. It was a birthday present.

Kindersley: So you said.

3rd William Proudlock : Which making me wonder why everybody goes on asking

Hastings-Rhodes : So then, you both did target practice. Meaning that when the prosecution mentions the gunpowder on the lady's right hand, it could have occurred then -

3rd William Proudlock : Yes.

Hastings-Rhodes : She could have got it at the practice rather than at the murder -

3rd William Proudlock : Yes.

Hastings-Rhodes : I am not saying of course that the later time is not feasible - that indeed it is not quite likely, especially if the dead man had really molested her -

3rd William Proudlock : He *did* molest her.

Sercombe-Smith : You *think* he molested her.

3rd William Proudlock : I *know* he molested her.

Hastings-Rhodes : So then you take a nap - you take a nap, wake, undertake some target practice. And then?

3rd William Proudlock : At about five twenty five I handed the gun to Ethel. I told her to put it away. We both then left for church. I went too, though I know some say I didn't. And then, a brief visit to the Club, a return home - I changing my clothes, leaving for my appointment -

Hastings-Rhodes : And all that time you noticed nothing unusual? Nothing odd in your good lady's behaviour? She was not agitated, upset, excited? -

3rd William Proudlock : No. The good terms we were on -

Hastings-Rhodes : Including romantically?

Wise (rather warily) : Romantically?

Hastings-Rhodes : I was wondering about the gun. Which being perhaps a rather peculiar, not to say, disturbing, birthday present -

3rd William Proudlock : That was to protect me. There had been a house-breaking. Earlier. In the earlier house.

Hastings-Rhodes : So then nothing to do with crocodiles.

3rd William Proudlock : Crocodiles?

Sercombe-Smith : Using the gun to shoot at crocodiles?

3rd William Proudlock : It was protective. A safeguard.

Hastings-Rhodes : Good. I am very glad to hear it. I am all the more delighted because your words serving as a proof of the intimate harmony of your relationship –

3rd William Proudlock : It was harmonious.

Hastings-Rhodes : You called your wife Kiddie.

3rd William Proudlock : Sometimes.

Hastings-Rhodes : I ask because your staff having heard you call her a good many other things

3rd William Proudlock : Natives tell lies – they are touchy –

Hastings-Rhodes : Yes, they are. And why not? They lack the cushion of social acceptance. They are used to slights – and this making them expect and fear the sort of insult that a dominant race can easily brush off –

Sercombe-Smith : You are not here to analyse the native character.

Hastings-Rhodes : Indeed not. My task is to clarify occurrences. And those you admit. You admit that the cook rushed to get you - that you ran to the bungalow - that your wife staggered forward - that she was moaning –

3rd William Proudlock : Yes –

Hastings-Rhodes : That, in Mr. Ambler's words, she uttered the rather melodramatic lines, "Blood, blood. I've shot a man".

3rd William Proudlock : Yes.

Hastings-Rhodes : Whereupon with impeccable grammatical precision you cried out, "Whom"?

3rd William Proudlock : Yes.

Sercombe-Smith : And after that?

3rd William Proudlock : After it?

Kindersley : What happened next?

3rd William Proudlock : I asked where he was. And she said he'd run -

Wise : Run?

3rd William Proudlock : Run away. She said it twice. "He ran, he ran". She was terrified. She was chalk-faced, she was sobbing. And then the next day when I saw the bruises - bruises all over - on her shoulders – arms - down her legs –

Sercombe-Smith : Yes, very distressing. On the other hand, if these wounds were self-inflicted

3rd William Proudlock : What?

Sercombe-Smith : Done later. Not original. I have to remind you, sir, that the doctor disagrees with you. That in examining your wife he found no bruising at all. And when we add that the same was confirmed by Mr. Ambler

3rd William Proudlock : Mr. Ambler?

Hastings-Rhodes : Your friend Mr. Ambler – the one you shared a house with – dined with – entertained with *Trial by Jury*

3rd William Proudlock : He saw them. He must have. I shall speak to him.

(Turning as if to go)

Sercombe-Smith : Come back. Come back at once. Really! Departing like this!

Kindersley : And when we haven't even dealt with the Mace business

3rd William Proudlock : The Mace business?

Ethel : More trouble!

Hastings-Rhodes : You were not, I believe, in court, sir, when Mr. Mace gave evidence –

3rd William Proudlock : No. No I was not.

Hastings-Rhodes : In which case you will not know that he too once shared a house – that he shared it with Mr. Steward – shared it for many months – was with him in fact till March, 1910

3rd William Proudlock : No, I didn't know that.

Hastings-Rhodes : It is important to take note of Mr. Mace's evidence. It is important, even though – as I readily admit - it does rather challenge other possibilities. There have been statements that Mr. Steward was a blackmailer. That he seduced and then blackmailed the defendant who therefore secretly summoned him to kill him. Unfortunately the letters claiming such a case have been proved to be false. They emanate from a disaffected mining employee. And so we turn back to Mr. Mace who gives a completely opposite picture. According to Mr. Mace, William Steward was not in any way an immoral man. Indeed, he was something of a Puritan. In a whole twenty four hours the most he had ever seen him drink was two whiskies. Two whiskies, Mr. Proudlock. And, though temperance does not necessarily include sexual continence, still given that he was a man of unusual fastidiousness – that he even abhorred spitting

3rd William Proudlock : Spitting?

Hastings-Rhodes : On the night of the killing Mr. Steward arrived with a rickshaw-puller. A coolie whom your wife suggested might wait in the kitchen. But Steward would have none of it. He ordered the man to wait in the street.

3rd William Proudlock : Because he had ulterior motives – because he was planning an assault -

Hastings-Rhodes : Because he did not care to hear him spit. Because, as Mr. Mace has sworn, Steward was moral, he was fastidious, he was an enemy to bodily coarseness. Which brings me to *you*. To your own morality. You would call yourself a moral man, would you not?

3rd William Proudlock : Very moral.

Hastings-Rhodes : And you concur with the general idea that in Malaya a woman should be treated with respect –

3rd William Proudlock : Yes.

Hastings-Rhodes : No mistresses.

3rd William Proudlock : None.

Hastings-Rhodes : No seduction before marriage.

3rd William Proudlock : No.

Hastings-Rhodes : And yet, Mr. Proudlock, I have here a statement to the effect that, before marriage, you lived with a Chinese woman.

3rd William Proudlock (shaken) : What?

Hastings-Rhodes : It is new evidence. Evidence which is as yet unconfirmed, but I am sure if we re-question the accuser –

3rd William Proudlock : Who is the accuser?

Hastings-Rhodes : Never mind.

Sercombe-Smith : It is Miss Marsh. That same Miss March who was actually here when junior counsel alerted us. It is Miss Marsh's assertion that you formerly lived with a Chinese woman. Apparently she had already told two of the kindergarten assistants and has now written to confirm it. What's more, she suggests we should question you as to your wedding arrangements.

3rd William Proudlock (faintly) : My wedding arrangements?

Ethel : No, no. He can't.

Sercombe-Smith : Prisoner will be silent.

Hastings-Rhodes : You were married, I believe, on 25th April.

3rd William Proudlock : Yes.

Hastings-Rhodes : April, 1907. Four years ago.

3rd William Proudlock : Four and a half.

Hastings-Rhodes : So then tell us about this marriage. Tell us about the wedding. At which, I believe, your father-in-law was not present.

3rd William Proudlock : No. He had missed the boat. He was in Ceylon.

Hastings-Rhodes : He has family there.

3rd William Proudlock : He does.

Hasting Rhodes : Family visited by your wife?

3rd William Proudlock : By her mother. Mother and sisters.

Hastings-Rhodes : But not your wife. Rather odd, isn't it? All the rest going and she never being invited. Never in Ceylon despite her poor health, despite the cooler, healthier climate Mrs. Proudlock's father is, I believe, something of a figure in Kuala Lumpur.

3rd William Proudlock : He has a certain recognition.

Hastings-Rhodes : Indeed so. He is a member of the Public Works Department, he is the leader of the fire brigade, he is a noted horticulturalist, he is a man credited with being the first in the Federated States to cultivate the Calcutta guava –

3rd William Proudlock (rather angrily) : He is also an excellent shot though what this has to do with his non-attendance at our wedding –

Hastings-Rhodes : I was wondering how much he approved. How much he was in favour. Which bearing in mind that you yourself appeared as bridegroom with a fire brigade escort, wore fire brigade epaulettes, and yet suffered the indignity of the leader of the brigade, Mrs. Proudlock's father, being notably *absent* –

3rd William Proudlock : My wedding was widely reported. The *Malay Mail* mentioned it. The best man was an assistant engineer. Ethel's sister was first bridesmaid –

Hastings-Rhodes : And your daughter – your daughter was born when?

3rd William Proudlock : My daughter?

Sercombe-Smith : Your daughter, Mr. Proudlock. We have heard a great deal about First Bridesmaids, we have heard a great deal about the strange electric blue costume worn by Mrs. Proudlock at her wedding – but as for the birth of your daughter –

3rd William Proudlock : My daughter's birth was registered on March 6th, 1908.

Hastings-Rhodes : Yes, it was *registered* then, but as for the *date* of her birth

3rd William Proudlock : She was born on 30th January. She was born in England. In Bedford.

Hastings-Rhodes : Bedford?

3rd William Proudlock : I'd been there.

Kindersley : Been but gone – you departed before the birth?

3rd William Proudlock : Yes.

Kindersley : Which considering your wife was so very poorly

3rd William Proudlock : She was not very poorly.

Hastings-Rhodes : So then let us sum up. You left England at the very start of January. Before that, you and your electric blue wife had both left Malaya within hours of your wedding ceremony. By the time your wife allegedly gave birth you had already been four weeks back in Malaysia. I must therefore put it to you that the likelihood of your daughter being born earlier – of her having been conceived outside wedlock –

3rd William Proudlock : That is a monstrous suggestion.

Hastings-Rhodes : Monstrous when we know that the prisoner's father failed to attend the wedding – when we know that, though the *Malay Mail* reported it, there was no list of guests, no description of gifts, no mention of any reception – and when we add that you yourself once lived with a Chinese woman – that you co-habited with a native?

Ethel (bursting out) : No. No. Stop it. You are implying that we are vagabonds. You'll be saying next that we killed Steward together –

3rd William Proudlock : Ethel.

Echo of the Other William Proudlocks : Ethel!

Ethel : Or that Billy did.

3rd William Proudlock : No, no.

Echo : No, no.

Ethel : - that he knew Steward and I were lovers, and then coming in, finding us – finding and shooting -

3rd William Proudlock : Ethel, for God's sake –

Voice of Other Proudlocks (from off) : Ethel, for God's sake.

Ethel (defiantly, leaving us uncertain whether she is being bitterly sarcastic or revealing a truth) : It could be so – he could have found us out. Is that the truth? Oh God, what next then, eh? *(She bursts into tears. Fade)*

(Scene changes to the prison in which Ethel is housed. Prison Governor discovered with E.A.S. Wagner. An orderly also present.)

Governor : And you are sure this is regular?

Wagner: I am the counsel for the defence. The requirements of justice -

Governor : Ah well, justice. The ace in the pack. But aces can count low. They can even be trumped. *(J.G.T. Pooley enters)* Yes?

Wagner : This, Governor, is Mr. Pooley. He is my deputy.

Governor : And you both wish to speak with Mrs. Proudlock?

Pooley : It is no more than our right, sir.

Governor : Five minutes. You can have five minutes. *(Orderly is signalled to fetch her)* You must realise that this is a critical time. It is a very critical time, and what with tomorrow being the day of judgement

Wagner : Rather a resonant phrase, Governor.

Governor : It's a resonant time, sir. I heard today that the French are in Morocco. And Germany pursuing. She is pursuing with a gunboat. And if the Empire is to avoid a conflict – if it is to rally and hold together *(Ethel is brought in by the Orderly)* Ah. Mrs. Proudlock.

Ethel : Governor.

Governor : You are recovered, I hope.

Ethel : I am in reasonable health.

Governor : The Defence to see you. I'm afraid it can be only five minutes *(He goes)*

Pooley : Good morning, Mrs. Proudlock.

Ethel : Good morning. You know who I am then? Though whether that will get us anywhere

Pooley *(in pleading remonstrance)* : Please, Mrs. Proudlock.

Ethel : Six hundred. There are six hundred prisoners here – six hundred with planks for beds and wood for pillows. And do I get anything better? Because if not – if indeed it is Empire policy that I *shouldn't*

Wagner : Mrs. Proudlock, we are not here to discuss Empire policy. In a few hours the assessors will decide your fate and, that being so, if there is anything at all you can offer us –

Ethel : Offer you?

Pooley : To support your case.

Ethel : I have my support. It's my father-in-law. He knows the Foreign Secretary.

Wagner (not believing this) : How? How does he know him?

Ethel : He used to work for him.

Wagner : And the fact that you have just accused his own son?

Ethel : I said my husband shot Steward. I said he had heard about my affair from his horrible mistress. But I don't say that now. I retract that, just as I retract that Steward himself had a mistress – that my William had two – that my William bribed the rickshaw-puller -

Pooley : Mrs. Proudlock, please. All these changes. All these alterations. And as to whether you were right to attempt to blacken your husband –

Ethel : I didn't blacken him.

Pooley : Pardon me, you did. Saying that he might be the murderer -

Ethel : Perhaps he was. Men! The truth is, there aren't many women out here, so you can't handle us. You're scared really. And so what with the bluster and the heartiness and the unfeeling comments -

Pooley : Do you accuse *me* of unfeeling comments?

Ethel : Not exactly.

Pooley : Well, then –

Ethel : Well, what?

Wagner : This is getting us nowhere. May I remind you that we are *all* here a minority? May I further remind you that there is the Empire to think of? I know, Mrs. Proudlock, that our Empire is supposed to be a good one. It is even said to be great. But the fact is, we are an occupying force. And when occupying forces become fearful they get jumpy – they start to panic and that makes them brutal – and if there are riots and we – the British – the heavily outnumbered British - should indeed get like that –

Ethel : Why should we get brutal?

Wagner (rather helplessly) : I don't know. Only the dust this case has raised –

Ethel (rather pleased) : Because of me.

Wagner : Because of Steward. Oh yes, it's true he suffered reversals. At one point he was almost suicidal. But at the time of his death he had a new post. F.W. Barker and Co. Consulting Engineers. And for a man like him to achieve that - a working-class man, the son of a poor farmer

Ethel : Trust you to bring that into it.

Wagner : What I am bringing in, Mrs. Proudlock, is that this was a promising life snuffed out. And that somebody did the snuffing. And as for your saying that men here are all unfeeling bluster ... Wel, what about the other sort? The sort brought up on *Westward Ho!* and *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. The sort who feel an insatiable need to combine masculine vigour with chivalric virtue, which being itself dressed in their own form of muscular Christianity

Ethel : Now who's getting off the subject -

Wagner : You admit, do you not, that you and Mr. Steward were physical lovers? That you visited him, spent the night

Ethel : I admit that I may have done. Why not? When you think how badly I was getting on with my so-called soul-mate

Pooley : And why was that? *Why* were you not getting on with him?

Ethel : He made aspersions –

Pooley : Aspersions about what?

Ethel : I won't say.

Wagner : Your background? Was it your background?

Ethel : Ah well, backgrounds. There are all kinds of backgrounds. I remember once visiting the Temple of the Azure Cloud. And do you know? There were snakes. Snakes creeping nastily all over the altar-screens. And that made me think. It made me think that nothing is as pure and untainted as it seems. That snakes get into everything. Oh look, there's a butterfly.

Wagner : Really, Mrs. Proudlock, if you are only going to talk about butterflies –

Ethel : I'm not. I was talking of religion.

Wagner : What about it? You mean it caused arguments?

Ethel : Doubts. William had doubts. Funny really. So did Steward. He admitted it once. He even told Billy. Big mistake. Never make a confidant of someone you're deceiving. And of course if you get too close – if you feel for him, worry about hurting him

Wagner : And that's how he *did* feel?

Ethel : I didn't say that.

Orderly (entering) : Two minutes, Mrs. Proudlock. (*He goes again*)

Wagner (worried at the limited time) : Then let us rush through another point. The gun? What about the gun?

Ethel : The gun?

Wagner : There's no chance, is there, that your lover might have requested it? That driven by guilt and suggesting suicide - you and he in a joint suicide, which you failed ultimately to honour –

Ethel (tossing her head) : Ridiculous.

Wagner (nodding) : Ridiculous. Yes. And that's the trouble. Really our only defence is resistance to rape. And was Mr. Steward a natural rapist? This was a man who was shy, introverted, who once said he only came alive on the rugger field –

Ethel : Perhaps it broke out. Perhaps all that suppressed emotion – suppressed sex –

Pooley: Not if he already had a mistress.

Ethel : I have refuted that.

Wagner : But let's say he did. That he *did* have a mistress. And that the strain of this made him unbalanced. I have said, have I not, that he had recently gained a new post. But mining is still precarious. One of his backers lost a whole fortune. So perhaps if, after all, we include *that*. If we imply that unbalance made him attack you with uncharacteristic violence Have you any reason to suspect

that he was unusually unbalanced? That at the time of his death he was unusually volatile?

Ethel : No.

Wagner : No?

Ethel : Except –

Pooley : Yes?

Ethel : Well, there is the fact that his last mine got flooded. That he lost both men and equipment. And then six months ago – do you know about that?

Wagner : About what?

Ethel : It was a death. One of his colleagues suddenly dying. Issacson he was called. David Issacson. Twenty three years old, sat in a chair and never got up. And so the natives say there's a curse. A curse on the compound. And it's linked with a ghost. A sort of vision. A white-dressed man leading an albino tiger. And my husband wore white – he was all in white at our wedding, and he's certainly beastly enough, so if you can swing it on *him* – he as the curse, or at any rate the killer

Orderly : One minute, Mrs. Proudlock.

Ethel (rather in a huff) : One minute? Yes. All right. (*Sinks dejected*)

Pooley : Bear up, dear lady.

Ethel : Like in the song. (*Sings*) 'Cheer up, my pretty' – oh cheer up'.

Pooley (to Wagner) : It's in a show. *Trial by Jury*.

Ethel : Only I will say one thing. Just one little thing and then I'll be gone. It is true, Mr. Wagner, that there is such a thing as justice. And it is true that I hope to get a bit of it. But that doesn't mean I won't have paid. Or that there won't be people squawking against me. It's like peacocks. Like those big brainless birds we call peacocks. Outside my cell I can hear peacocks. And they shriek. They shriek, Mr. Wagner. And that's the price. It's what they pay for being beautiful. And if we get

anything beautiful – and particularly if we betray it or do wrong to it – well, we have to pay. Always, always, we have to pay – as I have paid. As I am *still* paying. Only now I have paid enough. I have shrieked enough. And if you don't realise that – if you don't realise that I have shrieked enough – paid enough for making love, losing myself, possibly murdering somebody (*Breaking off rather suddenly, perhaps aware of time running out but also showing her matter-of-fact side*) You will get me off, won't you?

Pooley (despairing at her switches of mood) : Get you off? Get you off after what you just said to us?

Ethel (becoming prosaic again) : Persuade the judge – insist I go straight home. I've had enough. Do help me, boys, I pray. (*Fade*)

(*Scene switches to Buckingham Palace. King George discovered with an equerry. The King is sitting at his stamp collection.*)

King George : And they're here now, are they?

Equerry : Ready and waiting, Your Majesty.

King George : Send them in. (*Equerry signals for door to be opened and Grey and Griffiths enter*) Ah, Grey.

Sir Edward : Good morning, your Majesty.

King George : Stamps.

Sir Edward : Yes.

King George : Philately. Know anything about philately, do you?

Sir Edward : Not really, your Majesty.

King George : Should do. Interest. Man needs a hobby. Trivial, I know, but when you've been as hard-pressed as I

Sir Edward : Hard-pressed with the coronation.

King George : With the aftermath of the Durbar. All nine days of it. Heavy crown. Eight arches. Seven thousand diamonds. And of course presenting all those medals – medals to the British – medals to the Indians - I suppose you didn't come about that

Sir Edward : In a way I did. It's about the Proudlock case.

King George : Oh lor'! A death sentence, I gather.

Sir Edward : It *is* a death sentence.

King George : You'd better sit down. And we'll have tea.

Sir Edward (sitting, as do they all except the equerry who organise the tea) : Thank you. It isn't *all* bad, sir. The judge was fair. Fair up to a point. He weighed all the evidence - stressed that he was no more important than the other assessors – but I'm afraid the rather one-sided nature of his summing up –

King George : How *did* he sum up?

Griffiths (to the King) : Well, sir, for instance, the first thing he did was to denounce the natives - to imply that they were using this case to denigrate Britain. Only then when he finally forced himself to admit the background –

King George : The background?

Griffiths : The stories, sir. All the different stories. Over the weeks, the court had heard all kinds of different stories. They heard, for instance, that Mrs Proudlock had several lovers. They heard that it was another of these lovers who actually murdered Mr. Steward. It has also been said that Steward had been deliberately deputed to seduce the prisoner. That the husband actually *wanted* it. There was also a story that it was *Mr.* Proudlock who actually fired the shots –

King George : Good Lord!

Griffiths : - only then, sir – then when the judge said all this was poppycock –

King George : The judge called it poppycock?

Griffiths : In his opinion, sir, it is impossible to credit that Mr. Proudlock *wanted* his wife violated. And as for the idea that this went wrong – that it misfired because in her panic she went so far as to kill her assailant -

King George : Yes, yes, I see. (*As tea is passed to them, the King first*)

Griffiths (taking the cup from a tray) : Thank you.

Sir Edward (ditto) : Thank you.

King George : And the other theory? The idea that Proudlock himself is the killer?

Sir Edward : You think that likely?

King George : I think it is interesting. And when I remember my stamps

Griffiths : Your stamps?

King George : Later, later. Go on about the judgement.

Griffiths : Well, sir, the next thing was that Mr. Sercombe-Smith discussed the individual characters. The principals involved. Starting with the victim.

King George : Steward.

Griffiths : William Steward, sir – yes. A man in his mid-thirties, not gregarious, rather fastidious. He was also commercially rigorous – so rigorous indeed that in October 1910 he wrote a letter to the *Malay Mail* alerting it to an error. The nature of the error does not matter. It was something to do with a tin mine. But the overall impression of a professional man - professional, hard-working – not many interests -

King George : Yes, I see. And the lady? This lady with whom he is supposed to have had immoral relations?

Griffiths : A mystery, sir. Timid, we are told. A pale domestic woman devoted to her husband. Yet this was also a woman who danced, sang, acted, entered shooting contests, played tennis, dressed like a peacock. Nor should we forget, sir, that for a time she worked in a kindergarten – she was employed in the infants' section of a Methodist girls' school. I refer, sir, to the school run by a Miss Mabel Marsh – and Mrs. Proudlock eventually leaving under a cloud

King George : Did she? Did she be damned? And the judge – he *said* all this?

Griffiths : All of it, sir.

King George : More tea?

Griffiths : Thank you. (*Servant pours it and passes over the cup*) Miss Marsh's theory, sir, is the recruitment one. She thinks Proudlock hired Steward as a gigolo. But it seems unlikely. Mr. Proudlock is not known to be prone to subterfuge. A lower-class man, sir - a man lured to Malaya largely by a sense of adventure.

King George : Yes. Well, nothing wrong with adventure. Mind you, if adventure includes an element of opportunism –

Sir Edward : What the judge stressed, sir, was that Mr. Proudlock was a teacher. That he is in receipt of a teaching qualification from the English Board of Education. And this, despite his origins, making him generally respectable -

King George : Possibly respectable. I have known some very funny teachers.

Griffiths : He meant compared to the natives.

King George : Oh yes, the natives.

Griffiths : Though, there again, considering what he added – (*partly to Sir Edward*) all that about hanging about.

King George : Hanging about?

Griffiths : He said, sir, that Mr. Proudlock hung about after qualifying – that he dabbled in drawing and physiognomy – that he rather oddly joined the Isle of Wight Singing Guild –

King George : And that's all? That is the sum of it? Tactless, I admit, but whether anyone can really call that a sign of judicial prejudice -

Griffiths : What is prejudicial, sir, is what followed. When he got on to the victim. Of whom he said he couldn't possibly be a molester. According to the Judge, Mr. Steward couldn't possibly have been abusive. You could tell by the manly way he stood in a photograph. It was also pointed out that he was not a time-waster – that he worked hard, rarely socialised, only once entered a Selangor tennis tournament – came last in it anyway –

King George : Ridiculous.

Sir Edward : And his other point was about hardship. The Judge pointed out that Mr. Sewell has endured various hardships - that he had seen many of his colleagues asphyxiated – that he had been present when his mine-workings collapsed – that he sent every penny he earned back to his mother. And given all this plus the fact that he was liked by the natives – that even *they* liked him, though generally they pick up grudges like filings on a magnet ...

King George : You see, what worries me isn't that. It's the other things. Things to do with morality. My son, for instance – my son tells me the man had a Chinese mistress –

Sir Edward : He did, yes.

King George : A coolie woman.

Griffiths : It was hush-hush, sir.

King George : Not hush-hush enough. Not if we are to preserve our imperial dignity. How we are going to give the natives something to respect if we all have Chinese mistresses

Sir Edward : Yes, sir. Of course, sir. On the other hand –

King George : Yes?

Sir Edward : Well, on the other hand there's Mrs. Proudlock. And of course if she encouraged him – invited Steward in – hoped at least for some sort of dalliance - and then, when he rejected her, went wild and fired off a gun

King George : Yes, yes, very worrying. Very. Though whether it's as worrying as the other thing –

Griffiths : Other thing?

King George : It was the stamps. That's what reminded me. I had this letter. Malayan stamps. (*waving his letter*). And sensing in it a distinct whiff of blackmail

Sir Edward : Blackmail?

King George : It says that Steward was a blackmailer. That he was blackmailing Mrs. Proudlock. And given that that's not the worst - that the writer is now daring to turn his threats against *us* –

Sir Edward : He is doing what?

King George : Says we know about a cover-up. That the killer isn't Mrs. Proudlock. And if we don't reveal that fact – don't acknowledge, I mean, that Steward was a blackmailer and that it is *Mr.* Proudlock who shot him –

Griffiths : Can this be possible?

King George : This letter, gentlemen, is a threat to the throne. Well, you need only look at the stamps. Extra stamps with my head defaced. So supposing it's true. Suppose there *had* been a blackmail. Or even if there wasn't – even if Steward never blackmailed anybody - still, if Proudlock knew –

Sir Edward (too involved to be deferential) : Knew what?

King George : About the affair. He had been warned in advance - he knew it was going on - and then determined to catch them, bursting in on them – on Steward and the lady -

Griffiths : Could it have happened like that?

Echo : Could it have happened like that?

Sir Edward : I'll make enquiries. Do more follow-up. Well, true or not, more nice dilemmas, eh? *(They sip tea, thoughtfully. Fade.)*

(Scene changes to the home of Judge Sercombe-Smith. The Judge discovered with his wife Julia and with Lettice Quale. Lettice is drinking tea. Julia is standing as if she's just come to deliver a message. Sercombe-Smith is at his desk. A secretary Haynes – one of many parts that may be doubled or trebled - beside him at his desk.)

Sercombe-Smith : And you're quite sure it is he? You are absolutely certain -

Julia : I am quite certain, Thomas.

Sercombe-Smith : As if I didn't have enough. What with the reporters and now this coolie business Twenty-seven coolies, Julia – twenty seven beaten half to death and the managers only getting a fine *(As Proudlock bursts in, having been drinking.)* Oh, Mr. Proudlock.

2nd William Proudlock : Don't you Proudlock me. Don't even look at me. Murderer!

Sercombe-Smith : What? How dare you. How dare you, sir! Haynes –

Haynes : Yes, sir. *(About to try to remove Proudlock)*

2nd William Proudlock (coarsely) : Murderer! (Wrestles him off)

Lettice : Mr. Proudlock, please.

Sercombe-Smith : I assume, Mr. Proudlock, that this undignified behaviour is because of your wife. Because of the sentence. Which I know is bound to distress you. But how you can think you are aiding her cause by this sort of carry-on - by resorting to anarchy – lawlessness -

2nd William Proudlock : It's not lawlessness.

Sercombe-Smith : Isn't it? I have had complaints, you know. I have been inundated. And to burst in when we are engaged -

Lettice : I'll go.

Sercombe-Smith : No. You will stay.

Haines : Mrs. Quale has come on behalf of Miss Marsh.

2nd William Proudlock : That devil!

Julia : Perhaps if we all sit down.

2nd William Proudlock : I'm not sitting.

Lettice : No. Too uncouth! How I ever supported you -

*2nd William Proudlock : You never *did* support me. The complete lack of support any of you have ever given me*

Sercombe-Smith : That is enough. Now listen to me. Listen and pray do not interrupt. (To 2nd William Proudlock) I don't know what you are alleging against me or what your particular quarrel is with this young lady. But let me tell you making an undignified display doesn't help. How anyone can imagine we will get anywhere by anarchy –

2nd William Proudlock : It isn't anarchy.

Sercombe-Smith : Really? Well, what about Miss Marsh then?

2nd William Proudlock : What about her?

Sercombe-Smith : Miss Marsh got up this morning and found what she calls her trashcan spilled all over what she calls the sidewalk. She also found all her roses with their heads off. Now I know she is secondary. She is American and not English. But the fact remains that she is convinced that you are responsible. And

thinking – thinking with unexpected acumen - that her involvement as a witness prevents her approaching me personally, and having therefore sent her neighbour, Mrs. Quale

2nd William Prudlock (to Lettice) : You, you mean.

Lettice : She wants it stopped. *I* want it stopped. The idea of having all those heads cut off –

2nd William Proudlock : One would be enough.

Sercombe-Smith : Are you saying you *didn't* do it?

2nd William Proudlock (rudely) : What d'you think?

Lettice : Well who then?

Haynes : Some native, perhaps. Some coolie. Or it could have been a Briton. I'm afraid Miss Marsh's rather shady conduct combined with a distinctly peculiar manner -

Lettice : Miss Marsh told the truth. I don't like her much but I do believe that. *(To Proudlock)* The truth is, you Proudlocks hate each other. You always have. *(To the Judge and Julia)* And then when it went too far – *(looking back to Proudlock)* - when you, sir, secured Mr. Steward to serve as what Mabel calls a fall-guy – a fall-guy to seduce Ethel

Julia : I'm not sure you could call a seducer a fall-guy.

2nd William Proudlock : Of course you couldn't. The woman's insane.

Sercombe-Smith : The question of sanity is not at issue. What *does* matter is the effects. Even as we speak, my coolies will be reporting this. Even as we speak, it will have reached native quarters. Oh I know that won't necessarily alarm us. We are not all like the Morleys – not all prematurely panicking and seeking a transfer. But the dangers are real. I have only to quote the opinion of my friend Richard Curle -

Julia : What opinion's that, dear?

Sercombe-Smith : Myopia – that’s what he calls it. (*Indicating a paper lying on a glass-topped table*) According to Richard Curle, the British in Malaya are like the French nobility before the Revolution. They ignore the natives as the aristocrats ignored the peasants. And if we are going to carry that further – to avoid seeing what we do not wish to see, or, in your case, Mr. Proudlock, to ride roughshod not just over the natives but even over the British –

2nd William Proudlock : I am not riding roughshod over the British.

Sercombe-Smith : Then what *are* you doing? Bursting in, breaking the rules! We cannot have British people breaking the rules. If we break the rules, the natives will challenge us. We shall lose our moral pre-eminence. And as for behaving lasciviously – distorting justice – seeking to overturn it or, even worse, going round waving guns at each other –

2nd William Proudlock : I have a gun I could wave at you. (*Producing it*)

Lettice (with a little scream) : You see!

Julia : You wouldn’t dare.

2nd William Proudlock : Wouldn’t I? Oh wouldn’t I? I shall keep the gun in reserve. I shall reserve it because I have other means. But when I’ve tried those – when I’ve finished with the Government and ruined the ministers and hung out the King to dry

Haynes (shocked) : What do you mean : hung out the king?

2nd William Proudlock : I mean I’m going to write to the House of Lords.

Sercombe-Smith : And what will you say? What, Mr. Proudlock? That your wife is innocent? That she is virtuous? But your wife is *not* innocent. She is not even virtuous. Or if she is – if she really *is* innocent and has been maligned -

2nd William Proudlock : Maligned? Maligned by whom? Maligned by *her*? (*Indicating Lettice with the gun. Lettice gives a little scream.*)

Sercombe-Smith : I was thinking of you. Of you, William Proudlock. Upstanding, aren’t you? Upstanding, choir-leader, temporary headmaster – but I hear that you have a mistress. And not the first either. I am sorry to say this – especially sorry in front of my own dear wife – such reference ill beseems a British drawing-

room - but from what I hear this dalliance is nothing new – it had a predecessor. and the other one being even *more* shameful in being with the wife of one of your own pupils –

Lettice : He had a dalliance with the wife of one of his own pupils?

2nd William Proudlock : So what? So what?

Sercombe-Smith : So it does rather remove the gloss. It lowers your hand. And when I add my recent receipt of numerous letters – letters about your desire for a marital separation

2nd William Proudlock : Rubbish! (*With a glare towards Lettice*) Trash!

Sercombe-Smith : It is not trash! Recently I have received a number of letters. Nasty letters, I admit. Letters about you, about your wife, about Mr. Ambler -

2nd William Proudlock : Goodman? Have you spoken to Goodman? What did you say?

Sercombe-Smith : Rather more to the point is what *he* has said to *me*.

Julia : About what, dear?

Sercombe-Smith : About the murder night.

2nd William Proudlock : You already know about the murder night.

Sercombe-Smith : Not if you left early -

Julia : Left early?

Sercombe-Smith (to Proudlock) : Not as you said, is it? Not at all your version. According to you, you dined together – played music – were interrupted by your cook – were told there had been a killing – dashed off together to the bungalow -

2nd William Proudlock : Well, then

Julia : Well, then

Sercombe-Smith : But supposing it was *not* like that. Supposing you left his house earlier. You see, I have here a letter stating that you *did* leave earlier. That you left after having been continually upset, agitated - that you were so agitated that you rushed off home early. And Mr. Ambler – your friend Mr. Ambler – being worried about you, and finding you had left a glove –

Lettice: Aha!

Sercombe-Smith : - following you in case you were planning something desperate –

2nd William Proudlock : Ludicrous! It's bloody ludicrous.

Sercombe-Smith : So supposing it's true. Supposing he only arrived *afterwards* – arrived when there had been ample time for you to discover the lovers – shoot Steward - find his terrified rickshaw-puller – bribe the coolie to silence –

2nd William Proudlock : And the servants? What about the servants? What about the cook?

Julia (who is now quite enjoying this) : Good point.

Sercombe-Smith : It is *not* a good point. Oh yes, there was a cook. There was definitely a cook. But if he too had been bribed, and if, besides, you have some other hold over Mrs. Proudlock – if, say, you have so very great a hold that you could force her to take the blame – to assume the culpability – to accept even the possibility of a hanging –

Lettice : Well, Mr. Proudlock?

Sercombe-Smith (with a slightly reproving glance at his wife) : Well, Mr. Proudlock? I am not saying that I believe all that. I am not yet saying it. Frankly, sir, I consider it doubtful that Mr. Ambler could be persuaded to lie even for his acting headmaster. But on the other hand if the *other* rumours are true – the rumours of Ambler having drink problems, gambling debts - a tendency under extreme pressure to dip into collegiate funds –

Haynes (surprised) : Mr. Ambler?

Sercombe-Smith : Mr. Ambler. (*Turning to Proudlock*) –

2nd William Proudlock : And you're accusing me of blackmail?

Sercombe-Smith : I am saying he was in debt. That he had cause to be wary. And if you *knew* all that – knew, I mean, that he owed money – owed it to some Chinese cartel - and if you furthermore had the power to pressure him –

2nd William Proudlock : Lies. Fucking lies. (*Waving gun*)

Sercombe-Smith : Mr. Proudlock!

Lettice : Oh good heavens!

Sercombe-Smith : Mr. Proudlock, that is enough. I have said that may be false. I admit I myself barely credit it. But to break in like this! To resort to such language Here is a case of Mr. Steward dead on the verandah. He is dead, with trousers buttoned, shirt unruffled, pristine mackintosh. And you call *that* a rapist? You think that is how rapists conduct themselves? Whereas, if he was *not* a rapist – if, sir, he was pursuing a pre-planned consensual assignation –

Julia (also to Proudlock) : One you knew about –

Lettice : - having been warned by your Chinese harlot –

2nd William Proudlock : Ridiculous! Preposterous!

Sercombe-Smith : But not impossible. You burst in and challenge him - he challenges you - and you shoot him. And if the reason you are so agitated now is not one of concern but of selfishness – of knowing your wife to be innocent – innocent but possessed of a terrible secret -

2nd William Proudlock : Shut up, shut up. (*Fires gun*) You idiot. If I'd killed him, would I be here? I'd *want* my wife executed. But I see how it is. You want closure. You want her dead before there's any more damage. And as for pretending there are letters

Sercombe-Smith : There are. Hundreds of letters. Letters about her - letters about him – letters about their going off in a car -

2nd William Proudlock : That was at a party. There was a party. And if Ethel and Steward did happen to go off for a bit

Sercombe-Smith : And the murder? What about that, sir? What about your wife saying that Steward tried to drag her into another room? That he dragged her to a sofa-bed? Well, if this was his first visit, how would he know there *was* a sofa-bed? How could he be sure? Whereas if he'd been there before - if she was consenting and if *that* explains why on the Sunday there was no visible bruising, no sign of assault, no need at all to render her unconscious -

2nd William Proudlock : Lies, lies. (*Fires gun again*)

Sercombe-Smith : Mr. Proudlock, be quiet. I am weary of this. And I'll say something else. Something which perhaps I should not admit. In the long run I don't *care* what happened. I don't *care* what I ought or ought not to believe. The

main point is that your wife *has* to be guilty. If she is guilty, she can be removed and the issue may be forgotten. Whereas if we continue to rake up endless more hornets' nests, provoke disgusting publicity, unsettle the natives, arouse questions in London, cast doubt on the efficiency of our whole administration *(An orderly enters, alarmed by the shots, ideally with one or two native servants or white staff)* Ah men, there you are. Remove this gentleman. And if you, Haynes, would be so kind as to confiscate his starting pistol –

2nd William Proudlock : Lay off me, lay off me, you buggers. *(He is dragged off, still firing)*

Lettice : Listen to him! Just listen to him!

Julia (with sang froid, half-annoyed, half-amused) : Yes, really, that was *quite* an episode. *(Picks up her sewing)*

Sercombe-Smith : Regrettable. Best shut it clean away. *(Fade)*

END OF PART TWO

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PART THREE

(Music from "Trial by Jury" : the entrance of Angelina – 'Comes the broken flower'. As the music fades, scene opens on the London Foreign Office. Sir Edward Grey discovered with Lady Pamela Tennant, his mistress, who is toying with things on his desk. Lady Pamela is in a flippant mood)

Sir Edward : Now I've told you, Pamela, you can stay, yes, but this is a very, very serious matter. Ethel Proudlock has been sentenced to die. If you interrupt or are silly, the same may happen to you. *(As Griffiths enters, holding a dossier which is really a collection of newspaper cuttings)* Ah! Arnold!

Griffiths : They're all ready, sir.

Sir Edward : Good. Then if you will fetch them

Pamela (to Arnold) : I am collecting for charity.

Sir Edward : You are *not* collecting for charity.

Pamela : I am a sort of Miss Prism yearning only to provide the insane with worshipful hymns and bone soup

Griffiths (having gone to the door to summon the new arrivals) : Mr. Shaw, Sir Edward. Mr. Bennett Shaw - Mr. Walter Corrigan.

Sir Edward : Thank you. Do come in. And if I may introduce Lady Pamela -

Pamela : I am collecting for charity.

Sir Edward : She is collecting for charity. *(Keen to get away from levity)* Do sit down.

Shaw (stiffly and rather disapprovingly) : Thank you.

Corrigan : Thanks, yes. *(Corrigan and Shaw sit)*

Sir Edward : And allow me to tell you why you are here. The reason I have invited you is that I wish to consult – to seek your assistance on a matter which I know concerns you nearly. I refer of course to the Ethel Proudlock case. A case which producing a great deal of very disturbing correspondence, including from her own father-in-law Cigar?

Corrigan : Thank you.

Shaw (rather primly) : No thank you.

Sir Edward : In a moment I should like to discuss this letter further. But, first, if you would be so good, I should welcome your impressions. Mr. Shaw, you are, I understand, the headmaster of the school in which Mr. Proudlock has been acting as temporary principal.

Shaw : That is correct, sir.

Pamela (imitatively mocking) : Correct, sir. Jolly good.

Sir Edward (rather peeved now with the interruptions) : And how did you find him? Would you say that Mr. Proudlock has a satisfactory record?

Shaw : I found Mr. Proudlock a most hard-working and enterprising young man. Cultured too. Comparatively. Which, heaven knows, compared to the rest of that society –

Sir Edward : You think British society in Malaya somewhat philistine?

Shaw : Oh very philistine. You have only to consider the sort of books they read. Cheap shoddy romances. *Adventures of a Pretty Woman*. *Breath of Scandal*. *The Love Thief*

Pamela : Oh yes, I adored that.

Shaw : What I mean, sir, is that there is no really high art. And when there *is*, it is ignored. I regret to say this, sir, but when Madame Pavlova came to perform a programme of her signature pieces – when she did *that* and the *Malay Mail* advised an early purchase of tickets - there was so little demand that the lady had to cry off. She had to pretend exhaustion. I am not saying that the British do not do a very good job –

Sir Edward : I should hope that they do.

Shaw : But the truth is, British Malaya does not reward skill. It rewards doggedness. And as for being clever I am afraid, sir, in that society it doesn't do to be intellectually clever. The clever are deemed unreliable – they are said to show off. Though how that can be when it is the mediocre who get ahead – when educational attainment counts for less than prowess in a tiger shoot

Pamela : Yes, I can see you *would* dislike that.

Sir Edward (turning to Corrigan) : And you, Mr. Corrigan? What's your take? I imagine that you come to these matters from a rather different perspective.

Corrigan : Rather different. The more so as I know Ethel's father. I, sir, am a planter – I live in an outstation - but being, like her father, keen on what Mr. Shaw dislikes – on going on tiger-shoots

Sir Edward : You enjoy them.

Corrigan : Oh yes.

Sir Edward (not really approving of this) : - suggesting perhaps a rather higher opinion of the British attitude -

Corrigan : I'm not sure, sir, that there *is* a British attitude. I do know that the British are out of touch. That they look to Home, but Home no longer looks to them. I can recall, sir, the days when there was a real buzz in Kuala Lumpur. The days of Tristram Speedy who used to parade through Taiping wearing a leopard skin and turban, playing the bagpipes. I can also recall an official known as the Last White Rajah who farmed otters, toured his region on an elephant, burnt all government letters - on one occasion ordered two litigants to decide their dispute by a tug-of-war

Sir Edward : Yes, I see. I should mention, Mr. Corrigan, that we should not like the British in Malaya to be seen as cultivating a deliberate eccentricity. Nor – forgive me - would we wish for the home population to belittle such achievements as there are. As I understand it, there are now fine roads, hospitals, schools, there are segregated trains –

Corrigan : We *do* segregate, yes. We also exclude Asians from the Civil Service -

Pamela (sensing a sub-text) : - which you regret.

Corrigan (who is not much attracted to women) : What I am saying, sir, is that Malaya cannot be the Home Counties. It is not a bowling green. We do have bowling greens, yes, but beyond the bowling greens there is also the jungle. And it is my belief that *this* is what people fear. They fear the jungle. They fear the native alternative, and all the more they fear the infiltration of the wild into themselves.

Pamela : Perhaps it is there already.

Corrigan : My lady?

Pamela : The latent primitive – the jungle deep in the human -

Sir Edward : Bringing us back to Mrs. Proudlock -

Pamela : - to the radiant Ethel -

Sir Edward : - who, however, does *not* live in a jungle. So if, after all, this is merely the case of a bored lady seeking an outlet in a little amorous excitement

Shaw : Disgusting excitement. To condone vice, shame, marital adultery

Corrigan : You said you had a letter, sir.

Sir Edward : I have several. I also have the trial transcript.

Pamela : Start with a letter.

Sir Edward (repressing a sigh) : My first letter is from the father-in-law. It is from William Proudlock Senior. In it he reminds me that he once worked as my gardener. He also stresses that his own health is failing, that he is practically blind, that the current calamity has completely crushed him, and that Ethel has not actually murdered anyone. He adds finally he was at one time a coal miner – and that having started down the pits at the age of eight

Pamela (genuinely now) : Poor fellow.

Sir Edward : I know.

Corrigan : And the reply - you have replied to him?

Sir Edward : I have not replied to him. I thought the desirability of waiting until the arrival of the most recent Malay papers

Griffiths : All here, sir. (*Drawing out a formidable collection*)

Pamela : Goodness, so many. But perhaps if you summarise –

Griffiths : It's the *Malay Mail*, mainly. It states that the Proudlock case has transfixed the region – that in the entire history of the F.M.S. it is without parallel. *(Turning to include the others)* Apparently the news of the sentence has electrified the administration. They fear that it will weaken them – that it will allow a loophole for native unrest

Shaw : Ridiculous.

Corrigan : I'm not so sure.

Griffiths : Seven hundred, sir. That's all we are. Seven hundred in Kuala Lumpur, including wives and families. And being, as it is, a place that thrives on triviality

Shaw (sighing slightly) : That's true.

Griffiths (reading from the paper) : Mr. P.C. Russell reported taking to a motor-bicycle - Mrs. Noel Walker laid up with gout.

Shaw : Deplorable! But if of course it's a defence –

Sir Edward : That is my fear. Triviality as a defence. Amusement as a way of papering over the cracks. Given, however, that triviality can easily yield to panic - to lashing out or alternatively running round like headless chickens ... *(Indicating one pile)* There are nurses here saying 'she has disgraced her sex'. She is no longer a woman, she is immoral, hanging is too good. *(Indicating another)* And now, after the verdict, here they are in reverse, clamouring for mercy, galloping round the wards, ordering patients to contact the press – in some cases writing to the Sultan

Corrigan : And the *other* matter? The other matter apart from the hysterical nurses?

Pamela : What other matter?

Corrigan : The Eurasian matter. There is a growing rumour that Mrs. Proudlock is not in fact pure white at all. That her mother was Malay. And of course if her husband only found this out *after* he was married – if he found it out *then* and therefore has a motive –

Shaw (worried now) : It does make a motive.

*Griffiths : I am not saying that it is a *valid* motive. Not when Proudlock himself has a Chinese mistress. But if the world begins to think that we are a corrupt legislation, that the so-called purity of the English lady is a sham, that even Christian marriage is a mask for depravity and adultery –*

Shaw : It would drive a wedge in our moral authority – it would give the natives a chink -

*Pamela : A chink? Yes. Though whether that is exactly *le mot juste**

*Sir Edward : And that is the trouble. That's precisely it. What in these shadow-lands would be *le mot juste*? I look at this case, gentlemen, and how do I see it? Darkly. Through a glass darkly. On the one hand, there is the law. We can invoke the law, the woman can be hanged and we can all quickly forget about it. But what if we *don't* forget about it? What if this itself leads to rumours of a cover-up – or even worse to the idea that we would not have hanged her had she been white – had she *not* been Eurasian*

Corrigan : Yes, I see. Two views really.

Griffiths : Short-term and long-term.

Pamela : Short sight and long sight. On the other hand –

Sir Edward : Yes?

*Pamela : Well, Edward, I know I'm not an expert and I'm more interested in my bone soup and flea-powder, but don't you think perspectives have changed? When this trial began, there was a sort of relief. There was almost a pride. Here was a white Englishwoman on trial with no more favour than would be accorded to a Tamil or Malay. But now the issue is blurred. She may not *be* British. And if somebody starts saying you already knew this - that you and the judges knew her origins and the trial from the start was not pukka -*

*Shaw : And if it *wasn't*?*

Pamela : What?

Shaw : Wasn't fair – wasn't pukka - was a case of oppressors willing to throw a Eurasian to the wall

Sir Edward : Strong words, Mr. Shaw.

Shaw(to Pamela) : And there is no need to giggle. I, madam, am not one of your free-thinkers. I deplore immorality. I loathe any stain on our pure white Englishness. But two wrongs don't make a right. Two lies don't make a truth. I have read that this whole business was a matter of misinterpretation. That Ethel Proudlock misinterpreted a smile or a wink and was incensed when Steward failed to follow it up. But what if it is the reverse? What if it was *she* who enticed *him*. She led him on, he pounced and she panicked. And if *that* is the case – if she was in a sense defending herself – if, even though she is immoral and deplorable, she really *was* in terror of an undesired assault -

Griffiths : So what do we do? The latest intelligence is that she is appealing to the Sultan. And where does that leave us? If we object we look like tyrants. It may spring a revolt. So perhaps if we don't – if instead of objecting, we actually do the opposite -

Pamela : You mean help the appeal?

Griffiths (to Sir Edward) : Join in – send a delegation – and perhaps if that delegation were to include Mr. Anthonisz

Corrigan : Mr. who?

Griffiths : The Assistant Resident. He's a Eurasian. Cambridge-educated but a Eurasian. And if we make use of that – emphasize he's a half-caste while at the same time diluting him with the Judge and Mr. Winstedt

Shaw : The whole thing is disgusting. Adultery indeed. (*Turning to Pamela*) I ask you, my lady, can you even *believe* in such a thing?

Pamela (stirring slightly uncomfortably in her chair and glancing at Sir Edward surreptitiously) : I think perhaps I ought to pass on that.

Sir Edward (to Griffiths) : Use Anthonisz. Send cables right away. (*Fade*)

(Scene changes to Kuala Lumpur, a room in attached to the law-courts. Hastings-Rhodes and E.A.S. Wagner discovered seated rather formally in temporary alliance. A servant ushering in the 1st William Proudlock. Servant withdraws.)

Hastings-Rhodes: Mr. Proudlock, do come in. I am so sorry about this. The rather cloak-and-dagger nature of these developments

1st William Proudlock : It's all right.

Hastings-Rhodes : And myself actually allying with Mr. Wagner! What an idea! But the need to talk - unofficially, of course, entirely off the record –

1st William Proudlock : Yes, well, perhaps had my wife been better defended - better served and not by a friend of the victim

Wagner : I have never denied that. Nor, since the trial, have I denied that I am pretty convinced of her guilt. Do sit down.

1st William Proudlock : I will sit for five minutes. *(They all sit)*

Hastings-Rhodes : Mr. Proudlock, we can appreciate the strain you are under. We may not feel it but we do understand. However, you must see the wider dimension. The need to contain this issue particular now - particularly when the Germans are in Agadir and there may be a war

1st William Proudlock : A war? Did you say a war? How poor Ethel can be possibly accused of starting a war

Wagner : If there is a war we shall have to be absolutely sure of our natives. It is essential. Whereas if the natives start championing your wife – if they even begin making her a martyr and using her as a stick to beat the British

1st William Proudlock : Oh I see. You mean Eurasia. The so-called Eurasian angle. Let me tell you something. Natives hate Eurasians. Both sides hate Eurasians. So how anyone will want to claim poor Ethel

Hastings-Rhodes : Even when the natives cheered her? Even when they clamoured in court?

Wagner : We should have stopped that. Especially when they overflowed the public gallery. But then again, to ban them – to risk unrest, catcalls, possible rioting

Hastings-Rhodes : Quite.

Wagner : Quite.

Hastings-Rhodes : Quite. Which brings us to Winnie.

1st William Proudlock (rather taken aback) : To Winnie?

Wagner : We have sent for her.

1st William Proudlock : You've done what?

Hastings-Rhodes : Oh yes, we know. *(As if guessing Proudlock's argument)* Winnie is irrelevant. She has nothing to do with the murder. But she is nonetheless a card, and if we do not first seek to establish parameters – to see what cards we can play -

1st William Proudlock : You are treating the whole thing as a game.

Hastings-Rhodes : We are treating it metaphorically. We are suggesting that metaphorically we are all dealt certain cards in life – and if we don't know how to play them - how to exploit the arbitrary rules and sometimes win a rather unjustified trick *(As Pooley enters)* Ah. Pooley.

Pooley : They're here, sir.

1st William Proudlock : They?

Hastings-Rhodes : Mr. Tan is accompanying his daughter.

Pooley : If you will come this way, please.

(Enter Mr. Tan with Winnie who is very beautiful but sullen and full of resentment.)

Tan (respectful as always, bowing slightly) : Mr. Hastings-Rhodes. Mr. Wagner.

Wagner (with some charm) : Mr. Tan. Miss Tan.

Winnie : I have nothing to say to you.

Hastings-Rhodes : Of course. Nothing to say – nothing to impart. On the other hand, your acquaintance with Mr. Proudlock –

Winnie : Not acquainted.

Wagner (raising an eyebrow) : Not?

1st William Proudlock : Of course we are. Though why it should matter what I did as a bachelor

Wagner : And afterwards? After you ceased being a bachelor?

Pooley : I'm afraid we have proof, sir.

1st William Proudlock (half-aside, quietly and abashed) : Proof of my shame. Proof that may ruin me.

Hastings-Rhodes (briskly) : This, Miss Tan, is a dossier. It is a compilation of recorded sightings of Mr. Proudlock with a Chinese girl called Wenling Tan. It also records that twice his cook saw you sleeping together. Now then. I don't need to inform you that this is not good news. That it is dangerous to the administration. But of course if that pleases you – if you welcome it – if you even perhaps support the idea of an insurrection -

Tan : Not support, sir.

Wagner : I should hope not. One need only mention the lessons of history. Nero, the Wu Dynasty, Robespierre -

Hastings-Rhodes : What my colleague means is that we want no such civil strife here. That any such barbarity would be calamitous for all of us. I am not of course maintaining that you, Miss Tan, or especially your honourable father, are modern revolutionaries. Such an idea would be laughable. But there are always malcontents – always misfits who will latch on to trouble, and when they start saying that Imperialism is a con – that it is a speck of philanthropy plus a great mass of dividend

Pooley : Careful, sir.

Wagner : What we are saying is that things have changed. That we are not as we were. At the present our investments are yielding comparatively little. And philanthropy is barely appreciated. The reality – as I'm sure Mr. Hastings-Rhodes will agree - is that the natives have their own indigenous culture, that they will exploit any deficiencies in ours, and that they no longer recognise the darkness from which we claim to be raising them. Hence the new jumpiness. Hence the reason why fences are necessary. The need for us all to maintain our identity – to know who we are while keeping due order and discipline –

Winnie : Your order – your discipline.

Wagner : Miss Tan, Mr. Tan, we are not here as your enemy. Personally I would be only too happy were we Brits more understanding of your attitudes. But to be linked as one – or even worse, for us Britons to yield to the lure of infusion –

Winnie : Infusion?

Wagner : - blending in - melting into the more alluring aspects of your culture

Hastings-Rhodes : Beer mixed with wine.

Wagner : Beer and wine, yes. The merging of two different liquids which being better drunk separately -

Winnie (sullenly) : Go on.

Hastings-Rhodes : We mentioned just now a dossier. A substantial dossier. And here it is. It includes witness statements, yes. But there are also other things. Including accusations. (*To Proudlock*) It is the contention of Wenling Tan that you, Mr. Proudlock, found out that your wife was Eurasian. That you discovered it *after* your marriage and were horrified. She also maintains that your wife was pregnant when you married her, that you did not *want* to marry her, and that as a result of your disgust –

1st William Proudlock : Disgust?

Wagner : Wenling maintains that it was your disgust with your wife that destroyed your marriage – that it caused the lady to resort to numerous love-affairs.

1st William Proudlock : Ridiculous!

Hasting-Rhodes : Is it? Is it really, Mr. Proudlock? And what about you? It is one thing, sir, for a bachelor to take a native girl for his physical enjoyments. It is regrettably almost normative. But when that girl stays around after the bachelor is married, when the bachelor's wife is accused and sentenced for murder, when the native girl is clearly intent on trying to win the former bachelor back

Tan (distressed, appealing to the other of the legal duo) : Mr. Wagner.

Pooley (not altogether unsympathetically) : You did not know? You were unaware of it? (*Tan hangs his head*)

Hastings-Rhodes : Which brings us to the final strand. It brings us to *you*. I wonder, Mr. Tan, what you can tell us about the James Barrack case?

Tan (unhappily) : James Barrack, tuan?

Hastings-Rhodes : He was an English doctor. He was a doctor-turned-planter murdered by Chinese. He was not, however, the intended target. The intended target, as you very well know, was his travelling companion, an unscrupulous contractor named MacLean. (*Mainly to Proudlock*) MacLean, you see, had swindled the Chinese – he had kept back their money - and, happening, in July 1908, to be walking with Barrack on a lonely jungle road

Pooley : Got away, did he?

Wagner : He *did* get away. He got away, causing the coolies to vent their spleen on poor Mr. Barrack. (*To Mr. Tan*) The point being that one of those coolies was known to you. He was so very *well* known that you asked to be excused attending the trial – to avoid going with Mr. Ferguson –

Tan : Yes.

Hastings-Rhodes : And the reason? Would you care to state in what capacity he was known to you?

Tan : He was my uncle.

Hastings-Rhodes : Your uncle, yes. You were a respectable employee of the *Malay Mail* – you assisted the editor Mr. Ferguson - and yet here was your uncle - one of nine coolies – one of them a woman – being charged with a terrible murder. Now, then. It is not my intention to upset you. It will avail nothing to remind you that your uncle sat apathetically in court while outside a thunderstorm raged, and eight of his friends were sentenced to hang. But the fact remains that the case was a game-changer. It induced fear in us British. And with that a new loathing. And *if*, Mr. Tan - if certain people exploit this – if certain members of our British community apply that loathing to Winnie – if they tar her with the same brush of cruelty, of unreliability, of treachery – of wearing the inscrutable mask, beneath which lurks a personal and racial resentment –

Tan : You are saying she will be hounded.

Wagner : I fear you both will.

Winnie : And him? (*Pointing at 1st William Proudlock*) What about *him*?

1st William Proudlock : What *about* me? If you are implying that I am no better than a murdering coolie – that I am at home in the jungle as they seem to be –

Hastings-Rhodes : What I am implying is that we run the risk of escalation - of opening things up. (*Directly to Proudlock as a warning of what not to do*) Slander Miss Tan and you indirectly slander *us* – you invite investigation of our own racial credentials - and this being dangerous to the system -

1st William Proudlock : What system?

Pooley : You know very well what system.

Wagner (to Proudlock) : The system of segregation. The system by which even your own multi-racial school is run on strictly imperialist principles. Besides, there is another factor. We have forgotten about Malaya.

1st William Proudlock (rather surprised) : Malaya?

Hastings-Rhodes (nodding) : Malaya the country. Which, Mr. Proudlock, is not Canada and is certainly not our glorious India. Kuala Lumpur itself means muddy confluence. It is no jewel in the crown – no beloved gem for which the homeland

would do battle - and for that very reason the need to weigh our words – to weigh what we say and count our cards, not forgetting that one is a knave

Pooley : And given that Mrs. Proudlock is making this even harder –

Hastings-Rhodes : - given that she is threatening to withdraw her appeal

2nd William Proudlock : Withdraw her appeal?

Pooley : She has rescinded it. The length of the wait - the madness to which it is driving her

2nd William Proudlock (to Wagner) : And you knew about this?

Wagner : I am as shocked as you. However, there is still time and if, rather than yet more muddying of the waters, we can now get Miss Tan to become more amenable –

Winnie: How : amenable?

Pooley : Amenable to a plea of clemency. Mr. Proudlock will be appealing for clemency. He will be asking it in light of the recent coronation. And if Miss Tan can help us redeem his character – redeem that of his wife – join her own name with existing petitions to the Foreign Secretary – to the Sultan – petitions from over two hundred Europeans – several Irish - five hundred Indians – a scattering of Chinese ...

Hastings-Rhodes : Well, Miss Tan?

Winnie : Well what?

Hastings-Rhodes : Will you join us? Will you confirm our united front?

Winnie : And if I do? If I do go ahead and sign to it?

Hastings-Rhodes : If you do, then the sky will show rainbows. All your woes will be over. Oh I know there have been ripples. You need only ask the press. According to the Calcutta papers, the trial was a failure – it lay bare the farce of British justice. But it also says that Mrs. Proudlock was justified. That a man was attacking her – molesting her - abusing her honour – and given that your father's own paper said the same

Winnie : What? *(She eyes Mr. Tan sharply)*

Tan : We did, Winnie – it was all in the *Mail*. (*Hangs head again*)

Wagner : And that is why you must help us. Why, even though we are separate, we must also unite. Already Mrs. Proudlock is being re-cast as a heroine. As an example of oppressed womanhood. (*Holding out a newspaper*) See here, the *London Chronicle*. In which she becomes ‘the outraged feminine’. See here : the *Daily Mail*. In which she is a pure lady to Steward as satyr and monster. And that is how we want it. To leave it at that. A domestic drama. A drama of lust. Look, Miss Tan, we don’t mean to insult you. You are obviously a woman of some education – you are even refined -

Mr. Tan: Oh yes. She won a scholarship

Hastings-Rhodes : - but you have no notion of the damage your rumour-mongering is inflicting. You are saying that Mrs. Proudlock is Eurasian. That she is of impure race. Well, if she *is* – if in the imperial pack she is some sort of a joker – would we have gone ahead? Would we have brought her to court – would we, when the risk of *that* horror coming out

Winnie : I don’t know. Perhaps you found out after. You find out now and so wanting to bury - not wanting appeal -

Wagner : Of course we want the appeal. We did once and still do. Only now with you shooting your mouth off – seeking revenge – hounding - stalking – (*indicating Proudlock as her victim*) –

Winnie (furiously proud) : I do not stalk. And as for the rest

(*Wagner goes to silence her*)

Pooley : No, sir. Let her talk.

Winnie (who is eloquent while still finding some of the longer words hard to articulate) : Talk, though, of what? Of how strange you all are? Of your puppeteer policy? You talk of sticking together yet you talk too of boundaries. You talk of joining yet you separate. Oh yes, I know. My father’s beloved *Malay Mail* is a fair

Malay Mail. It criticises the judge. It shows im-part-ial-ity (*She separates the syllables either for emphasis or because the word is hard for her*). Yet it also publishes a defence. A defence twice as long. And that is the point. It is the point because deep down you despise us. For all your civilised manners – for all your fair play - you despise us. (*Turning to Wagner*) I look at you, Mr. Wagner and at you, Mr. Hastings-Rhodes, and what do I see? I see men very clever – men I could admire. But how *can* I admire you when to you we are unworthy? We talk back to an English official – we get deported. We steal a few eggs – we get deported – we are lazy on our shift, we get deported – and if you deny this -

Hastings-Rhodes : I do deny it. I deny it utterly. And besides –

Winnie : Besides what?

Hastings-Rhodes : Besides, if you are all so virtuous, why do the Tamils hate you? Why do the Malays hate you? You call us racist, Miss Tan – you damn us for that - but what about *you*? Are you friendly to the Malays – are you kind to the Tamils? I have heard it said – and this by a Chinaman – that the Tamil language is the discourse of hell – the tongue of the devil. And that makes me wonder. It makes me ask myself : do you know what ‘Tamil’ means? It means 'self-speak', or 'speech of one’s group'. And that is what we *are* in Malaya. We are separate groups. So how you think we can combine – how we can do anything but live in separate compartments, and just occasionally peep up - clamber over the parapets.....

Winnie : *Your* parapets. The parapets of privilege. Ones you maintain even when you bid me unite with you. Well, one day we Chinese will climb those parapets. One day we will scale your heights. And where then will you be? Where then will be your proud Mrs. Proudlock? What then shall we say of the half-caste who has killed a pure white man – a half-caste whose father is white, but who being herself muddy, tainted, fit just like us to be hanged

1st William Proudlock : Stop it! Stop it! (*Smashes her face*)

Wagner : Stop it! Stop it!

Hastings-Rhodes : Wen-ling Tan I bid you be silent. If you will not be silent, then the need to put you under house-arrest –

Tan (very distressed) : You can't. You can't.

Wagner (hardening now) : Oh yes we can. We shall refer it to the Sultan. And given that he is to review the case - given too that his power depends on us – and that he hates the Chinese

1st William Proudlock : Hates them. He despises them.

Winnie : You are a snake beneath my worst contempt -

Hastings-Rhodes : And you a fiend. (*As orderlies come in.*) Go, bear the fiend away (*Winnie struggles but is led out. Tan distraught. Black out*)

END OF PART THREE

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PART FOUR

(Music from “Trial by Jury” : “A nice dilemma’ Music fades to reveal the comfortable home of Mr. Redland. He is discovered with his wife, Margaret, who is perusing a document.)

Margaret : Leung.

Redland : I beg your pardon?

Margaret : Leung, dear. I was wondering about this Mr. Leung.

Redland : Where did you get that?

Margaret : It was left.

Redland : Left here? At the house?

Margaret : At the club. I found it at the entrance. I was just leaving the club and I saw this note. It was sort of wedged.

Redland : Wedged? Wedged anonymously?

Margaret : Yes.

Redland : Wedged as a threat? Wedged because of the Proudlock case?

Margaret : I suppose it may have been. It asks about justice – about British Justice. And then when it refers too to the rickshaw-pullers

Redland : Rickshaw-pullers?

Margaret : It says about Mr. Leung but going on next to the rickshaw-pullers.

Redland (rather exasperated) : Give it to me. (Taking it) Oh yes, that. I remember that. There was a strike. Before we came out. A strike of the rickshaw-pullers. And so the Resident called the leaders. He gathered their leaders and told them they were aliens. They were aliens on short contracts and if the strike was not over by six o’clock, they would be expelled.

Margaret : Expelled?

Redland : Yes. And quite right too. Unfortunately, however, that was not the end. It was not the end because since then there have been *more* cases – *more* expulsions. And though, when they go, they get a suit of clothes and a blanket, still the ill-will it breeds –

Margaret : I'm not surprised. How anyone could sanction any such thing

Redland : That is not the correct response. It is not at all apposite. How you can sit there playing devil's advocate

Margaret : I'm not sure what that is. I do, however, remember about Mr. Leung. *Now* I do. There was a petition. I signed it.

Redland : You signed a petition? A petition from whom? From Proudlock? Was it from Proudlock?

Margaret : It could have been Proudlock. I didn't look really. I was preoccupied with the carpenter-ants. And of course the marmalade. We're getting dangerously low on marmalade. Only when this native came up with a petition -

Redland (a bit alarmed now): A native?

Margaret : Quite handsome. Dishy really. And not at all offensive. All he wanted was a signature and I do remember now the name on it being Leung – What's the matter? Have I been indiscreet?

Redland : Margaret, you are regularly indiscreet. You are never anything *but*. In this case, however, you have excelled yourself. The Leung case is a case in which the Sultan himself has expressed an interest. And given that he actually wrote asking me for news of it.....

Margaret : Then you *do* know of it.

Redland : I passed it to my junior. Only then when it reached the House – when it got to Parliament and the Under-Secretary said he couldn't possibly comment

Margaret : And the details?

Redland : I don't *know* the details. Something about a deportation. Two years ago a Mr. Leung was ordered back to China. He was dismissed for gross disrespect. Apparently a British official had asked him to write his name. And he

refused on the grounds that the official would be unable to read it. And this meaning he was put in shackles, removed to prison, sentenced to five years; banishment

Margaret : My goodness.

Redland : I know. Not our finest hour. But he *was* offered a deal. All he had to do was to state publicly that he had not intended any insult. That he never intended to criticise the British government. And he *did* say it. And if Proudlock is now scraping even *this* barrel –

Margaret : You think he is? (*Indicating the note*)

Redland : I feel sure of it. He was always jealous and now he's vindictive. He thinks we scorn him – that we treat him as an outsider. But seeing as he *is* an outsider

Margaret : Like the Chinese , though perhaps not as clever

Redland : What you must remember is where we are. On which particular dot of the imperial map. We, Margaret, are in Malaya. We are necessarily segregated. So it's all very well signing petitions – though even *that* I doubt – but if you think it is time for us all to combine - to live some jolly little unified life, never mind the slyness, the subterfuge, the drug-addiction, the treacheries (*Noise off*) What's that?

Margaret : It sounds like a noise.

Redland : Well, obviously. It's a hell of a noise. (*Shocked*) Miss Marsh. (*Mabel Marsh has rushed in, followed by servants for whom she has been too quick*)

Mabel : Oh Mr. Redland.

Redland : Miss Marsh, please. What is this? Sit Sit down.

Mabel : I can't. I'm on fire. They've shot fire through my windows. And if it's what I think – if it's the note

Margaret : The note?

Mabel : I happened to be writing this note. A note to the Sultan. About that horrid Proudlock and his terrible Mr. Leung business. And if now that awful Proudlock has got the wrong end of the stick – if he is actually setting fire to me

Redland : Miss Marsh, what can I say? It's terrible. I shall send for the fire officers. But I must say if you will keep stirring things up – adding more fuel just when the Sultan is in conference about the poor fellow's wife *(As a servant enters)* Yes, what is it?

Servant : A snake, tuan. A snake flung through the window. And there are men outside with fire. They are throwing fire.

Redland : Impossible.

Margaret : No, look! There it is.

Mabel : There it is. Fire. We shall be massacred. *(She whimpers)*

Redland : Go, call the guard. *(To the ladies)* And you run to the club. Escort them, Chan. For Hell's sake, get away! *(Fire at the windows. Noise of banging and drumming from without. Quick fade.)*

(Scene changes to the Palace of Sultan Aluaddin Sulaiman Shah Ibni-Al-Marhum. The Sultan present with Judge Sercombe-Smith, Richard Winstedt, Mr. Anthonisz and Sir Arthur Young, who is the High Commissioner for the Federated Malay States. Also present is Ali, a favoured servant. The Sultan is a generally genial but rather fox-like gentleman)

Sultan : Gentlemen, gentlemen, welcome. Please to be seated. You will see there are seats allocated. Sir Arthur, for instance, at the top, Mr. Smith at the bottom –

Sercombe-Smith (correcting him) : Sercombe-Smith.

Sultan : Yes indeed. Sercombe-Smith. Well now, this is jolly. It is very jolly but also serious. It is serious because in a moment I shall be asking your opinions. I shall also be pleased if you would care to partake of some of the delicious snacks I have had prepared for you. Sir Arthur if you would care to begin -

Sir Arthur : Certainly.

Sultan : - pausing only to partake of some succulent tomato chicken –

Sir Arthur : Yes, very well. *(Clears his throat)* Gentlemen, I stand –

Sultan : - sit –

Sir Arthur : I sit before you now in my role as Commissioner of the Federated Malay States. But I do not speak only for the British. I feel that I here represent many persons – many types, each with their different ingredients –

Sultan : Ah yes. Like food.

Sir Arthur : What?

Sultan : Different kinds of food. You must know, gentlemen, that our Malayan Islamic cuisine is something of a mishmash. India, China, the Middle East. Steam, boil, stir-fry -

Sir Arthur (pressing on doggedly) : Gentlemen, his Highness has asked me to commence proceedings by giving my own opinion of the Proudlock case. He has also asked me rather oddly to incorporate Mr. Leung. And so if we could perhaps begin with *that*

Sultan : Begin, yes. Begin at the beginning -

Sir Arthur : Indeed.

Sultan : - after first trying some of our most delicious lemon-grass -

Sir Arthur : You will all know, I think, about the Leung case. How in 1909 a Mr. Leung was ordered back to China.

Winstedt : I know, yes. It was rather excessive –

Sultan : Excessive. What a lovely word. And I agree. An overcooked response. A too rich response. Though whether it was as bad as some others

Ali : His highness refers to a recent case. An Englishman. An Englishman who having just got away with being fined only seventy five dollars – seventy five for killing a Chinaman –

Anthonisz : Your point being?

Sultan : Nothing, nothing. But it is interesting, is it not? Interesting that Mr. Proudlock is making a collection of such cases. And this hatching of discord – a hatching which, may I say, reminds me of this dish of copperhead-snake served in its own newly hatched eggs

Sercombe-Smith : This is preposterous. I am aware, sir, that the Leung case created a bit of a stir. I know it did. But the fact is, Leung was offered a deal. He was offered a deal and accepted it and if you think there is any mileage in *that* -

Sultan : Thank you indeed, Mr. Smith. How kind of you to remind me. (*Turning to Sir Arthur*) Next.

Sir Arthur : Oh I can go on now?

Sultan : By all means. Indeed, if you do *not* – if we are compelled to waste any more time listening to trifles (*Eyeing Sercombe-Smith who glowers silently*)

Sir Arthur : His Highness has raised the case of Mr. Leung. He has raised it because he thinks it is being resurrected. What he means – what I *think* he means – is that Mr. Proudlock is using it. He is using this and other awkward previous cases to put the heat on. To make his wife's release the price of his silence. Gentlemen, I do not believe it. I am not even sure Mr. Proudlock cares for his wife at all. However, if he *does* circulate such material – if, as he threatens, he directly involves the British Press - I shall come down hard. I shall alert the Colonial Office. I shall send out editorials– I shall see they are run in every edition of the *Singapore Free Press* – I shall have them pasted up in hotels, guest-houses, on notice-boards, on hoardings –

Sultan : Thank you. And your view of the other thing?

Sir Arthur : What other thing?

Sultan : The idea of a pardon.

Sir Arthur : Oh that. My opinion of that is that a pardon is the lesser of various evils. It will draw a line. My advice therefore is that you give her one.

Sultan : Good. *Very* good. Advice that I give her one. Next.

Sercombe-Smith : Next?

Sultan : The next is Mr. Winstedt. And what a distinguished gentleman he is. Mr. Winstead, as some of you may know, is a most erudite person. Not only is he compiling a Malay-English dictionary. He is also involved in education. The Penang Free School – the Malacca High School, the Anglo-Chinese School –

(Turning to his servant-advisor) – I believe one of the daughters of Mr. Tan – I believe *she* was educated at the Anglo-Chinese School.

Ali : She was, Highness.

Sultan : And that is so important, is it not? Education is such an ice-breaker. Like food really. Though, mind you, different tastes, different dietary laws

Anthonisz : I really think, sir, if we could stick with the Proudlock case

Sultan : Yes, indeed. Though whether that should also include the Irish I have had a letter from an Irishman. A letter describing Mrs. Proudlock as modest, quiet, unassuming – *(slightly more loudly)* and since the letter also challenges the entire judicial system of the whole British Empire

Sercombe-Smith : Oh really!

Sultan : According to this Irishman, any woman is justified in defending herself - her honour is dearer to her than life. And this meaning that rather than being executed, she should be given a medal –

Anthonisz : A medal?

Sultan : I know. Preposterous. A thorough-paced absurdity. Didn't I say so, Ali?

Ali : You did, Highness. You said it was absurd. Adding that once we overcome this ignorance – once we get this new college so cleverly making English the dominant language –

Sultan : I said that, did I?

Ali : You did, Highness.

Sultan : Good, wasn't it?

Ali : Very good. So clever – so propagandist. And then when you added that bit about imperial virtues – that it was indeed slick to proclaim the imperial virtues, though whether the poor would be helped at all – whether they would be at all *gratified* by the education of an indigenous elite

Winstedt (restraining annoyance) : May I speak now?

Sultan : Certainly.

Ali : Certainly.

Winstedt : Then much as it grieves me, I must call a halt. I fear I must. In my view, any disclaimer in the *Singapore Press* would be a calamity. It would merely enflame things. Nor am I convinced that Mr. Proudlock is quite the radical that people assert. In my view he is merely drawing on the well of his own bitterness (*Sir Arthur coughs*) And if to these personal concoctions, we add *political* ones –

Sultan : Very wise. A good point. Have some liver.

Winstedt : I'd rather not, thank you.

Sultan (unperturbed) : And your view of a pardon?

Winstedt : I believe you should offer it. I believe it all the more because the high chance of the British Government following suit –

Sultan : Excellent. Truly excellent. Mr. Anthonisz.

Anthonisz : Ah. My turn.

Sultan (to the others) : Mr. Anthonisz is Acting Resident while the real one is away. Whether, however, he will equally appreciate my nasi dagang
(*Raising a dish of food*)

Sir Arthur : Never mind the nasi.

Sercombe-Smith : No indeed. How anyone could possibly have imagined we were going to waste all morning discussing food preferences

Anthonisz : There is no doubt, gentlemen, that food is not here at issue. But it does make a point. When one considers the mix – mix of cuisines, mix of cultures, not to mention the heat that both generate

Winstedt : You are saying that this case has many ingredients.

Anthonisz : I am saying that we cannot rely on one recipe. And even if we do, the chance that we may cook it up differently

Sercombe-Smith : Ridiculous.

Anthonisz : It is not ridiculous. Already comment on the Proudlock business has become over-heated. Why else would the *Malay Mail* impose a moratorium on readership letters? And this being further enflamed by recent native cases

Sercombe-Smith : What native cases?

Sir Arthur : Was it a murder?

Anthonisz (to the British contingent) : On the same day as the Steward shooting somebody found the body of a decapitated Tamil. It was found blood-drenched in the grounds of a convent. At the very same hour a coolie committed suicide. He stabbed his wife and then drowned himself. But as for either of *these* being accorded any attention – being discussed – reported - provoking any remark

Sultan : Regrettable, is it not? But then of course with the British so despising the Tamils – calling them so very simple, so childlike –

Winstedt : We do not call them childlike –

Sultan : Ugly too, I believe. What was it Mrs. Proudlock's father said of them?

Ali: He said 'ugly', great one. He said that, before considering copulating with a Tamil, a man would have to be either very drunk or very desperate

Sultan : Yes.

Ali : Yes. Which considering he himself may have succumbed

Sercombe-Smith : Sir!

Sultan : I know! Too hot. Like this chilli! (*Almost threatening him with it*)

Anthonisz (trying to continue rationally and calmly) : As I see it, we have here two issues – two, possibly three. Issue Number One is whether Mrs. Proudlock should be pardoned – pardoned, I mean, on her own judicial merits. Issue Number Two is almost the opposite. It is how far – if at all – we should be influenced by the machinations of her husband. As for Number Three -

Winstedt : Yes, what is that?

Anthonisz : Race, sir. Issue Number Three is race. An area on which I normally advocate total tolerance. However, when one considers the way this case is going – the way it has brought out the faults in every single racial variety –

Sultan : Oh I know. Like alcohol. Bringing out the best or the worst. We of course do not drink alcohol. We do not do *that*, any more than we partake of non-halal

meats. If, however, Mr. Smith would care to supplement his protein intake by beef –

Ali : Beef, water-buffalo, goat, lamb or indeed poultry - (*Ali offers another dish, almost as a double-act*)

Sultan (thrusting a dish precipitately at the Judge) : This is poultry.

Sercombe-Smith : If you don't shut up about poultry

Anthonisz : My own belief is a minority one. It is that the race here does not matter. It is irrelevant because in my view Ethel Proudlock is innocent. And of course when we add the need to avoid the horrors of the Barrack case - how witnesses were paid – how time and again the Judge referred to the defendants as ruffians - how one man was taken into custody purely because he had a hat similar to the victim's and another just because he blenched when questioned

Sir Arthur : And the fact that he proved to be guilty?

Anthonisz : What?

Sir Arthur : Guilty. He was proved to be guilty. Guilty but his sentence then being commuted.....

Sultan : Commuted?

Sir Arthur : It was commuted.

Sercombe-Smith : And that is the point. That is the crux. You rail, sir, against British justice – you delight in cooking up lies on it - but four of the men were saved. They were reprieved. Oh yes, there are faults. There are miscarriages and you have certainly made the most of them. But may I say I absolutely refute the charge that I conducted the Proudlock trial inefficiently. Is it not enough that my joint-assessors completely disbelieved the woman's evidence? That the King himself has pronounced her guilty? And when you add that in March she sought time off from work to buy a gun – that she bought a gun on the almost mad pretext that her husband liked shooting at crocodiles –

Sultan (picking up crocodile meat) : Crocodiles?

Sercombe-Smith (refusing to be intimidated) : Is it likely? Is it credible? Whereas if she bought it not for his use but for hers –

Winstedt : Against whom?

Anthonisz : Against Steward?

*Sercombe-Smith : Steward, yes. The same Steward who may well have known she was a Eurasian. The same one who certainly *did* know she was respectably married. Well, then, if Steward threatened to expose her or denounce her or even if he simply refused to resume their already flagging relationship.....*

Sultan : Ah, yes, I see. Quite a dilemma. The wit needed – the difficulty in solving it –

*Winstedt : And your own view? Your *judgement*, your Highness?*

*Sultan : Oh, no, not yet. No final judgement yet. Let it stew. Only I will add this. I will *command* it. Let Mrs. Proudlock be removed from the death cell – let her agree to place herself entirely at my mercy – let her if she likes, conduct the newspaper interview she has requested – and then, at the end of two days –*

Sercombe-Smith : Two days? –

Sultan : Two days during which I shall simmer the evidence most carefully –

Anthonisz : Two days – well, I suppose, gentlemen, if it is only a wait of two days

Sir Arthur : I agree to two days.

Winstedt : I agree to two days. (Sercombe-Smith snorts)

Sultan : You have a cold? Do try this rich dessert. Or chilli p'rops. (To Ali vis-à-vis Sercombe-Smith) More heat there, Ali, eh? (Ali attempts to pop a chill-pepper into Sercombe-Smith's mouth. Sercombe-Smith splutters and protests. Winstedt almost laughs. Fade.)

(Scene changes to London. Buckingham Palace. Queen Mary with Florence, the Resident's wife.)

Queen Mary : Lady Florence.

Florence : Such an honour, your Majesty.

Queen Mary : Not at all. Well, probably. Do sit down. You are on furlough, I gather.

Florence : I am, ma'am. My husband is in the Gold Coast - he is examining the position regarding the confiscation of native land – and I being surplus to requirements -

Queen Mary : Yes, evidently. Sherry?

Florence : Thank you.

Queen Mary : I'm afraid we've run out. But if you care for water This business in Malaya now

Florence : The rubber crisis -

Queen Mary : The Proudlocks. Which is really why I have invited you. The need to be informed - enlightened. About them – about the Sultan

Florence : Sultan Aluaddin?

Queen Mary : Such an odd man. He has dreams, you know. He keeps telling our ambassadors of a dream to do with a burglary. And when, on top of that, you add the gun –

Florence : I beg your pardon?

Queen Mary : I refer to the alleged birthday present. The one Mrs. Proudlock is supposed to have given to her husband. Apparently that odd American woman is now not so sure that there was a gun. She is not even sure that a birthday was ever mentioned. Apparently Mr. Proudlock's recreations were music and piano. Music and piano, with excess energy released in gymnastics and football. And this meaning that there was never a whisper of any sort of crocodile shoots Are you cold?

Florence (who has been trying not to show signs of shivering) : No, no. I'm afraid my conditioning to the tropics

Queen Mary : Oh yes. Jungles.

Florence : I don't actually live in the jungle.

Queen Mary : Oh we all live in a jungle. It's called politics. And as for our bodiesDid you know, dear, that our bodies are full of a jungle of what they call microbes, some of which are good for us and some bad. That's why I've turned down the heating. The need not to breed any more of these horrid microbe-creatures

Florence : I suppose not.

Queen Mary : Of course, one does have to consider the look of it -

Florence (rather at a loss) : Oh indeed.

Queen Mary : Pardons, that is. A look at pardons. You are quite right on that front. To grant a pardon now would be very bad for the look of it. It would undermine the Judge's authority, it would sabotage his integrity – in a worse case, it could make him a laughing-stock. And that, my dear, brings me to the wider issue. The issue that goes beyond guilt and innocence. The issue on which I am sure you can help as you have already helped me so much on all the rest. So if you care to guess.....

Florence (blankly) : Guess?

Queen Mary : I am sure you know.

Florence : Well, not really.

Queen Mary : Race, Lady Florence. The issue of race. Frankly, dear, I agree with you : I don't care whether Mrs. Proudlock is innocent. I believe, if the native element could be appeased, she would be reprieved anyway. But, as you say, one has to consider the other ingredients. Ingredients of obsession, of humiliation - above all, of race. William Proudlock, my dear, is an obsessive – he is the sort who, once started on anything, develops a taste for it.

Florence : I suppose he does.

Queen Mary : You are quite right to say so. I knew you were reliable. And anyway, if besides all that, there's something else - if his wife really *is* what they call a Eurasian –

Florence : You think she is?

Queen Mary : Well, who knows? As you remarked, anything's possible. But if she *is*, then won't she be all the more likely to want to safeguard her Englishness – and wouldn't she feel all the more humiliated if her lover abandoned her for a *Chinese*? And so that brings me to the other things I wanted to ask you about. About the Chinese. Or rather two Chinese. I heard yesterday from a Mrs. MacIntyre. She is, as you say, the wife of the doctor, and is one of the many bombarding me with petitions. And she tells me there is something I ought to know. I ought to know, says she, that Mr. Steward himself had a Chinese mistress and that, amazingly, that mistress is the sister of one of the mistresses of this dreadful Mr. Proudlock. Well now, isn't that remarkable? And so that is my question. If I am to take any position as to whether Mrs. Proudlock should be pardoned, whether she should be exonerated, whether even she should be allowed back into Britain, then the need to know whether she knew that her husband had a Chinese mistress - and even more, whether she knew that *that* mistress was the sister of the victim's one –

Florence (ever more bewildered) : And you're asking me?

Queen Mary : I thought you'd know.

Florence : I'm afraid not. I'm afraid, ma'am, my absolute lack of information

Queen Mary : Oh dear. And the other thing? The Eurasian question? Come, come. What about the Eurasian question? Leaves a nasty taste, I know, but if you could bring yourself to drop a few crumbs -

Florence : I'm afraid I can't.

Queen Mary : Not even a bite?

Florence : All I know is a rumour. There is a rumour. It is a rumour, ma'am, that Ethel Proudlock *may* be a Eurasian. But I have no personal knowledge and her complexion is as white as a lily. The only thing I *can* say is that race may well be a factor. The shame of being replaced by a Chinese woman – one who perhaps strikes at the wife's self-doubt – who adds, I mean, to her wondering about her own real parentage –

Queen Mary : Exactly. Just as I thought. How wise you are. Have a sweetie. (*Holds out a dish containing a very few very small sweets*) And so that brings us to my last inquiry – to what I might call the ultimate. Let us suppose such a complication does exist – let us assume it is what pushed her over the edge – well, then how do I and His Majesty respond to it? How do we react to a woman who is both of the British and *not* of us? Whom we both embrace and scorn?

Florence (rather wretchedly breaking out) : Oh if only I knew. If only it were the old days –

Queen Mary (rather startled) : The old days?

Florence : In the old days, ma'am, it would have been easy. It would have been decided by Mr. Speedy. He was the Assistant Resident who used to go round wearing animal skins while droning on the bagpipes. But these are *not* the old days. They are not whimsical days. They are not even authoritarian days. Already, ma'am, we face a German war. Already the Kaiser has sent his gunboats to Agadir. And if therefore the natives take against us – if, as my husband fears, they use *this* case and the growing war-clouds as a means of defying us –

Queen Mary : Yes. Yes, I see. So you think we should be cautious.

Florence : I think you should try not to involve yourself.

Queen Mary : Not involve.

Florence : No. And then if there is any fuss – any come-back

Queen Mary : I think you are right. I think it is far better to leave everything to the Sultan. Of course, Mrs. MacIntyre might not agree. In her view the Sultan takes bribes. *He* is the greediest man in South Asia. But as to whether we should really

get involved – build fences between races when I for one have never even climbed a fence Is that necklace gold?

Florence : Gold, yes.

Queen Mary : Very pretty. *(Covetously)* Perhaps when you have finished with it *(An attendant brings in sherry on a tray)* Ah, sherry. There is sherry after all. What a shame you cannot stay.

Florence : Can't I?

Queen Mary : But Proudlock – what on earth's his cunning game? I wish I knew. Whatever can it be? *(Sips sherry. Florence realising she is dismissed, gets up, rather forlornly to leave. Fade)*

(Scene changes to the Proudlock bungalow. 2nd William Proudlock, slightly drunk, discovered with Servant.)

2nd William Proudlock : And he's here, is he?

Servant : The doctor is, here, sir.

2nd William Proudlock : Good. Come in, doctor. Sit down. Drink?

MacIntyre (who has entered) : I think not.

2nd William Proudlock : I think so.

MacIntyre : You are wanting to consult me.

2nd William Proudlock : I am, yes. It's about Ethel. About my being barred from her. It's ridiculous. She is allowed to see Mr. Wagner, she is about to be interviewed by our newspaper editor, but when it comes to *me*

MacIntyre : I think it's a matter of protocol. And of course you don't help - your cabling of the Colonial Office - the demand for a royal pardon – that insistence within hours of the verdict

2nd William Proudlock : I did not insist.

MacIntyre : Your tone was insistent. You must realise, William, that threats are useless. Especially when, for all we know, Ethel really *is* a Eurasian. Perhaps she is. Perhaps she *knows* she is and has been keeping it under wraps for

years. And now with all these other threats these vows that you are going to sell your story directly to the British Press

2nd William Proudlock : I am going to. I want it to be known how my wife has been failed. (*Really more concerned about himself*) You do know that it's come out that I had a Chinese mistress. I did and Steward did, though as to knowing who *his* was

MacIntyre : No.

2nd William Proudlock : Do you know?

MacIntyre : I am afraid the impossibility of discussing anything like that -

2nd William Proudlock : Anyway, that's not the point. The thing is, I was wondering whether you would do something for me. I want you to alter your evidence -

MacIntyre : Alter my evidence?

2nd William Proudlock : - say that Ethel definitely *was* assaulted. You said, didn't you, that it seemed to you that she hadn't struggled much. You didn't even think she'd had that much of a shock. But if she's to get this pardon from that bloody Sultan

MacIntyre : She'll get it.

2nd William Proudlock : How do you know? Supposing she doesn't? Sometimes I almost wish she wouldn't. Inconsistent, I know, but the stick I shall get about Winnie

MacIntyre : The stick you will get about Winnie is as nothing to the other rumours that are circling. I heard yesterday that you *wanted* Steward to be Ethel's lover. That you could use it as grounds for divorce. Only of course when it went too far - when there was a murder and she ended up sentenced to death -

2nd William Proudlock : Think that, do you?

MacIntyre : I am only saying what I hear.

2nd William Proudlock : You hear too much. Anyway, why should I be pilloried? And about Winnie of all people! After all, it's not as if I'm the only one. Look at Steward. Look at the Foreign Secretary.

MacIntyre : I think we should lay off the Foreign Secretary. The very fact that his brother has just been killed – that he was literally devoured by a lion

2nd William Proudlock (brooding) : The truth is, I don't know whether to stick by Ethel or not. I mean I do in a way love her. Did, anyway. But you know - the fuss of it all – and now with everything so unsafe

MacIntyre : Unsafe?

2nd William Proudlock : I was thinking of the Barrack case. Poor dull fool weeping, crying, pleading for his life. But did he get it? Did he, heck! Knifed in the throat.

Mc.Intyre : I know.

2nd William Proudlock : And now they're saying one of the accused had the cheek to try to hang himself. Didn't trust our justice. Justice, my arse! Tell that to the Great White Rajah. But if Ethel really does give an interview - if she launches in with her own side - hints that she knows more than she's said

MacIntyre : That would indeed be difficult.

2nd William Proudlock : And after we took such care too. Winnie's father knew not a dickie-bird. But if it all comes out – if the British press get hold of it –

MacIntyre (with a sarcastic implication): This being the Press you were planning to sell your story to....

2nd William Proudlock : Up a gum-tree, aren't I?

MacIntyre : You are *halfway* up a gum tree –

2nd William Proudlock : In a jungle up a gum tree. But if you could help

MacIntyre : How help?

2nd William Proudlock : By killing her.

MacIntyre : What?

2nd William Proudlock : Killing Ethel. Stopping her. Crazy, I know but the need to do *something* –

MacIntyre : It's ridiculous. How you can even contemplate

2nd William Proudlock : Accidents. There are accidents. You must admit there are accidents. You yourself had an accident recently. Rickshaw rammed by a car, wasn't it? And supposing it happens again because if so – if it were to happen again and you got run into more powerfully

MacIntyre : Is that a threat?

2nd William Proudlock : No, no.

MacIntyre : You should watch your words.

2nd William Proudlock : It was a joke. An injection of humour. Mind you , you *are* a doctor - you *could* get access. So if you did go - go and visit –with a poison – something tasteless - *I* can't get in, but you being a doctor

MacIntyre : Mr. Proudlock, I am at a loss. You said you loved your wife. I thought you *did*. But now this self-concern – this appalling heartlessness

2nd William Proudlock : I have my career to think about. My career and my future. What with that and that bloody old Sultan

MacIntyre : The Sultan?

2nd William Proudlock : Why trust a Sultan? Answer me that. Why allow some bloody foreigner to have control of an Englishwoman? But of course if she *isn't* an Englishwoman – if she *isn't* an Englishwoman, and the people at home find out – find out because you haven't helped me get rid of her -

MacIntyre : No. No I *won't* get rid of her. How you can even suggest such a thing

2nd William Proudlock : Because I am desperate. Because I'm not myself. And because of something else. Because we are all more than one person. Because, like germ-cells, we can be bad, good or any number of points between. In a suitable climate, it would be different. In some climates Ethel and I would work swimmingly. We could float on a lily. But now we're in deep water – we're drenched by scandal - and if we've only stuck it out because of that – because the downfall of one is the end of the other. Where are you going?

MacIntyre : I'm leaving. I'm fetching my coat.

2nd William Proudlock : Cookie says I drink too much. And it makes me reckless. But considering he's an opium-eater You've left your gloves.

MacIntyre : Oh yes.

2nd William Proudlock : Watch out for cars. Be careful where you walk. A joke of course. Best think so anyway. *(Almost pushes him towards the door, then gulps down a full glass of whisky. Fade)*

Scene changes to the prison. The Prison Governor discovered. A British flag on a long pole propped behind the Governor's chair. Orderly enters.)

Orderly : Mr. Ferguson – he's here, sir.

Governor : Very well. Show him in. And fetch Mrs. Proudlock.

Orderly : Yes, sir.

Ferguson (entering and offering to shake hands) : Mr. Wales.

Governor : Come in, Mr. Ferguson. Sit down. I hope you travelled incognito.

Ferguson : In a closed car, sir. And understanding, as I do, that this interview is only to be published in the event of a reprieve -

Governor : A pardon, Mr. Ferguson. In the event of a pardon. You are to publish only in the event of a pardon and even then only when your article has been vetted by the Acting Resident. And now, before you see Mrs. Proudlock, I should like to advise you. To remind you of the difference between this and other cases. Cases such as Taiping.

Ferguson : I remember Taiping. Twenty-seven coolies tortured. One driven to hang himself. Only the *Mail* not being allowed to report it - I not being *allowed* to report it

Governor : And that is the difference. That is the gulf between this case and all else. This case already has world-wide publicity. It is a feast to all the legal furies. I, Mr. Ferguson, am not naïve. I know what can happen out here. I remember an old song of our drunken planters. It was called 'If a coolie makes you sick', the remedy being to heave a brick at him

Ferguson (nodding) : Throw a brick, dislocate his liver, beat him to a pulp -

*Governor : Exactly. The only law he'd understand. But is *that* what we want to promulgate? Is *that* our interpretation of the white man's burden? I am uttering these warnings because already I am being inundated with complaints from all over Europe. Britons evading punishment. Britons getting away with murder. And though I know most of this is war-mongering, and few Chinese really get whipped and even fewer jailed for stealing ten cigarettes, still, if this case creates any *more* adverse copy – if there is yet *further* mention of Chinese mistresses, gambling teachers, brutalised rickshaw-pullers –*

Ferguson : And so you want me to stick to the script –

Governor : The script, yes. To confine yourself purely to the personal. And even there the need for tact, for discretion (As the Orderly returns with Ethel) Ah, Mrs. Proudlock.

Ethel (rather haughtily; turning to the Governor) : Good afternoon, Governor.

Governor : Good afternoon. This is Mr. Ferguson.

Ethel : I know Mr. Ferguson. We used to play tennis.

Governor : Mrs. Proudlock, I will be frank with you. Mr. Ferguson is here from the press. He is to be allowed to conduct a purely personal interview. But I must stress there are severe limitations. For one thing, he is not to publish unless and until you are pardoned. For another, even then the draft will have to be cleared. It must be cleared by both the Assistant Resident and the Sultan. Is that plain?

Ethel : Oh yes perfectly. I do like your tie.

Governor (rather thrown off balance) : Thank you.

Ethel : French, is it?

Governor : It is a golfing tie. I wear it when, as applies now, I am officially going off duty.

Ethel : What fun!

Governor : Yes, well, if I may leave you (Gives a slight bow)

Ethel : Thank you, Governor.

Ferguson : Thank you, Governor. (The Governor goes)

Ethel : Such a nice tie. It had egg on it.

Ferguson : Mrs. Proudlock, I think we should sit down. I also think we should get one thing straight. I can quite understand that you may have your own ideas as to the conduct of this interview. That, in the event of a likely and very welcome pardon, you will be wishing to present yourself not just as good but also as vivacious and attractive. But you cannot expect me to fall hook line and sinker for any line you may throw at me. Nor may you presume on the fact that we have once or twice played in a mixed doubles. Now then. I have a few questions. I thought if I asked the questions – provided a kind of framework –

Ethel : - robbed me of the initiative.

Ferguson : It *may* do that, but given that it will also avoid our stepping onto forbidden territory

Ethel : Rather filleting things, isn't it? Rather like the bowdlerising of those old Restoration comedies.

Ferguson : We are not here to discuss Restoration Comedy.

Ethel : Evidently not. (*Sits in rather a posed position*) Is this all right?

Ferguson : Perfectly.

Ethel (satirically) : Such fun, isn't it, sitting. Though of course the scandalous way we may set about it

Ferguson (as if calling her to order) : Your holding conditions. Perhaps if we tack first to that -

Ethel : Oh yes.

Ferguson : Well?

Ethel : Well what?

Ferguson : Do you find your holding conditions generally acceptable?

Ethel : No. No, I don't. Bloody awful, actually. I am a lady, Mr. Ferguson. It was said so in court. And then to treat me like *that*. Do you know that even *before* my trial I spent two months in Pudu Gaol?

Ferguson : I *did* know that.

Ethel : Disgusting. The food. Hardly anything British. Rice, yes – meat, eggs – two kinds of vegetable. But only two meals a day. One at 10.15 and the other at four. Oh and I got porridge for breakfast.

Ferguson : Ah well, the familiarity of porridge -

Ethel : It wasn't *English* porridge.

Ferguson (makes a note) : Not English porridge. And I presume no tablecloth. On the other hand, the serving-sheds seem clean enough and I suppose, given that your main concern was not food but absence from your family

Ethel : What? Oh yes. That was dreadful. Worse even than uncomfortable sitting. They say, you know, that in Selangor women are held in the highest esteem. They are flowers. But not in prison. No gentlemen in prison paying us compliments, rushing about, jumping up as soon as we show signs of rising. Do you know what I have been reading?

Ferguson : The papers?

Ethel : Not allowed. John Ruskin. I've been reading John Ruskin. *Sesame and Lilies*. Which considering he himself never knew what to do with a woman over the age of six

Ferguson (finding this rather vulgar) : You don't like Ruskin? You dislike his idea of womanhood?

Ethel : I don't like it when our homes have to be a garden. Especially when the plants in it are all sweet and mild, crossed with gentleness and passivity. That's the blueprint, isn't it? That explains why it's still in the library. But if it means being a cultivar - not being *yourself*

Ferguson : So, no more gardens.

Ethel : No more gardens. No gardens and no angels. Mind you, if that leaves us with the jungle - if we take down all the fences and end up in the wild Let's change the subject.

Ferguson : I think we should. Allegations : I was wondering about allegations - The assertions in my correspondence page that in Malaya the killing of a man matters less than breaking your marriage vows -

Ethel : I *didn't* break them.

Ferguson : No. But say you *had*

Ethel : I'll tell you this. However much my life means to me - however much I don't want to die - still, my reputation matters more. And the newspapers agree with me. *Capital* said that any man who attacked or lied about a woman should be tarred and feathered. He should be feathered all over, and then if he happened also to be strung up – bashed about a bit – left with a crown of thorns in a flickering light -

Ferguson : I thought you didn't see the papers. ...

Ethel (turning away slightly) : I don't usually.

Ferguson : But when you do

Ethel : Oh, when I do, they're not very flattering. Not exactly a picnic. (*Quite seriously*) I suppose what it is really, Mr. Ferguson, is that I'm too clever. 'Don't show your cleverness. Just bloom like a blossom'. That's Ruskin too, though if the bloom is a tough one - not a lily but some horrible red-hot poker

Orderly (returning) : Two minutes, Mr. Ferguson.

Ethel : Oh dear, and we've hardly got anywhere.

Ferguson : We've got to the sentencing.

Ethel : Have we?

Ferguson (rather as a prompt for the news angle) : Which being presumably terrifying

Ethel (rather theatrically but as if he knows she is performing here) : Terrifying! It was terrifying! I sobbed. I clung to my husband. But of course that's changed now. I know now that the judge was over-zealous – that nobody wants me to die - and if the Sultan *does* intervene – grasps the nettle – keeps hold of the cobra Do you *know* the Sultan, Mr. Ferguson?

Ferguson : I don't know him personally.

Ethel : Mild and refined. So says the Governor. But of course Billy hates him. He absolutely can't bear him. And as for his hobbies Apparently he has all these

hobbies. I was going to tell that to my mother – tell her, I mean, about the Sultan's wood-carving and cookery - but she never came. So how they can say she made me withdraw my appeal - seeing as she never came – seeing as she stayed away and perhaps *isn't* really my mother at all

Orderly (re-appearing) : One minute, sir.

Ethel : One minute. Sixty tiny seconds. May I tell you something?

Ferguson (rather moved) : Please.

Ethel : It's two things really. Two little things which you can put in your report if you want to. And the first is about the gun. They wondered about the gun. Why I should buy William a gun. But he was in the Malay Rifles. So why shouldn't I? And the other thing is the timing. How odd it is that all this should be happening *now*. Because today is six months to the day after the coronation. It is *exactly* six months. And last month when I was lying in the condemned cell, when I was lying there conscious of my innocence, shrinking from being stared at, sleeping on a plank, no blanket, wooden pillow - well, do you know what was going on *outside*? A ball. A coronation ball. Electric lamps. A crown lit up in red, yellow, and emerald. And can you guess what one of the guards said? He said *I* myself didn't deserve to be lit up because I was bad. Because it was my sort that got natives killed..... But that wasn't *my* fault, was it? It's not as if I *like* to think of anybody suffering. When those coolies went on trial – the ones who did that murder – there was a black-dark thunderstorm. But the judge didn't care. He was lit up. He was in court illuminated by a great big lamp. But not me. I was in the dark. I was in my cell while everyone else was having fun. Well, why can't *I* have fun like all the rest? I hate what's drab. I'll change it yet somehow. (*Fade*)

(*Scene changes to a drawing room in Buckingham Palace. Queen Mary. discovered, sitting stiffly with a rather fussy-looking middle-aged man. The Queen is wearing Lady Florence's necklace. A knock at the door.*)

Queen Mary : Come in. (*Sir Edward Grey and Griffiths are ushered in.*) Oh it's you, Sir Edward.

Sir Edward : You asked to speak with us, Your Majesty.

Queen Mary : Well, I did, yes. Do sit down. Mr. Griffiths, isn't it?

Griffiths : I am Arnold Griffiths, your Majesty.

Queen Mary : Good. Excellent. And this is Mr. Fisher. Mr. Fisher is a writer for *Mostly About People*. It is an illustrated paper.

Sir Edward : I see.

Queen Mary : I doubt you do, but if you would care to make yourselves comfortable

Sir Edward (not finding this easy on the austere high-backed chair) : Thank you.

Griffiths : Thank you.

Queen Mary : I won't offer you sherry. It would spoil your lunch. However, if you would listen and if Mr. Fisher would care to begin –

Fisher (rising) : Thank you, your Majesty.

Queen Mary : Not at all.

Fisher (pacing a little, rubbing his hands together) : I, gentlemen, am one of the editorial team of a leading London journal. It is called *Mainly About People*. More to the point, I am a patriot. And having lately been in receipt of certain papers –

Sir Edward : Papers?

Queen Mary : He means letters really. I should point out that we are both receiving letters - I in particular – when I think of the letters I keep getting from that indefatigable Mrs. MacIntyre, not to mention the half-mad Miss Marsh Do go on.

Fisher : As her Majesty graciously says, many of us have been in receipt of colonial correspondence. My own has been mainly from *Mr. Proudlock*. Which is to say from the husband of the lady recently pardoned by the Sultan. However, when we place *his* version beside the one received by Her Majesty

Queen Mary : Indeed yes.

Fisher : One sent by Mrs. MacIntyre –

Queen Mary : Off his head, so *she* says. Cracked as a pudding basin. And now with him actually assaulting the poor woman's mother

Griffiths (genuinely surprised) : Proudlock has assaulted his own mother-in-law?

Queen Mary : Awful, isn't it? And after she sent in the new clothes – after she spent all that money just so his wife could leave prison like a lady (*Nodding to Fisher to continue*)

Fisher : Mrs. Proudlock's mother has indeed finally stepped up to the plate. She was even present at the lady's release. But of course the possibility that she is *not* the mother –

Sir Edward : Quite.

Fisher : And that the husband – Mr. Proudlock – may be trying to silence them -

Queen Mary : Yes, it's a wicked world. Sometimes when I think of the world's wickedness I get so sad I have to eat a great big box of chocolates. Not, mind you, that I approve of worrying. Pointless, isn't it? Where were we?

Griffiths : We were saying, ma'am, about Proudlock's letters.

Fisher : Letters criticising the trial - blaming the judge - saying it nearly drove the lady demented – (*Handing over a journal*)

Queen Mary : And he mis-spells things. Always this horrible Mr. Proudlock mis-spells things. Terrible spellings, bad grammar, inaccurate biblical quotation How he can possibly consider himself a *schoolmaster*

Fisher : Exactly.

Queen Mary : More than exactly.

Sir Edward : And the precise tenor? The nature, ma'am, of his accusations?

Queen Mary : Tell them, Mr. Fisher.

Fisher : The main tenor is simple. It is simply that his wife's trial was corrupt.

Queen Mary : He says the assessors were the judge's business associates –

Fisher (rather obsequiously) : True. Yes.

Queen Mary : He also says they mixed freely with the police, bribed witnesses – that the Chief Commissioner took bets on the outcome –

Griffiths : Good grief.

Queen Mary : I know. (*Reluctantly*) Biscuit?

Griffiths (tactfully taking a small one) Thank you.

Sir Edward : And that's the case, is it? Scandalous, yes. It is indeed most indecorous. But whether we can *do* anything – anything other than apply some limited censorship -

Queen Mary : Oh that's no good. Really, Sir Edward. Mr. Proudlock and his wife are talking of coming to London. They're coming to England. And if, when he gets here, he starts demanding compensation -

Griffiths : Compensation?

Queen Mary : Some people are money-mad.

Fisher : Quite.

Queen Mary (finding this inadequate or perhaps a dig at herself) : Quite?

Fisher : I mean the correctness of Your Majesty's esteemed opinion

Queen Mary (fully serious now) : And that is why I have summoned you. I have summoned you, Sir Edward, because this has got to stop. My husband is a man of peace. He is a man who has campaigned tirelessly for native involvement in government. But if now he sees these articles – articles against us, against the British administration – articles averring that Mrs. Proudlock was suicidal –

Fisher : Terrible! Terrible!

Queen Mary : And there's another thing. A thing against which all that pales into insignificance. There is this business of the mistress. According to Mrs. MacIntyre – that is the Mrs. MacIntyre who is one of my most tireless correspondents – according to *her*, the scandal also involves matters of sex. It involves details of Mr. Proudlock's mistresses. Now then. I do not approve of sexual indulgence. I consider it overrated. On the other hand, we cannot expect total abnegation. Abnegation to my mind is a mistake. It merely adds to the world's misery without doing anything to soften it. Only we can't let the natives

know that. And now with this latest mistress escaping – with this Winnie person having fled from house-arrest - constantly getting out and running around and busily shouting the odds against the imperial government –

Griffiths (risking being half-humorous) : I can see why you summoned us.

Sir Edward (to the Queen more gravely) : I can see why you summoned us.

*Queen Mary (sternly) : I summoned you because this has got to stop. It must cease forthwith. Which is why I have alerted the Resident. Why I have asked him to speak to Mr. Proudlock. And may I also suggest another thing? May I suggest that we turn to Mr. Corrigan. To that Corrigan fellow you named to me once. Get *him* to deal with this China-woman. Let him bribe her if necessary. I don't approve of bribery. I approve of bravery and loyalty and dedicated service. But if the international situation gets any worse - if, I regret to say, *Germany* gets more threatening - then the help we shall need from the colonies - the absolute necessity of our being able to depend on native goodwill, native support, native troops in any forthcoming war (A lady attendant enters) Yes?*

Lady Attendant : Forgive me, ma'am. The King

Queen Mary : His tattoo?

Lady Attendant : I'm afraid, ma'am, the need for a dressing

Queen Mary (to the men) : He got it in Japan. It was the day he gave the Empress two wallabies.

Griffiths : The King gave the Empress of Japan two wallabies?

*Queen Mary : But that is *nothing* to the task at hand. Wheel Belfield out. The planter too, now, eh? (She sweeps out rapidly. The men bow. Fade.)*

(Scene changes to a room in the Residency, Kuala Lumpur. Sir Henry discovered with his wife Florence and Richard Winstedt. A secretary Timothy also present.)

Resident (unhappily) : And I've got to see him, have I?

Winstedt : I'm afraid, sir, you have. The need for you to remind him of his duty, of the demands of his calling – plus of course the advantages of toeing the line if he is to rise further in the Imperial service

Resident : Very well. But we shall do this formally. I shall sit at the desk. You will sit beside me. Timothy, will take notes.

Lady Florence : And I?

Resident : You, dear, will not be present..

Lady Florence : On the contrary. We've been parted for months, and, you'll soon be off again. So if I can't stay with you - keep mum - sit at my sewing (*She sits at the side*)

Timothy (as the Resident nods to him; to a man still outside) : Come in, Mr. Proudlock.

(3rd William Proudlock enters. He looks ready to be quite belligerent.)

Resident (offering to shake hands) : Mr. Proudlock.

3rd William Proudlock (not shaking hands but inclining his head very slightly) : Sir Henry.

Resident : You know Mr. Winstedt – and of course my wife.

3rd William Proudlock : Quite a reception committee.

Resident : There is no question of a committee. I do, however, wish to keep this entirely formal. So if you will kindly sit –

Timothy : Sit there, please, Mr. Proudlock. (*Proudlock sits moodily*)

Resident : I have called you here, Mr. Proudlock, in view of some very disturbing matters. Matters which arose during my absence. Matters on which I have prepared a list of charges.

3rd William Proudlock : Of charges?

Resident : Don't interrupt. You will kindly not interrupt me. I am not saying of course that I am deficient in sympathy. I know full well how trying Malayan life can be. I myself am shortly to be moved. I am to become Governor

of Kenya. So I can assure you that I do understand the pressures. The idea of home is rest. It is peace, rest and perhaps a rather sentimental idea of a rose-bordered sunlit garden. In the colonies it is the opposite. It is the ferment of growth beneath a scorching sun. It is heat and humidity and the exhaustion of a life without wind. And when to that one adds the near-loss of a wife –

3rd William Proudlock : Put that rather late, did you not?

Resident : I put it late, Mr. Proudlock, because in this country we believe in the idea of service. We all believe in it. Look at the King. Touring South Africa, holding the Durbar, launching the Australian Parliament. I am not denying the strain you have been under. But there is a line not to be crossed. Bringing me to the libel.

3rd William Proudlock : That being the first charge, is it?

Resident : I beg your pardon?

3rd William Proudlock : ‘A man shouldn’t sue for libel’.

Resident : It is not you who have been suing anybody. As I understand it, one of the detectives is suing *you*.

3rd William Proudlock : So?

Resident : So *why* is he suing you? Because you have written to the London newspapers impugning him – stating that his entire investigative conduct was irregular – that the assessors were his friends – that they took bribes – influenced witnesses – that he and the chief Commissioner made bets at the club as to whether your wife would be strung up -

3rd William Proudlock : They *did* take bets.

Lady Florence : Did they really?

3rd William Proudlock : Took bets – joshed about the outcome. And when you add that this was the very same detective who beat up my servants –

Winstedt : He says not.

3rd William Proudlock (getting up heatedly, perhaps knocking over his chair) : Then he’s a liar. He beat them up because they wouldn’t incriminate my wife.

Resident : I come now to the petition. To those local residents refusing to sign the petition. And you will recall your response –

Winstead : You wrote to the papers. You wrote asking what would have happened, had *they* been the assessors.

3rd William Proudlock : Too right! She'd have hanged.

Resident : That is not for you to say. It impugns the assessor system.

3rd William Proudlock : It deserves it.

Resident : Nonsense!

3rd William Proudlock : Nonsense yourself. Those men withheld their consent on the grounds of morality. They said that all colonial women are unchaste. They said it's a well-known fact. And if you think *that* would have helped your precious assessment system –

Resident : Turning now to other matters –

3rd William Proudlock (sarcastically) : Oh. Can't cope with that one.

Resident : I find here your letter to the London *Daily Mail*. A letter in which you allege police brutality. A letter in which you say that your wife went mad. You also aver that she was suicidal – that she was driven insane through the effect of prison clothes – that the prison diet poisoned her – that she was only allowed to peer at her friends through a grille –

3rd William Proudlock : I may have exaggerated about the grille.

Resident : Exaggerated? You call all this an exaggeration? Would you not rather concede that you have gone off the scale? That, in place of the usual local afflictions of tedium and edginess, you have succumbed rather to hysteria, paranoia, near-lunacy

3rd William Proudlock : I am not a lunatic. I am a man of sense and substance. So if I may now be allowed to defend myself

Florence : Oh yes, he must have a defence, dear.

3rd William Proudlock : I know what you think of us, Not right. Not quite pukka. I, though undoubtedly musical, am a boor. My wife may even be a Eurasian. Well, I shall say nothing about the Eurasian business. Nothing except that Mrs. Chater - Ethel's mother - has denied it – *she* has – also the father

Winstedt : Not publicly. Their refusal even to be seen now in public

3rd William Proudlock (cutting in) : More rot. More red herrings. You do realise that my poor dishonoured wife has fled – that she is now on her way to London - and this making her defenceless – devoid of all influence

Resident : She is *not* devoid of influence. *You* are not devoid of influence. The very fact that I have been directed to see you by no less a person than Sir Edward Grey –

3rd William Proudlock : I know there has been a lot of string-pulling.

Resident : It is not a question of string-pulling. It is a matter of protocol. I look at you, Mr. Proudlock, and I see a man who has some virtue, some integrity, but who is all too easily swayed. Whose emotional volatility can make him good and bad almost simultaneously. But of course if you won't listen – if you won't even sit down -

3rd William Proudlock : I will sit down. (*He does, though rather ungraciously*)

Resident : I understand of course why you should appear so defensive. And I am not denying that there are abuses. Only yesterday I heard of a coolie fined and whipped merely for not dismounting from his bicycle. But though all that is regrettable, and even more regrettable is the deplorable treatment of your wife, still the way you lambaste the Establishment – hold us all responsible – make us a catch-all -

3rd William Proudlock : You think it's a mask. That I don't really care.

Resident : I don't know whether you care or not. I am sure that a lot other than you find it very difficult to understand why some poor coolie should have to dismount just because he is passing the house of his manager. But whether that is *really* what is driving you - whether it is not something closer to home. It is as you admitted yourself. People are saying you are not one of us – that your wife is not one of us - that she is a deceiver whose comparative light-heartedness in court -

3rd William Proudlock : My wife wept after the trial.

Resident : She did, yes. So perhaps, after all, she had been holding it in. But you? What about *you*? I have heard it said that you compare our civil servants to the Trafalgar Square fountains. That both 'play' from ten till four. I also know that you once burst in on Judge Sercombe-Smith, brandishing a gun –

3rd William Proudlock: Lies. I was never there.

Resident : And so I ask you again if the real truth is different - if you have become unhinged, wild, overheated –

3rd William Proudlock : I am not overheated.

Winstedt : Not overheated but determined to destroy us –

3rd William Proudlock : I complain because of the system. Because the immigrant natives have *no* rights – because they work till they drop, pay to be shipped, get thirty cents a day, minus all living costs -

Resident : All right, all right. I admit the barbarity of indenturing. I admit the danger of loan sharks. I admit even that many die of malaria and that I myself once reported an estate manager for denying hospital to a man with chronic pneumonia. But that was nearly two years ago. And within two months indenturing was outlawed. It was forbidden by our very own Government. And yet here you are still stirring it up – spreading dissent - embroiling others –

Winstedt : And what with that and the personal issues

3rd William Proudlock : What?

Winstedt : Personal. Individual. It is one thing, Mr. Proudlock, to dredge up every abuse you can find. But when this is really a diversionary tactic - when your *true* desire is to evade the consequences of your own shame and that damaging libel action –

3rd William Proudlock : Rubbish. That detective was a friend of mine -

Winstedt : Not by then. Not when he ruined you. Oh it was different before. Before, with your wife new-released, you seemed positively blithe. You swaggered about, ran the school, drank at the club, occasionally turned up at St.

Mary's. Only then, sir – then - something happened. You were replaced. Mr. Shaw came back. He returned and was honoured with a concert. And your own resentment boiling up – seething beyond anything to do with coolies dying - coolies barred from hospitals - coolies losing their wages if they entered one -

3rd William Proudlock : How can you say that? How can you possibly say it? I played at that concert. I accompanied *Greensleeves*.

Winstedt : And were immediately sacked.

Lady Florence : Sacked?

Resident (to Proudlock) : Sacked, yes, because you were an embarrassment – because your wife was an embarrassment. And though I wrote to Mr. Shaw - though I entreated him personally – still, what with the embarrassment, and the need to draw a line, and the fear that the British would get a bad name

(Disturbed by a new arrival) Yes?

Timothy (entering) : Excuse me, Sir Henry - I thought, sir, the need to see this

(Holds out a document)

Resident : Dear me.

Lady Florence : What?

Winstedt : What is it?

Resident : A letter. A command from Mr. Anthonisz. *(To Proudlock)* You are to see him immediately. And this having been ordered by the High Commissioner on direct demand from the King –

Lady Florence : The King? From the King?

3rd William Proudlock : Conspiracy. It's all a bloody farce. You bloody fools. I'll have your guts one day. *(He marches out. Fade)*

(Scene changes to the imposing office-residence of Mr. Anthonisz. Orderly announcing the arrival of William Proudlock)

Orderly : Mr. Proudlock, Mr. Anthonisz.

Anthonisz : Thank you. *(The 1st William Proudlock enters. Anthonisz rises.)* Good morning, Mr. Proudlock. Cigar?

1st William Proudlock : No thank you.

Anthonisz : Nor I. Smoking may at times give an air of useful insouciance but the way it muddles the head Do sit down.

1st William Proudlock : Thank you. *(Proudlock does but Anthonisz prowls about somewhat)*

Anthonisz : I own, Mr. Proudlock, I am somewhat at a loss as to how to begin. But begin I must, not least because, as you no doubt know, it has now been decreed that you are to be held - that you will not be allowed to travel to England.

1st William Proudlock : And the reason? The excuse for this foul violation?

Anthonisz : I am coming to that. It is well known, Mr. Proudlock, that you have long been viewed as a rational level-headed man. For years you have had an acceptable record. But that seems to have changed. Just lately you have revelled in attacking the English system. You wrote in one journal that everything in Malaya was slack-arsed. That without trial by jury the whole legal system was a farce. More to the point, you claimed that the detective in your court case – a Mr. Wyatt - was guilty of assault. He had assaulted your cook, assaulted your house-boy. Good heavens, Mr. Proudlock, that detective was a friend of yours. He protected your wife. Seven days he waited before jailing her. Seven days. And then when the boy was interviewed – when he said that he never *had* been beaten – that he was completely uninjured

1st William Proudlock : Because he was frightened. Because he didn't dare admit it. Oh, good Lord, if you only knew -

Anthoniz : I do know. I know as well as any that intimidation may occur. I am the first to admit that frightened people will say anything. However, when the houseboy also adds that he never saw either you or your wife with a revolver –

1st William Proudlock : What?

Anthoniz : The boy was interviewed by Sir Arthur himself. He said he never saw you with a gun, never saw either of you practising – so unless Sir Arthur is lying –

1st William Proudlock : Everybody is lying –

Anthoniz : Including yourself?

1st William Proudlock : Not me, no.

Anthoniz : Then why were there no bruises?

1st William Proudlock : What?

Anthoniz : Bruises. There were no bruises. Not one on that servant-boy's body. But of course the advantage to you of implying that your staff had been got at – that they were lying – that there never *had* been an intimacy between your wife and Mr. Steward -

1st William Proudlock : There hadn't.

Anthoniz : Is it not true that you made it all up? That the only chance of saving your wife's reputation was to represent her as a poor persecuted female? And when I add that under oath you yourself admitted to striking your servants

1st William Proudlock : And what if I did? I am a civilised man, Mr. Anthonisz. I don't maim, kill or harm anybody. But I am not a paragon. You live in a different world. Even your servants are superior. Whereas my servants - my cook, for instance, who is nothing but a silly old fool – a lights-out halfwit

Anthonisz : I thought you were rather a champion of our servant class.

1st William Proudlock : I am not a saint, sir. Not even consistent. But when you think of the rest –

Anthonisz : Oh I know. That's what so hard. You *seem* reasonable. We hear good reports –and yet the things you are *doing* –

1st William Proudlock : I am defending my rights, Mr. Anthonisz. And I am also being truthful – truthful, I mean, in exposing the corruptions of the British Look, Mr. Anthonisz. I have said I’m no saint. I’ve owned to a few indiscretions. But I did what I did for my *wife*. For my duty to *her*. And if I did once beat the cook – tan his hide, in fact – well, Wyatt did a great deal more. He was positively sadistic. *And* he denied it. “Do you think I am such a fool as to put my neck in a noose for a damn Chinaman” – that’s what he said. “A damn Chinaman”.

Anthonisz : A Chinaman –

1st William Proudlock : Yes.

Anthonisz : Not a Chinawoman.

1st William Proudlock : Of course not a Chinawoman.

Anthonisz : - only having just now received intelligence in connection with a young Chinese woman

1st William Proudlock : What intelligence?

Anthonisz : Intelligence from Sir Arthur. And it’s true, is it not? Before marriage you co-habited with a Chinese woman?

1st William Proudlock : I may have done.

Anthonisz : A Winnie Tan?

1st William Proudlock : It seems like a dream.

Anthonisz : Seems like but isn’t. As is shown by what you said in the libel. You admitted then that this liaison had been a long one – that it continued after your marriage – that the woman, though not rich, had somehow acquired some jewellery –

1st William Proudlock : Oh dear.

Anthonisz : And you know where this has led? You know what she is saying? She is saying that not only did you continue the sex but that she suffered the theft of some jewellery – jewellery estimated at a value of one thousand five hundred dollars – and that *you* being probably the one who stole it

1st William Proudlock : What?

Anthonisz : She says you’re the thief.

1st William Proudlock : But that's a lie, sir.

Anthonisz : And the fact that you have been seen in possession of a number of diamonds - that we have spoken to Mr. Ambler and he recalls seeing them

1st William Proudlock : Yes, but not hers. None of them were hers. How would Winnie get diamonds? How in a month of Sundays? But of course if she's just trying to get at me - at you - at those damned pure-blood Europeans -

Anthonisz : Europeans like yourself -

1st William Proudlock : Not like myself. Not unless you give me a silver spoon. Listen to me, Mr. Anthonisz. Listen and take note. I hear people at the club yearning for a home they've never visited. I hear them being abusive, vile, prejudiced. I hear them lambasting so-called brown beggars - denouncing their Chinese servants And now just because I am trying to throw some light on these terrible dealings - on these terrible people -

Anthonisz : You are actually telling me that all that you care about is the natives? That you'd ruin yourself for *them*? I put it to you, that that is *not* the case. You are not concerned. You are embittered. And having now lost the libel - having been found to have imperilled the reputation and career of a blameless officer - having been fined, reprimanded, ordered to pay all costs

1st William Proudlock : Because I am not one of the Establishment. Because I don't fit. Because I have been maligned, ridiculed, slandered -

Anthonisz : And if you have? If, after all, you really *are* innocent? Look, Mr. Proudlock, I do see. I do understand. It may well be that Detective Wyatt intimidated a house-boy. He may even have hit him. But look at you. Look at your dealings. And so I suggest another tack. I suggest that I help you. I assist in two ways. In the first place, I destroy all evidence suggesting that your wife is of mixed race. We have some and were intending to use it, but we shall erase it. The lady shall be whitewashed. Secondly - and this will be of even greater benefit - I will personally undertake to find you a very good post in a different colony. A colony far removed from the F.M.S.

William Proudlock (more ruefully than angrily): And the price? There being always a price!

Anthonisz : The price is your good behaviour. Any more scandal, and we shall disown you completely. Indeed, we shall destroy you. So that is my condition. You must be pristine. You must be pure. You must polish up your better self and throw away the baser parts Your wife, Mr. Proudlock – your wife, I believe, takes part in spoon-shoots?

1st William Proudlock : She used to, yes.

Anthonisz : As do my cousins. Proving, you see, the common ground – the united interest. *You* mentioned spoons, I believe.

1st William Proudlock (ruefully) : I mentioned silver ones.

Anthonisz : I shall consult to clean your tarnished gloss. But make no waves. We'll drown you else, I'd say. *(Fade)*

(Scene changes to the School. Mr. Shaw discovered in bed, downstairs His wife at the door apparently talking to people, who turn out to be the Resident and Judge Sercombe-Smith.)

Beatrice : And this is for my husband, is it? You do realise, sir, that he is suffering from malaria, that he is suspected of having had a stroke -

Resident : Difficult, isn't it? I myself am far from easy about being here, only now with the Queen commanding me -

Shaw (calling from within) : Beatrice? Is that you Beatrice?

Beatrice (to those at the door) : You'd better come in. *(To her husband as she leads the others in)* It's Sir Henry, dear. Sir Henry and the Judge. I told them you were unwell but apparently some new complication –

Sercombe-Smith : Perhaps if we now take over -

Beatrice : Only if I stay. I'm not having a sick husband agitated. Here, Bennett, your medicine.

Shaw (who is a shadow of his former self) : Thank you, dear. Oh my! Talk about threatening!

Resident : We have called to see you, Mr. Shaw – and may I say how sorry we are to see you so ill – in full awareness that our timing is far from ideal. And may I from the outset assure you that this bespeaks absolutely no criticism of you. The school you have created – an education for life - the creations of good citizens. Extra activities. Sports Days. Let me see, when was your first Sports Day, Mr. Shaw?

Shaw : My first sports day. Oh dear, I don't know.

Beatrice : It was 1897, dear. 1897, possibly '98.

Shaw : '98, yes. And so much done since. But I feel I have been too hard. Too censorious. And now with these visions -

Beatrice : Drink this. (*Reproachfully to Sir Henry*) I did tell you -

Sercombe-Smith : Mr. Shaw it is indeed distressing to see you so out of sorts. Unfortunately the Resident has been away. He was in the Gold Coast attempting to conserve the native lands. However, seeing that in the meantime you have at least had a chance to catch up on your reading

Beatrice : History. *The French Revolution*.

Resident : Well, I never. One of my own special studies.

Shaw : It's about Robespierre. (*In a wondering tone*) It says here that he was unique. He was unique in being simultaneously long and short-sighted.

Resident : So he was. He was also known for soft-heartedness. There is a pigeon story -

Shaw (looking about him rather alarmed) : A pigeon?

Resident : A story that as a boy Robespierre was given some pigeons. He was given them and he let his sisters borrow them. The point being that they left one in the garden And it died in a thunderstorm and he never forgave them – he was obsessed, he made no allowances which if possibly it reminds you of somebody -

Shaw : Reminds me? Does it remind me, Beatrice?

Beatrice : Of course it doesn't.

Resident : I was thinking, sir, of Mr. Proudlock. Of your former acting headmaster. I was conversing yesterday with Mr. Proudlock, and I must say the extent of his bitterness, the vehemence of his sense of betrayal -

Shaw : Which is why I am so pleased to see you. Because it's true, sir. Mr. Proudlock is indeed tortured. He's a split individual. And now, like Robespierre, being intent on purifying -

Beatrice : Oh yes, fanatical.

Shaw : Everywhere he sees corruption. Everywhere he imagines vendetta. But just because his vision is blurred - just because it is as flawed as Robespierre's double sight -

Resident : You are saying that there are limits - that this not making him wrong about *everything*

Shaw : I was too narrow. I didn't think. I cared too much for the school.

Beatrice : There, there.

Shaw : And then when I hear the latest - they are saying now that he is a thief. That he stole diamonds. William Proudlock is no thief. When he acted as my deputy, he was responsible for very large sums, and the probity - the total honesty of all his undertakings -

Beatrice : Be still, dear.

Shaw : Yes, but if they're saying he's a thief

Resident : Not a thief then.

Shaw : No. Oh dear me no.

Sercombe-Smith : And his own accusations?

Shaw : Justified. Some of them *are* justified. I know. My visions tell me. I myself have heard of coolies being whipped for scowling, for getting drunk, for talking back to a foreman - and as for the Tamils -

Beatrice : Oh yes.

Shaw : Beaten for singing Indian songs - for dancing - for daring to celebrate Gandhi's birthday -

Sercombe-Smith : He had liaisons –

Shaw : Liaisons?

Sercombe-Smith : With a Chinese woman. *Two* Chinese women. It's all very well saying he is tortured – he is split – but considering he *isn't* split when it comes to denouncing us, and considering that he actually had immoral liaisons with the mother of a pupil –

Shaw : You amaze me. I am appalled. (*To Beatrice*) Did you know, dear?
(*Beatrice turns away slightly*)

Sercombe-Smith (*as Beatrice evades a direct answer*) : Difficult, isn't it?

Resident : More than difficult. It is congress with inferior races. And, though this is all very regrettable – though I myself grieve at it – still the need to show they *are* inferior, in order to be able to presume to rule over them However, that is not the point. The real point is the judge. The point that Judge Sercombe-Smith has been threatened. He has been told he will die. And this meaning that we want you to answer some questions

Shaw : Questions?

Sercombe-Smith : Very necessary questions.

Beatrice : Only if you want to.

Resident : It is about Mr. Proudlock's character. Or rather its changes and variants. There are those, Mr. Shaw, who say that the man is a degenerate, that he even occasionally goes with his houseboys. And so I must ask you : how was he before all this happened?

Shaw : Before?

Sercombe-Smith : Before he was forced to resign

Shaw : Oh dear. Well, I should say that in the earlier days Mr. Proudlock was regarded as a most notable asset.

Resident : Including morally?

Shaw : Certainly morally. I do know of course that in Malaya we tend to have a bully-boy element –

Beatrice (*half-aside*) : Too true.

Shaw : - that some gentlemen, perhaps in revenge for earlier slights, tend to let power here go to their heads. But that was not *his* case. He was a good teacher – a good sportsman – and as for his entertainments. In 1910, we gave *him* an entertainment. Gilbert and Sullivan. Scenes from Shakespeare. And then when we gave him the purses –

Sercombe-Smith : Purses?

Shaw : Three gold purses. Purses to celebrate his marriage. It was because we had done Portia. We had done the Portia scenes in *The Merchant of Venice*. And this man – this man who, in the opinion of the boys, was all gold, neither silver, nor lead – he was cheered to the echo. And now look at him. Look, Sir Henry. This teacher who fostered music and art - who was not only cultured but a wonderful gymnast – he is now adjudged a liar – he is forced to pay humiliating damages – he is living with the consequences of a murder -

Beatrice (worried for him in his agitation) : Bennett, please.

Sercombe-Smith (irritated for other reasons) : Yes, really.

Resident : And so you are saying that it was different. That before he was a different fellow. But we are all different fellows. And especially now. I learned yesterday of a doctor dismissed for daring to protest at the appalling conditions in the native hospitals. I have also heard of people denouncing native travel restrictions and being hounded from the trains. But at least these are *good* people. They have justified grievances. Whereas Mr. Proudlock, daring to write directly to the British public – to involve the London Press - threatening the careers of senior officials in both jurisdictions

Beatrice (not entirely sympathetically) : Breaks a taboo, doesn't it?

Resident : It does more than break a taboo. It spreads unjustified calumny, and if, Mrs. Shaw - *if* your husband intends to go any further in supporting him - even, as I am told, to issue a statement in his defence –

Shaw (anxiously) : You think I shouldn't?

Resident : I think you should peruse these. (*Producing some documents*) These, Mr. Shaw, are letters. They are copies of letters from a Mr. Corrigan. Mr. Corrigan, as you know, is a planter. He is a planter living in the jungle. And being needed mostly on his plantation, he sends his house-boy to take letters. He calls it *Operation Robespierre* – it's a sort of joke against me –

Shaw : Knowing of your interest.

Resident : Knowing it – mocking it.

Sercombe-Smith (rather impatiently): The point being that he is far too mercurial to be trusted. And when I add that the letters are to the Foreign Secretary, that his house is a staging-post for new recruits, that he is shortly to be interviewed by a reporter –

Beatrice : And so you copy his letters.

Sercombe-Smith : Copy, then transmit. Never let it be said we do not transmit. But the need first to know what he is saying, the more so with this Winnie Tan business

Resident : Winnie Tan has been released. She is free. Until recently she was under house-arrest. But the Foreign Secretary having asked Mr. Corrigan to get her out – to see to *that*, while presumably bribing her to keep her head down –

Shaw : Oh dear, oh dear.

Sercombe-Smith : Which makes her a liability. She is a snakes' nest with eggs in it. And if you, Mr. Shaw, make this easier – if you muddy our waters by yet again championing Mr. Proudlock –

Shaw : I *am* going to champion him.

Resident : No, sir, you are not. And I will tell you why. Because of your school. Your school, Mr. Shaw, is a jewel. It is a jewel in the crown. And the credit is yours. But - and this is the important point – what sort of a school is it? And the answer is : Multi-racial. It is multi-racial both in pupils and founders. I have visited your school, Mr. Shaw. I have visited and applauded. I have admired its discipline, its laboratories, its pipe and bugle band – but I notice one thing. One

thing, Mr. Shaw. Your cadet force. Which is for Christians only. And why is it that? Because even *you* are aware that we cannot mix races in *everything* – that, though native foot-soldiers are vital, still, it is dangerous to risk training Muslims and Buddhists and Hindus as a military élite. And if you risk Mr. Proudlock getting away with denouncing us – lambasting even *your* element of restriction - getting your multi-racial school *itself* embroiled in his venomous attacks

Beatrice (murmuring) : Yes, yes, I see.

Resident : And so what I want you to do is this. I want you to denounce *him*. To remind him of his duty - remind him too that, even if he names you as a referee, he will be scorned, he will lack prospects, he will be denied any post in the government service –

Beatrice : Until he leaves Malaya.

Resident : Unless he leaves Malaya.

Shaw (timidly) : And if he doesn't?

Sercombe-Smith : If he doesn't, he will be blackballed. And so will you. Believe me, Mr. Shaw, we don't like doing this. It is not normal to our character. But what with the war-warnings, and the rubber crisis, and the suicides and the bankruptcies You do realise, sir, that investment has slumped almost to zero – that the colony is in meltdown - and if your friend Proudlock keeps blasting all Europe with tales of our brutality and mismanagement – our cruelty and avarice –

Shaw : A tangle It's all such a tangle.

Beatrice : And Corrigan writes letters to the King! A tangle, yes. A jungle every way! *(Fade)*

(Scene changes to an outstation in the jungle interior. Noises of toads, frogs, birds etc. A steamy atmosphere generally. Corrigan sitting on the verandah of his wooden house – built on poles and with access obtained by rudely notched steps on the trunk of a tree. He is smoking a pipe. With him is Mr. Harris, a rather naïve new colonial administrator.)

Corrigan : There it is. Look at it. Your first view of our dangerous river. Dangerous but rather wonderful. Light thinning away, moths brushing the lips (*Yawning*) Dear me. I am getting poetical.

Harris : It's very interesting, sir.

Corrigan : Not really. I've drunk too much. Top up?

Harris : I don't think, sir, perhaps

Corrigan (indicating the bottle) : A great danger out here, Harris. Gin and the snakes. You have been warned about snakes?

Harris : The Green Whip, sir. The Malayan big-eye green whip. Also the Oriental Whip, the blue kreit, the pit viper –

Corrigan : And of course the Malayan cobra. Brown or black usually with white markings. Which as an emblem for an effective mixing of the races Ah, there you are.

Ferguson (entering from within) : Here I am.

Corrigan (to Harris) : Mr. Ferguson is writing a piece on the rubber crisis. (*To Ferguson*) This is Mr. Harris. He is going up-country but the boat having been delayed and a night's lodging being asked of me

Harris : It's very kind of you, sir.

Corrigan : Oh I don't mind. Lonely out here. (*To Ferguson*) We were talking about cobras -

Ferguson (rather warily) : Ah.

Corrigan : - which can blind you. I have known several instances of dogs being temporary blinded. But no killing. Never seen a killing. So compared to the rubber-industry -

Ferguson (to Harris) : Mr. Corrigan is thinking more of *economic* killings –

Corrigan : I can remember when we had nine new flotations a day. The Exchange was known as the Shock Exchange. Traders shouting so much they got what we called rubber throat. Whereas now – now with this crisis -

Harris : Yes. Yes, I see. (*To Ferguson*) However, you don't *only* write about rubber. And of course with the murder – Mr. Corrigan was telling me about a murder. I hope you don't mind.

Ferguson : No, no, I don't mind. Actually, if we might perhaps discuss all that -

Corrigan : You are looking for a story. The rubber's just an excuse -

Ferguson : I was wondering about Winnie.

Harris : The Chinese girl.

Corrigan (having wiped his brow) : The Chinese girl. Free now. Free as a bird, though not quite so airy. And indeed with Mr. Proudlock now gone off to England - and the disappearance of Winnie's father -

Ferguson : Yes. Yes. That's right. Tan did disappear.

Corrigan (slightly drunk but still shrewd) : I wonder, Harris, what you will *really* make of this country - how you will come to view it in the context of a likely war. I read a funny thing the other day. How, for maximum comfort and despite the threat of war, we should patronise Teutonic shipping lines. Most notably the *Norddeutscher Lloyd*. If, Harris, you travel by *Norddeutscher Lloyd*, you will get better service, lunch-time orchestras, outstanding health facilities, English-speaking crew, you will mix with German travellers who are generally much more at home with the English than with any other Europeans

Harris : Yes. Yes, indeed, sir.

Corrigan : Have another. (*Pours drinks for both men.*).

Ferguson : Thank you.

Harris : Yes, thank you, sir.

Corrigan : But it's odd, ain't it? Because the Proudlock case has been blamed for making the Germans think us corrupt. It has been blamed for our so-called decadence. And all the while all the while (*As Harris brushes something away*) What's that?

Ferguson : I think it was a firefly, sir.

Corrigan : I think it was a mosquito. Never underrate the mosquito. Never, Harris, underrate the mosquito - the rubber-smuggler - the gambling den - the spit, cough and hack of the average coolie I'm not being very encouraging, am I?

Harris : No, sir, not very.

Corrigan : But you see, I feel the need to warn you. To stop you being naïve. You are about to go up-country, and that, I am sure, to a young lad is very exciting. But Empire is not what it was. People are tired of it. Whether at home or abroad, they have had enough. Agree, do you, Ferguson?

Ferguson : Oh yes, I've even written about it.

Corrigan : And?

Ferguson (as a slightly repressive confirmation) : And I concur. It has been said, Mr. Harris, that we out here pine for home. And it's true, we do. Even those who have never *been* home pine for it. But the truth is, home no longer pines for *us*. It doesn't even admire us. We are Britons, after all. We are supposed to be all-capable. But if we *are* all-capable, then why are we not able to rout out the white ants? Why can't we do that? The other day I went to a football match. Malay against Briton. And you know what I heard? I heard Malays shout, 'Kill them', 'Break their bones'. And so could that be how it really *is*? Might it be that, under British rule, attitudes have actually *hardened*? I hear from Sir Arthur that Proudlock's refutations are all lies. That we are educating the Malays. That we are training a civilised elite. But is it not more likely that we don't *want* them educated? That we fear to unsettle them? And so we provide Sultans with pensions - we make minor adjustments - we solve territorial disputes - but all the time our preference for leaving the rest of them to farm and fish - to carry on in the same old backwater *(A noise in the undergrowth. He reaches out)* Got you!

Corrigan : What?

Harris (rather alarmed) : Is it a snake?

Corrigan : Not a snake. Or at least *(Winnie is seen sullenly standing grasped by his hand)*

Winnie : Let me go.

Corrigan : I shall certainly let you go. This, Mr. Harris, is Winnie. Winnie of Kuala Lumpur. Though why she should come to this primitive out-of-the-way place –

Winnie : You call *me* primitive?

Corrigan : I call myself primitive. You have only to look at my one smoking lamp, my flour crawling with cockroaches, my tea full of drowning white ants – my necessity to dig out a spoon to strain them

Winnie (pointing at the others) : And these? Why are *they* here?

Corrigan : What?

Winnie : Mr. Ferguson.

Corrigan : Mr. Ferguson is staying overnight. He is investigating the rubber industry. More to the point, why are *you* here?

Winnie : You know why I'm here.

Corrigan : I know nothing of the kind. What I *do* know is that you would do much better to lie low – that your recent displays of spite and malice, far from gaining you the sympathy you deserve, are likely to alienate, to harass, to annoy –

Winnie (with contempt) : You're drunk.

Corrigan : I *was* drunk. The sobering effect of your arrival

Winnie : He has gone.

Ferguson : Who?

Winnie : Proudlock. Proudlock is gone. And as for my father

You know about my father?

Ferguson : I know he has disappeared from the office.

Winnie : He has disowned me. He has thrown me out.

Corrigan (to Mr. Harris) : Miss Winnie had a long dalliance with the gentleman we were talking about.

Winnie : I loved him.

Corrigan : Loved him, yes. Like her sister. Her sister was in a similar position. Similarly 'in love' with the dead Mr. Steward. Though whether Mr. Proudlock actually *knew* they were sisters

Winnie (fiercely) : I would do anything for my sister.

Corrigan : Would you? Would you cut off an arm for her? Sorry. Not fair.

Winnie : No.

Ferguson : But you must admit it's a hell of a mess. Look at Mrs. Proudlock. Unable to bear prison – refusing to wait for a proper appeal – having to apologise to her supporters. And as for the planters –

Winnie (dismissively) : Oh, planters!

Corrigan : He was thinking of the strain. Life in the jungle. The strain of it.

Ferguson : Well, there *is* a strain. You wouldn't deny it?

Corrigan : On the contrary. Look at us, Winnie. Look at our foul tempers, our brutality, our rages. But there is always another side – always with the gold goes the silver and lead. And if you consider the tedium, the soul-destroying, brain-numbing monotony - and all of it combined with the ants - red ants - white ants – ants that make *us* their breakfast (*Suddenly breaking off and changing tack*)

Why have you come?

Winnie : What?

Corrigan : Why have you come? You have crawled through the jungle – you have, presumably been dodging from prahu to prahu - so unless there's a reason

Winnie : You owe me a favour.

Ferguson : Don't listen, Harris.

Winnie (whose English, though still fluent, is not quite as correct as formerly because she is so angry) : Reward. He promise me reward. I keep quiet and get big reward. But there *is* no reward.

Corrigan : No.

Ferguson : No. It's the new policy.

Winnie : Whitewash policy.

Corrigan : So you could say.

Winnie : Do *you* say it?

Corrigan : I say that, yes, you may be right. That sometimes we *do* blanket things. Now here in the outstations we don't have blankets. We have Dutch widows, which is the name for the bolster we put between our legs to allow more air. But in London - oh in London, they have a different idea. Blanket everything. Don't rock the boat. Pretend it never happened. (*Turning to Ferguson*) Pretend *Winnie* never happened –

Winnie : I happened. Lily happened. And now we have nothing. Even my father –

Harris : Scared to go out?

Winnie (nodding) : He cry. He cry all the time. And then he go off. But if they think we run away – that we will run off into the jungle like the coolies that run off from *you* and get swallowed by tigers –

Ferguson : I am very sorry, *Winnie*. Mr. Corrigan is very sorry.

Corrigan : Yes I am. I am genuinely sorry. But you must understand. You must make allowances. In Malaya, *Winnie*, it is not the big things we white men are frightened of. It is the little things. It is a cut, a bruise, a scratch. And it is *you*. You, the little foreign characters who in England could be ignored but in Malaya – here in Malaya - where you can inflict such damage

Winnie : Damage? *I* can do damage?

Ferguson : Anything can do damage. A cut can do damage. Look at this. (*Showing one on his arm*) - only little – just a little bite - but if it leads to blood-poisoning – blood-poisoning blistering, dysentery – if it ends with my being driven into a filthy rat-infested hospital – the sort of hospital where this year alone there have already been three large public health emergencies –

Winnie : But you *will* help me.

Corrigan : How can I?

Winnie : By take me in. You take me in. Please, Mr. Corrigan. Proudlock is gone. He gone to England. My father gone too. But if I come to you, stay with you, live with you -

Corrigan : I don't want you to live with me.

Winnie : But I am so beautiful

Corrigan : Oh yes, you are. Very beautiful. But you see, sad to say, Winnie, I am not interested in women. I had not intended to say this – and certainly not in front of Mr. Harris, who is a very upright young gentleman and already conscientiously learning all five native languages – but I prefer men. And having, as I do, an arrangement with my houseboy –

Ferguson : You do what?

Corrigan : Awful, isn't it? I hope you won't print it. But the East being different – breaking down one sort of fence even as it imposes so many others –

Winnie : I don't believe you. You lie to get rid of me. But if I tell more - if I go away and cannot be blanketed, and go and tell more -

Corrigan : What more?

Harris : Something salacious? Something not true?

Winnie : About Proudlock. About what he did. About getting Steward to seduce her -

Corrigan : Old news. Old news. (*About to stand up*)

Winnie : Not if they were lovers already –

Harris : What? Who were lovers? I don't understand.

Winnie : No, you are a boy. And you are stupid. (*Explaining nonetheless*) Proudlock thinks his wife innocent. He thinks she is innocent but he is bored with her. And Steward – Steward has Lily. He has Lily, who is sweet like a flower and smell like spice, and so he is tired of this Ethel who nags, who demands, who grows red like a poker. And so he will tell her. He will tell this proud Lady Peacock that he no longer wants her. It is to end, to be finished. Only then when Proudlock come to him – when he ask Steward to seduce –

Harris : To seduce, so he could catch them? So he could sue for divorce?

Ferguson : Is this the truth? It *cannot* be the truth.

Winnie : Already they were lovers. Then he came. The river flows – flow back and you will see. *(Fade.)*

(Green light against suggests a hypothetical flashback. Ethel discovered with Steward. Drinks on a table.)

Ethel (who has been flicking through a magazine): Strawberries.

William Steward : I beg your pardon?

Ethel : While I was waiting I was reading about them. How to make strawberries. The trick being that you dispense with strawberries altogether. You mash up bananas with ideal milk, add two or three spoonfuls of strawberry jam, place it on ice –

William Steward : It sounds very complicated.

Ethel : It sounds very ridiculous. *Malaya is* ridiculous.

William Steward : Since when?

Ethel : Since for ever. Honestly, Billy, we try to make it seem like the homeland – we go to the club and order bangers and mash and brandy-butter and mince pies, and all the time we are surrounded by jungle, we have opium dens, we have child prostitutes, we are home to one of the largest leper colonies in the world -

William Steward : I didn't expect to be invited to talk about lepers -

Ethel : You were not invited to talk about lepers. You were not invited to talk about anything. You never *are* invited. Not properly. Why did my husband go and visit you?

William Steward : What?

Ethel : Oh yes, he did. Cookie told me. And don't say Cookie's an idiot. Even idiots tell the truth sometimes. You're up to something.

William Steward : Oh no I'm not.

Ethel : Oh yes you are. Which is why if you want anything out of me at all tonight – anything apart from hiccupping over my indigestible strawberries – then, the need to explain, to make a clean breast of it –

William Steward : I cannot possibly imagine

Ethel : No, you never can. Which I quite like. The dullness of your conformity is a plus. It gives the one illicit thing you *do* do a kind of exoticism. However, it's no good. My husband went to see you and now you're up to something. He hasn't found out, has he? Cookie telling – splitting on us?

William Steward : I can assure you, Ethel, that your husband knows nothing about it. I almost wish he did. The guilt of deception –

Ethel : Rubbish. You don't feel guilty. And anyway times have changed. No one cares now. So if you think I'm going to be a sort of Alice Hume -

William Steward : Alice Hume?

Ethel : Alice Hume had an *affaire* with an Indian sweeper. She had an *affaire* and her husband found out. He found out, beat her, nearly killed her and then blamed the Indian. Which considering he walked in when they were actually at it in the middle of – you know - in the bathroom

William Steward : The bathroom?

Ethel : Makes a change from the boudoir. Though whether it says anything much for Imperial justice

William Steward : You mustn't think, Ethel, that I'm up to something. That just because your husband may possibly have visited me, there's a plot – a conspiracy -

Ethel : Shall I tell you what I think? I think my husband is tired of me. I think that despite my manifold charms, he wants to get rid of me - to carry on with the Chinese and put me out to snake-infected grass. And the reason is that he thinks I tricked him. That I deliberately got pregnant before marriage. And the other thing he thinks is - well, never mind. Best not to say. But I do know he doesn't like me. And that most of our life is a charade They say, William, that Asians are inscrutable – that you can never penetrate the mask - but, believe me, compared to the English compared to their everlasting hypocrisy I say, did you hear something?

William Steward : No, I don't think –

Ethel : I did. I have very acute hearing. It's a girl.

William Steward (rather alarmed) : A girl?

Ethel : It's not *his* girl, is it? Not my husband's. ... (*Calling over the verandah*) Yes, yes, I can see you. Come up.

William Steward : Ethel, please.

Ethel : If you don't come up, I shall pour artificial strawberries all over you I shall then entangle you in poisonous snakes. (*To Steward*) She's coming.

(Lily enters, very warily)

Lily : Not mean to intrude.

Ethel : I am sure you didn't. You sly, creeping thing. Are you William's whore?

Lily : Whore?

Ethel (whose insults will now include indirect quotations from her favourite opera) : His whore, yes. The horrible slitty-eyed creature with whom he pants around in *my* bed-sheets. The poor wandering one who far from taking heart seems about to drop dead with terror –

William Steward : Ethel, for God's sake.

Ethel : - who beneath this beautiful blue - though actually quite dark - sky seems only too ready to abandon her mystery - give up all her slitty-eyed wiles - beg, plead, creep –

Lily : I not creep. It is the Tuan. It is William –

Ethel : Yes, so I said.

Lily : But not *your* William. *My* William.

Ethel : *Your* William?

Lily : *This* William.

Ethel : What?

Lily (pointing to Steward) : This my William.

Ethel : This is what?

Lily : I Lily – I his girl.

William Steward : Ethel, she is raving.

Ethel : Raving? Is that what you call it? She needs a bullet. A slug through the brain. I thought she was my husband's. But it turns out she's yours. And as for you, you traitor -

William Steward : Ethel, in heaven's name -

Ethel : Hell, more like. Hell as a home for you. Which seeing that I myself am an excellent shot –

William Steward : Ethel.

Ethel (indicating a gun on the table) : Guns here in fact.

William Steward (edging round the table) : Ethel, if you think that by losing your temper – by resorting to violence –

Ethel (who has picked up the gun) : They say, don't they, that Asiatics don't understand kindness. That to indulge them is to lose their respect. Whereas a well-aimed bullet – a shot between the eyes –

William Steward : All right I'll tell you.

Ethel : What will you tell me?

William Steward : What your husband came about.

Ethel : So he *did* see you.

William Steward : He came and I suppose Lily overheard. And the overhearing, I suppose, causing her to follow – to come after me -

Lily : Follow tuan – say not do this.

Ethel : Not do what?

Lily : This. Not do this.

William Steward : Your husband came to me to ask me to seduce you. He was, as you guessed, tired of you and he was seeking a way out. What he did *not* know was that we are already lovers. That we have been lovers for nearly twelve months. Twelve long months, Ethel. Ever since *Trial by Jury*.

Ethel : And so you told him. You told him we were lovers.

William Steward : I didn't tell him. I didn't want him to know. And given that I was going to break it off in any case –

Ethel : Break it off?

William Steward : I love Lily. I have been seeing Lily for some time. She's not educated – compared to her sister she's a halfwit - but still she's loyal, she's trusting. And this meaning that I have asked her to come permanently to live with me

Ethel : Live with you? An Asiatic? A Chinese?

William Steward : What about you? Some say *you* are an Asiatic. (*Ethel swipes him round the face. He flinches but stands his ground.*) They do, Ethel. There is a file. Suppressed, but still being leaked. And they look down on you. They look down because people have to look down on *something*. To bolster ourselves, the need to think we are better than *somebody*

Ethel (hitting him with the pistol) : Get out.

William Steward (continuing his point) : - better than somebody, Ethel. Not just for dominance – not to feel superior - but to allay inner doubts. And in Malaya where there is always doubt – always a fear that the jungle may infiltrate – that the Orient may claim us – that we may be twined in the creeping vine of the ever-invasive Other -

Ethel (same business but shouting more loudly) : Get out.

William Steward : It's like salt, Ethel. Salt to the taste. Which is good in small quantities but if you have too much You can have too much of the Orient, Ethel - even the good bits - and so you have to exclude it. And I have to exclude *you*. Even though I myself may co-habit with a Chinese, even though I mix my British blood with another, yet being myself of a pure blood, a pure race and such salt as I possess being entirely *pure* salt – table salt – unadulterated –

(Ethel picks up the gun and shoots at him once)

Lily (screaming) : No.

3rd William Proudlock (entering) : No.

(He rushes at Ethel, forcing the gun away. Lily rushes to pick it up and turns it to fire at Ethel.)

3rd William Proudlock (rushing to stop her): No.

William Steward (from the floor) : No.

(Proudlock diverts the gun and it turns towards Steward, going off again)

Ethel (who has sunk down beside Steward but now rises suddenly, rushing at Lily) : But you, you slut. I'll tell them you did this. (Indicating the body)

3rd William Proudlock (severely, dragging her off) : You won't, you know. I'll tell you what we'll say. (He drags her aside. Steward lies groaning, already mortally wounded. Fade.)

(Music of "Poor Wandering One". This fades as the lights go up on a jungle scene. Sir Edward Grey discovered sitting on a tree-stump, smoking a cigar)

*Sir Edward : Strange here, isn't it? Strange the pictures we can weave from a tangled web of threads of possibility. Though whether it was *really* like thatwhether, given that Steward was shot six times and actually died on the verandah Ah, there you are.*

King George (shown lit up at a table with the Queen, Griffiths behind the in attendance) : Here we are.

Sir Edward : Tea, is it?

King George : Tea. Going to have tea. (Calling) Winnie.

Winnie (entering) : I bring tea. (She goes again)

King George : And perhaps now the guests.

Queen Mary : Guests in the steaming green. Guests mid the creepers and the tangled hibiscus.

(Characters from the play enter variously through the jungle growths and sit at little tables which are now illuminated. The guests are possibly masked. They include several of the previously seen figures – for instance, Mabel Marsh sits with Lettice and the Redlands have their own table.)

Some guests : Good afternoon.

Other Guests : Good afternoon.

King George : Sit please.

Queen Mary : By all means. And then if you would perhaps care to donate a little money towards the refreshments

King George (after gesturing to guests to sit) : Ladies and gentlemen, we have called you to this tea-party to attempt some kind of final resolution – to resolve once for all this terrible Proudlock case. And may I first remind you that this is of no small moment. We, ladies and gentlemen, represent the Establishment. We are the ones who gave pensions to the Sultans - ended the wars of succession - allowed six labourers to a room but at least gave them tobacco and haircuts. And now if we may begin by sketching in some of the background –

Queen Mary : - examining the context –

King George : - deciding whether there is in fact any case to answer

Queen Mary : Mr. Steward. Do we have a Mr. Steward?

Steward (unmasking and rising from one his chair at one of the tables) : I am William Steward.

Queen Mary : Dead, aren't you?

Steward : I am indeed dead, so why I should have to be spooned up again –

Sir Edward : You are spooned up because it is being said in some quarters that your death is of small moment. That, had you lived, the likelihood that anyway you would have ended up committing suicide -

King George (to Steward) : And would you? *Would* you have committed suicide?

Steward : I don't know. It is quite true that many planters and engineers *do* commit suicide. It's a sudden instinct – an impulse really - and if the moment passes, you're all right. On the other hand, if not – if you feel you are failing – if you sense that you are not coping, and the drink is near and the opium handy and if above all, you've renewed your insurances

King George : Yes, I see. Any further comment?

Corrigan (rising and unmasking) : Sir.

Queen Mary (raising lorgnette) : Ah, yes, Mr. Corrigan.

Corrigan : My name is Walter Corrigan. I am the man who got Winnie released and rather regretted it. And what *I* should like to say it is it's not as simple as that. Nothing is as simple as that. And given that the natives are too scared to complain, that they tend to keep their heads down

Queen Mary : Stick to the main matter, please.

Some guests (thumping tables) : Main matter, main matter.

Corrigan : Which is suicides. You were asking about suicides. And yes, I admit there *are* all too many. The Brits, you see, have been led to expect success. And so the pressure of failure – even of the fear of it -

Masked Figure (at one table) : Very regrettable.

2nd Masked Figure (at another) : Very regrettable.

Corrigan : And so, yes there *are* suicides. But we need to distinguish. In my whole Malayan service I have known only one case of a *woman* committing suicide. She, poor thing, drowned herself while the servants were setting out lunch. But the men! Carbolic acid – hanging – shooting - one man swallowing opium after the white ants got to him! And when we remember that according to one rumour even Mr. Proudlock eventually topped himself –

Queen Mary : Did you top yourself, Mr. Proudlock?

1st William Proudlock (rising at one table and unmasking) : No.

2nd William Proudlock (rising at one table and unmasking) : No.

3rd William Proudlock (rising at one table and unmasking) : No.

1st William Proudlock : At least we don't think so.

(The three Proudlocks sit)

Corrigan : And so I say no. On balance, I do not think Mr. Steward would have committed suicide. I do not think even Mr. Proudlock would have committed suicide. Indeed, having heard an assertion that, far from hanging himself, he became a housemaster and died peacefully in Argentina –

Sir Edward : We shall come to Argentina -

King George : - come there – get a tattoo (showing his) -

Queen Mary : Next. (Corrigan sits down)

Lady Pamela (rising and unmasking) : Oh well, if the next could be me perhaps

.....

Griffiths (to King George; in his ear) : Lady Pamela. Sir Edward's mistress.

Lady Pamela : It is true, Majesty, that I am a kept mistress. But that does not mean I have had a silver-spoon existence. My husband made his money out of bleach. He made it in Glasgow. And besides, does not a great man need a release? Sir Edward is not naturally suited to the Foreign Service. He has only once been out of the country. And if your charge is that he and I are guilty of hypocrisy - that, while condemning the Proudlocks, we were really just as bad

.....

Queen Mary : You think you were not?

Lady Pamela : Well, we didn't murder anybody. We didn't resort to a gun. And besides –

King George (rather severely) : Yes?

Lady Pamela : Look at it this way. Kuala Lumpur is different. Sir Edward is a countryman. His interests are birds, flowers, and fish. Now Kuala Lumpur does

have birds. It even has flowers. But though it may, for instance, enjoy the Lake Gardens where Ethel and Steward once went for a spin, still beyond the gardens there is always the jungle. There are always the ipoh trees. Great big trees whose sap contains a virulent poison. So if you like to think of colonial life like that - as a garden full of poisonous growths, where the jungle is always invading the civilised

Queen Mary (not much impressed) : Next.

King George : Next. (*Lady Pamela sits again*)

Sir Arthur (rising and unmasking) : And that's me, is it?

Griffiths (as an incentive) : The need for their Majesties to be fully apprised of colonial life

Sir Arthur : It's very difficult, isn't it? Lady Pamela now – she's been talking of landscapes – about ipoh trees - but this isn't about that. It's about the Proudlocks. It's about you three Proudlocks joining your wife in London. It is also about your writing to the Secretary of State, demanding redress, demanding a good job, threatening to bring down the government

3rd William Proudlock (rather nastily) : Only we failed, didn't we?

Sir Arthur : You did fail, yes.

3rd William Proudlock : Absolute washout. Like this tea. Next.

2nd William Proudlock : Next.

1st William Proudlock : Next.

Timothy (rising and unmasking) : Oh well, if you don't mind

King George : Proceed.

Timothy : What I would like to stress is good intentions. That we did our best. I mean, those Proudlocks – they were bad eggs. Mere jumped-up nobodies. And yet the cheek of them! They come to England, petition Parliament – William Proudlock stalks the P.M., he threatens to accost Her Majesty

Queen Mary : He *did* threaten to accost me.

Timothy : And for what? For what? For our complete lack of interest. On the contrary, most of his woes occurred not just with government *knowledge*, but at its *insistence*. And so then - then, when he gets desperate - when his gold is tarnished, and his silver is tarnished, and even the lead is in danger of tarnishing

3rd William Proudlock : Next.

2nd William Proudlock : Next.

1st William Proudlock : Next.

(Lady Florence enters, holding a lamp, picking her way through the jungle)

Lady Florence : Now I know what you're thinking. I shouldn't be trekking. I should be sitting at a table. But the truth is, *really* I'm in Kenya – I and my husband are now running Kenya - and, though I miss Malaya – miss especially eating at the E. and O. where the Swiss chef is absolutely marvellous – still, the difficulty of getting here – traversing all this

Queen Mary : And the point of your visit?

Lady Florence : Oh yes the point. Well, the point is Mrs. Proudlock. I wanted to remind you of *Mrs.* Proudlock. To ask, why nobody much heard from *her*? All these letters from her husband – letters to us, letters to you – but from her – nothing. Nothing except one brief missive to Mrs. Shaw. And then in February 1912 – when the husband wrote for the last time – when the Colonial Office received those last eleven close-packed pages -

King George : Eleven pages? Was it *really* eleven?

Fisher (rising and unmasking) : It was eleven.

Queen Mary (quite pleased) : Mr. Fisher.

3 William Proudlocks (together) : Mr. Fisher.

Fisher (during which Lady Florence sits at one of the tables) : In February 1912 the Proudlocks were living in Bromley. And the man himself was becoming more and more extreme. One of his friends actually buttonholed a peer of the realm – button-holed him – threatened that he must raise it in the Lords. And so then – then - a letter of eleven pages - each sheet marked “Private and Confidential” – and a copy to me

Queen Mary : But you didn’t print it? Tell me, Mr. Fisher, you did not print it

Fisher (almost indignantly) : I most certainly did not. What? Print such a diatribe? From a man like Proudlock? He said that Sir Arthur had betrayed him. That he had leaked false files. That a job-promise had been negated. *(To the male Proudlocks specifically)* And then when you went on to inform us that the editor of the London *Daily Mail* was interested – that he was going to publish an attack on the whole imperial system

King George : Disgusting! *(To Winnie) :* Get him some tea please.

Winnie (grumbling) : Always enslaved. Always the underdog.

Sercombe-Smith (rising, unmasking, rebuking Winnie) : Which, if the coolie hat fits

Griffiths (whispering again to the royal couple) : Judge Sercombe-Smith, Majesties. President at the trial.

Sercombe-Smith (rising) : My name is Judge Sercombe-Smith. This is Lady Julia, my wife. And may I remark that if this is the way you run an official inquiry, then I am hardly surprised there were ructions. These Proudlocks were a menace. They were threatening to ruin us. And let us not forget here that this is Malaya we are talking about. It is not some tidy Home Counties suburb. Privately I would admit that some of our own young men *do* run wild. Some are almost as bad as the Chinese. But should we admit that fact? Should we expose it and broadcast it and worry the Government? Of course we shouldn’t. And if thereby we juggle the parameters – move the fences a bit – still, the need to have limits, the need to have boundaries

3rd William Proudlock : Next.

1st William Proudlock : Next.

2nd William Proudlock : Next.

Mabel Marsh : Oh sure!

Lettice : Why not?

Mabel Marsh : And if he could come in a rickshaw

Anthonisz (entering in a rickshaw) : My name is Anthonisz. J.O. Anthonisz, which is A.N.T. and some other letters. And the truth is, I am a bit torn here. I, as you know, am of mixed race. I am of Dutch origin with a touch of the tar brush. But that doesn't mean I can't squeeze myself into a pure-blood pro-British mindset. *(To the male Proudlocks)* The truth is, you were blackmailing. You were nothing but blackmailers. The very fact that you threatened to tell all – to use the newspapers – only to *desist* if you could be guaranteed a good job and a huge kickback - well, it's extortion. It was virtual piracy. And so a snooty reply – a message that the Secretary of State was unable to interfere - a reply which you called weak but was actually bold – bold and courageous and as noble-hearted as I would be if I could only be pure-blooded British

(He is pushed aside by the rickshaw-driver to try to join the Establishment group. They may or may not accept him.)

Queen Mary : Next.

King George : Next.

Griffiths : Next.

King George : And if this could be the penultimate

Windstedt (rising from the mud and unmasking) : I am the penultimate. *(He shows a label stating his name with the legend 'Almost last')*

Queen Mary : Richard Winstedt. (*Looking at notes*) It says here you were a Malay-sympathiser –

Winstedt : I *was* a sympathiser. I admired them. I said they had all the glamour of sportsmen – that they were natural aristocrats – natural cynics – that we should feel honoured to rule them –

Sir Edward : And yet you tried to kill yourself –

Winstedt : I did, yes. Odd that, isn't it? Odd that I who *liked* Malaya – who actually compiled a Malay-English dictionary – should have turned to a pistol! But perhaps it was *because* of it. Because I knew too well that one little puff of our non-existent Malayan wind was enough to topple us – to collapse the whole imperial house of cards. The truth is, we British were *not* good settlers –we should have been more like the Dutch – worn local dress, cooked local food, spoken the languages, studied the history –

King George (not liking this) : Next.

Queen Mary : Next.

King George, Queen Mary and Griffiths (not liking this, repeating) : Next.
(*Winstedt is hustled off by attendants*)

Ethel (entering slowly) : Ah well, if it's me you are talking about

1st William Proudlock : Ethel!

2nd and 3rd William Proudlocks : Ethel!

King George : This finally is the celebrated Eurasian?

Ethel (addressing theatre audience directly) : After we went to London, I didn't go out much. I left that to William. And so I locked myself away. Locked myself proudly. Refused to take part. And so it came about that people thought I was dead. I was mad or dead or in an asylum. Only I wasn't dead and eventually we left. We went to Quebec. Which is where we parted. We who had been through so much – who has been bound as one flesh – were now estranged. I hated him as I hated Winnie – as I loathed little Lily. Only it's curious. I am the last. We have

said that. And yet there is still someone. Someone to whom I must speak. Not my husband, not Steward – and certainly not Winnie - but if there were somebody

Queen Mary (very quietly) : If there were somebody

(Robespierre enters. From now on the light fades on all the others except him and Ethel and later those who join in their dialogue.)

Robespierre : Did you say somebody?

Ethel : I did, yes. Somebody to hear my story. To decide whether or not I was really half-Tamil. Though whether that is you

Robespierre (to audience) : Strange, is it not? Strange how we often confide best in an almost total stranger. And yet we do have a link. A sort of dominant flavour. All dishes should have a dominant flavour. (Turning back to Ethel) As if you care to elaborate -

Ethel : Elaborate how?

Robespierre : - by saying what became of you.

Ethel : I went to America.

Robespierre (nodding) : America, yes. Another group of states. You fled to America where, with your usual facility – your usual mendacity –

Ethel (almost smirking) : I told them I was going to Sioux Falls.

Robespierre : You did, yes. You also swore you had no criminal record –

Ethel (as if before a tribunal) : ‘I have no criminal record’.

Robespierre : - and then eventually – eventually in 1950 when you and Dorothy finally moved to Florida

*Ethel : We *did* move to Florida. We moved to the sun. I became a naturalised United States citizen – and then, when I did *that*, when for the first time I became equal -*

Robespierre : All men are equal. All women are equal.

Ethel : You're Robespierre, aren't you? I see now you're Robespierre. Though as to what connects us what tendril of the jungle – what current in this curious river -

Robespierre : Tell me about William.

Ethel : My lover?

Robespierre : Your husband.

Ethel : Argentina. He went to Argentina. Went there, became an Assistant Housemaster, died in 1958, was commemorated on a plaque -

Robespierre : And his wife? Did he ever commemorate *you*, Mrs. Proudlock?

3rd William Proudlock (lit up now) : We did not commemorate Mrs. Proudlock. We were estranged – we sought newer-hatched comrades – we *did* hear that she rented an apartment –

1st William Proudlock (also being lit up): - lived near Dorothy -

2nd William Proudlock (ditto): - had an ugly garden –

3rd William Proudlock (ditto) : - possessed a swing.

1st William Proudlock : Only then what with the shootings –

Robespierre : Shootings? (*Robespierre looks rather alarmed*)

Ethel : It was a burglary.

Sultan (entering, possibly followed by Ali, bearing trays of food) : It was a burglary. It was what I had the dream about. Only not a burglary of *you*. Not *you*, my dear Mrs. Proudlock. It was a burglary of your *daughter*. Of Dorothy. Because by then you were dead. You had worked as a nurse, you had crocheted, you had loved your daughter, but what with bronchitis, what with emphysema, what with cardiac arrest – and all after such a travelling life -

1st William Proudlock : Poor Wandering One.

Four Williams : Poor Wandering One.

Queen Mary : And as for the rest of us -

(The Proudlock men fade as do all except Robespierre.)

Robespierre : And that is the point, is it not? For who *are* the rest of us? I answer now to Robespierre. But I was once Mr. Tan. And I am also the Tamils and also the Malays and perhaps now the British. The point being that it is wrong, very wrong, to reduce us. To make stereotypes. This story, ladies and gentlemen, is *not* a stereotype. Real people are *not* stereotypes. When I, Robespierre, led the revolution I re-named the months. And one was called Floréal. It was the month of flowers. But the month of flowers was a month of blood. It was also the month in which the Proudlocks got married. It was also the month in which William Steward was murdered. And we, ladies and gentlemen – we are like that month. We are good and bad and sweet and terrible. I, it is true, have been monstrous. As in a different way has Ethel. But I still loved my pigeon. And if we admit that blend – acknowledge the tangled skein of heredity, environment – of the force of circumstance – the pressure of events - if we recall too that in the jungle of poisonous growths there are still flowers that might have been

Ethel (light coming up on her, holding a rose) : Might have been.

Ethel and the Williams, Winnie and Steward : Might have been ... (*This echoes around*)

Robespierre : And that even *I* believed in my cause's purity -

Lily (entering with the gun) : You killed my man and you must die for it. (*Shoots Ethel. Ethel falls*)

Robespierre (sadly, riddled with self-doubt) : Excuse, perhaps? Or wise words, after all? (*Black out.*)

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AFTERWORD

First there was *White Mischief* and now there is *A Faithless Floréal*. The piece is my own look at colonial life and death, the treatment this time being based on an actual 1911 murder trial – one which is at least as fascinating as anything that happened in Kenya a few decades later.

The actual significance of the Proudlock case is still debated but in this play I use it as a study of issues which, for all the historical variants, still resonate. Among these are matters of race-relations, of multi-culturalism and social cohesion, and of identity, both personal and corporate. Also important are the *motifs* of government cover-ups and press responsibility.

It is true that a play set in 1911 cannot fully reflect modern life. Multiculturalism in Malaya meant not so much a *blending* as a *juxtaposition*. It was race and traditions in compartments. But this – and the notion of barriers - in itself remains a significant issue. How much should we seek to retain our indigenous culture, how much be true to our roots? Should we, like Margaret Schlegel, seek to connect or should we, as her sister advocates, be true to ourselves and our values, flowing pure in the conviction of their worth?

One big issue in the play seems admittedly of less relevance today. This is the issue of colonial rule itself, of its nature, its cause and its

justification. Many of course see no justification at all. They regard colonialism as generically evil and its legacy as entirely negative. But this too shows that, as an inheritance, it remains important. We can argue over the motivations – everything from White Man's Burden to exploitation and dominance – but the lingering tendrils remain in the national and often the individual consciousness.

Not all aspects of colonial rule and the concept of Empire are covered in the play. I make little, for instance, of the role and purpose of the missionary, and religion generally is kept as a peripheral issue. This is because in the Proudlock case it did not particularly feature. Ethel went to church but she and her husband were essentially secular people. Class, on the other hand, *is* important. It raised barriers both within the expatriate community and in Kuala Lumpur society generally.

Even among the British, there were divisions. Neither William Proudlock nor his wife could be accounted part of the *élite*, though both were impatient to rise. True, as an acting headmaster William earned four thousand dollars a year. But he was the son of a miner-cum-millwright and did not consort with the upper echelons. The Proudlocks did not hunt or play polo. They did not go to dinner parties or attend the better weddings. It may be this indeed that accounts for the rather perfunctory newspaper accounts of their own wedding. This is just as likely as more dubious considerations of possible Eurasian blood in the bride and probable sex before marriage.

Another important aspect of the story is its timing. In terms of Empire history, 1911 was on the cusp. The year of the Delhi Durbar, it was in one sense a culmination. It was also a tipping point. Before this, there had been a clear determination to consolidate imperial power and – equally important – to promote loyalty to the concept. In 1901, the future George V and his wife had toured the British Empire. Their itinerary included Gibraltar, Malta, Port Said, Aden, Ceylon, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, Mauritius, South Africa, Canada, and the Colony of Newfoundland. The aim was to reward the dominions for their participation in the South African War. In a carefully orchestrated attempt to ensure a sense of belonging, George presented his colonial troops with thousands of specially designed South African War medals. There were also some attempts at crossing the racial divide. The royal party met civic leaders, African leaders, and Boer prisoners. Everywhere they were greeted by elaborate decorations, expensive gifts, and fireworks displays.

Even in 1901 the foundations of Empire were showing alarming cracks. Faced with Prince George's arrival, many white Cape Afrikaners expressed resentment. They were furious at the display and expense, not least because the war had weakened their capacity to reconcile their Afrikaner-Dutch culture with their status as British subjects. Critics in the English-language press also decried the enormous cost. This was doubly to be regretted at a time when 'hard-working families' were facing severe economic hardship.

As a whole the Edwardian period both boosted and became weary of its cumbersome Empire-management. In Australia, George as Duke of York opened the first session of the Australian Parliament. In New Zealand, he praised the colonials for their military values, bravery, loyalty, and obedience to duty. He was himself proudly informed of the adoption of up-to-date British standards in communications and the processing industries. The implicit goal here was to advertise New Zealand's attractiveness to tourists and potential immigrants, while avoiding news of growing social tensions.

The mix in British attitudes to Empire continued on the home front. Here again there was a similar blend of bolstering with a latent uneasiness. On his return to Britain, in a speech at the Guildhall, George voiced doubts within praise. He warned of 'the impression which seemed to prevail among [our] brethren across the seas, that the Old Country must wake up'. This was vital 'if she intends to maintain her old position of pre-eminence in her colonial trade against foreign competitors'.

The sense that the Empire was an old institution finding it hard to adapt may be extended to colonial society generally. In his study of the Proudlock case, Eric Lawlor emphasizes that, for many ordinary British citizens, Empire was increasingly seen as a liability. Yet at the same time it did provide opportunities for aspiring British emigrants and was certainly an aspect of patriotic pride. From November 1905 to March 1906, George and his duchess toured British India, blowing the trumpet for imperial rule. Significantly, George was simultaneously disgusted by racial discrimination, campaigning for greater involvement of Indians in the government of the country.

India was one thing, Malaya quite another. The academic Mary Cody, author of a thesis on the Proudlock case (*1), writes that the British in Malaya 'were not the aristocrats of the colonial world. They were people who had come mostly from England and were extremely poor. They'd come out to better themselves'. She adds that for such people the Empire was a great opportunity : 'Ethel Proudlock's husband had risen in Kuala Lumpur to be acting headmaster of a prestigious school, but his father had been a pit boy in England from the age of seven'.

Mary Cody's view of Edwardian Malaya perhaps underestimates the presence of a middle-class professional cadre. But her main thrust is just. In South East Asia, some of the new wave of colonial rulers found themselves administering coolies when really 'their own families were white coolies themselves'. This filters into the Proudlock case and especially into the psychology of William who tended increasingly towards belligerence to the Establishment. At his trial for libel he was continually referred to by his counsel as a 'manly man'. The term relates partly to the concept of muscular Christianity but (particularly as he was an agnostic) it also suggests someone of an independent spirit. Proudlock wanted to rise and he wanted to fit in, but he was quick to resent what he saw as slights from a socially superior, better-born élite.

There was another factor relevant to the timing of the Proudlock case and this was King George's coronation. This took place at Westminster Abbey on 22nd June 1911, being celebrated by a Festival of Empire in London. Petitions for mercy almost invariably used the coronation as a spur. In view of its imminence, the reprieve of a colonial lady would be

an appropriate kingly gesture. Perhaps ‘queenly’ would be a better word here for many of the petitions were addressed directly to the Queen.

There is no doubt that Empire and the need to keep white colonials ‘on side’ was in 1911 very much in the royal mind. Later that year, the King and Queen travelled to India for the Delhi Durbar. Here on 12th December they were presented to an assembled audience of Indian dignitaries and princes as their Emperor and Empress. George for this occasion wore the newly created Imperial Crown of India. He also announced the shifting of the Indian capital from Calcutta to Delhi. Another side of the royal nature was shown in his subsequent activities. Travelling throughout the sub-continent, George took the opportunity to indulge in big game hunting in Nepal, shooting twenty-one tigers, eight rhinoceroses and a bear in the space of ten days.

The elevation of Mrs. Proudlock to colonial lady had its own ironic aspect. Persistently there were rumours that she was actually not ‘pure-blood British’ but actually Eurasian. Of her paternity there is little doubt. Her father George Charter was prepared to swear to the relationship (*2). But Ethel’s alleged mother may not have been her biological one. It was surprisingly common for British colonial men to take Asian mistresses, whether of Tamil, Chinese or some other origin. William Proudlock had a Chinese mistress and so did the murder victim William Steward. Many men had two. One of the rumours about William Proudlock’s last known mistress was that she was the mother of one of his pupils. This in itself

casts a questionable light over his professional integrity and alleged allegiance - even as a sceptic - to the highest British standards of muscular Christianity.

It is a pity that we do not know more about Ethel's family and origins. Her father, we know, had a job of no great importance in the Public Works Departments but he was nonetheless something of a celebrity. He ran the Kuala Lumpur fire brigade, was famous (like the King) as a big-game hunter and (an interesting sidelight) was a keen and noted amateur horticulturalist. He was, for instance, among the first in the F.M.S. to cultivate the Calcutta guava. He also seems to have been something of a snob, regarding Proudlock as socially inferior. This, according to Richard Winstedt, was a time when teaching had limited status. The early 1900's 'were the happy-go-lucky days when a knowledge of irregular verbs and an aptitude for games were considerable adequate equipment for a schoolmaster' (*3).

According to Eric Lawlor, it was Ethel's Eurasian blood that led to her being put on trial at all. Normally the British could cover up sexual scandal among their own. They could even cover up murder : 'What sealed her fate was that, in addition to being a killer and an adulteress, she was also almost certainly a Eurasian'. Actually, such a motivation is by no means certain. We do not know how widely her Eurasian blood was known about, besides which, even if she *was* Eurasian, the British Establishment would hardly care to acknowledge the fact.

One theory is that William Proudlock found out about his wife's Eurasian blood not *before* but after the marriage. This, it is argued, made him hostile towards her, feeling he had been trapped. Yet, if that is so, why would Ethel's father have opposed the wedding in the first place? Might he not have been pleased to get her off his hands? We do know that he did not attend the wedding. We also know that the eldest of Ethel's putative sisters lived in Colombo where she was often visited by her mother and the youngest daughter but never by Ethel herself. Lawlor finds this suggestive : 'The British loved Ceylon – it was cooler than K.L. Ethel was delicate. She was often sick. Why, then, did they never invite her along?' (*4)

It is impossible to be sure now whether Ethel was or was not a Eurasian. Physically she was blonde-haired, quite pale-skinned and petite. She hardly seems a likely candidate for what was then disparagingly called 'a touch of the tar-brush'. Nor is it easy to understand why the Establishment, knowing (possibly) of her (possible) mixed blood would see this as a reason to allow for her 'sacrifice'. Might they not have feared that in a public trial her mixed-blood origins would come out, undermining British social prestige? Or did they think that the reverse would happen – that the very fact that they could write her off as 'not really one of us' would enable them to shrug her off, if her dubious origins ever came to light?

The ironies of Ethel's position – championed in petitions as a British colonial lady while possibly being of mixed race – extend too into other areas. Indeed, the whole notion of the King's mercy was double-edged. If

he favoured an English lady, and issued her with a pardon, might not the natives resent it? Might they not see it as favouritism towards one of an élite and oppressive ruling caste? Certainly George had many reasons for worrying about native unrest. Eric Lawlor details countless abuses, mis-trials and strikes, most notably that of Chinese rickshaw-drivers which occurred in 1909 and is directly referred to in the play.

There is no doubt that race relations were uneasy. In England native Malays were thought of as piratical, fierce and armed to the teeth. They were smilers with knives ever-ready. This, according to a possible tongue-in-cheek F.W. Knocker, was, however, a misconception. It applied only before they had been 'smoothed out and turned aside into Elysian paths by a considerate and parental British government'. Many social commentators felt the same. 'Thanks to the British,' said Thomas Bleakley, 'every Malay is a gentleman, even those of the lower orders' (*5).

The double picture of inter-racial relations is only one more complication in Ethel Proudlock's complicated world. Rickshaw-pullers, for instance, were notably recalcitrant and seen often as a social threat, yet many were ravaged by malaria and a fair number reduced by opium to skin and bone. This did not prevent their being seen as capable of subversion. To Arthur Keyser, 'The coolie who pulls the rickshaw is about the most unpleasant scoundrel who ever came out of the underworld of Canton. He is an inveterate gambler and opium-smoker with one aim and object in life : to make money by fair or foul means'. The fact that he is 'surly and hates

work' is the final straw. It makes him the antithesis of the British Protestant work ethic, not to mention guilty of damaging disrespect to his social superiors (*6).

It is easy to laugh at the English prejudices against native peoples and to see the latter as not really very threatening at all. But there is clear evidence of latent hostilities. In particular, the British regularly complained about the Chinese. They were truculent. They refused to kowtow. Indians might bow and scrape when the British entered their shops but the Chinese let them wait. Indians yielded their seats on trains. The Chinese let the British stand.

The idea that the Chinese were worse than the Indians was directly related to the aftermath of the Proudlock case. It was in late 1911 to early 1912 that both came to a head. One cause was the murder of James Barrack (described in the play), following which there was an intense outbreak of anti-Chinese feeling. Then things got worse as the government tried to ban gambling. This particular veto led to nearly a week of rioting causing twelve deaths and bringing much of Kuala Lumpur to a standstill.

The gambling protest riots were brief but alarming. During them the town was placed under a kind of general alert. Two companies of the Malay State Guides were brought from Taiping, and the Malay State Rifles were mobilised. To prevent arms reaching the rioters all trains entering the city were searched. Britons marched to the armoury, demanding rifles. The government, to its credit, refused to give them and ordered the men back home.

The Chinese riots did not ultimately change the status quo but there is no doubt that the British temporarily lost control. Mobs roamed, houses were put to the torch, shops were looted and policemen molested. The tide turned on Day Four when a crowd armed with stones and bottles entered Sultan Street and tried to storm the police station. The police fixed bayonets and drove them back. After various charges, the Chinese were routed and several killed. None of this can be directly related back to Ethel Proudlock but it does show what the government had to fear.

Fear was indeed a prime motivator. It stimulated much counter-violence. Among other things the government at home was obsessed by alarm that news of British loss of authority would get out and affect our international reputation. There was also a fear that native troops might be needed but prove unreliable in the event of a possible war. This led to a delicate tightrope act : conciliate the natives – keep them on board – but also control them, suppressing any hint of rebellion before it gets out of hand.

The wider international situation certainly feeds into - and is *fed* into - by the Proudlock case. In 1911, during Ethel's trial, Europe was undergoing the so-called Second Moroccan Crisis or the *Panthersprung*. The term refers to the international tension sparked by the deployment of a substantial force of French troops in the interior of Morocco. Germany then reacted by sending the gunboat SMS *Panther* to Agadir, where she arrived on July 1st. This was a provocation. France's pre-eminence in Morocco had been upheld by the 1906 Algeciras Conference, following the First Moroccan Crisis of 1905–1906.

The Agadir crisis was not just a matter for France and Germany. Anglo-German tensions ran high at this time, partly owing to an arms race including German efforts to build a fleet two-thirds the size of Britain's. Germany's move now was aimed at testing the relationship between Britain and France, and possibly intimidating Britain into an alliance with the Kaiser. Germany was also enforcing compensation claims. She would have to be paid for accepting effective French control of Morocco.

There was another factor in all the above – namely that it reinforced a wider international sense of latent rebellion. Early in 1911, a rebellion broke out in Morocco against the Sultan, Abdelhafid. By early April, he was being besieged in his palace in Fez. This led to the French preparing to send troops to help put down the revolt, under the pretext of protecting European lives and property. Specifically, they dispatched a so-called flying column at the end of April. Then on June 8th, the Spanish army occupied Larache. Three days later they occupied Ksar-el-Kebir.

The next stage in all the above was the German intervention. This was under the pretext of protecting German trade interests but things soon escalated. Not only was the *Panther* deployed. The larger *Bremen*-class cruiser *SMS Berlin* arrived days later, replacing the gunboat. All this time, the British government were attempting (but failing) to restrain France from adopting hasty measures and to dissuade her from sending troops to Fez. In April (a key month both in politics and the play), Sir Edward Grey wrote 'what the French contemplate doing is not wise, but we cannot under our agreement interfere'. One key factor was that the Royal Navy

had a naval base in Gibraltar and was distinctly fearful that the Germans meant to turn Agadir into something similar. This (notwithstanding Grey's caution) caused Britain to send battleships to Morocco, in case war broke out.

ii.

There is no scope here to go into the full ramifications of pre-First World War politics but it is certainly significant (a) that Britain increasingly feared conflict with Germany and (b) that we needed to be sure of support not just at home but from the whole of the wider Empire. Ironically – in a case full of ironies – the Germans at this time were regarded in many ways as our natural allies – or at any rate as quite like us.

The 'natural' German-English link can be illustrated in many ways. Eric Lawlor shows it by quoting advertisements for sailings to Malaya and the other colonial areas. Among other things, we learn that on boats belonging to *Norddeutscher Lloyd* an orchestra performs during dinner, there are excellent health facilities, the crews speak English and the engine room does not smell. True, most of the passengers are German but this is hardly a problem. How could it be, since 'Germans who have travelled are generally more at home with English people than is the case with other Europeans'?

The issue of Agadir and Anglo-German relations may seem to take us a long way from the Proudlock case. But actually it is all part of one complex knot. William Proudlock's father had at one time worked on the

estates of the Foreign Secretary. He personally sent him an agonised appeal. More generally, the need to keep the natives on side became an increasing obsession. This may indeed be one reason why ultimately the matter of whether or not to grant Ethel a pardon was handed over to Sultan Aluaddin Sulaiman. It enabled the British government to distance itself. Not that the effects were altogether positive. While the Establishment was trying to walk another tightrope - between supporting 'an English lady' and appeasing the natives - the British Press was fulminating against allowing an Oriental Potentate to decide the fate of a English memsahib.

The involvement of the Pressmen would not much have mattered, had not William Proudlock continually threatened to write to them. This increased after Ethel's release when he became obsessed with the idea that he was being hounded and that all promises of future colonial employment were being deliberately blocked. Historians might claim this should simply have been ignored. But his persistence had severe repercussions. His friend Mr. Barlow met members of the House of Lords. One of them promised to raise the matter in the Chamber. More significantly, Proudlock was threatening to damn the government's record and highlight Malayan abuses. This might cause public concern at home. Even worse, it might raise an already dangerous level of discontent in the native populations.

It is difficult now to be quite sure how anti-British the subject races actually were. Undoubtedly, it wasn't just the British who were disliked. There was constant friction between Chinese and Tamils and indeed numerous others in the shifting, migrant populations. Towards the British,

it was the Chinese who were generally thought to be more hostile. The British were even said to like Malays because they kept their distance : ‘one could share a hut with a Malay and not worry about being dug in the ribs or being called by one’s Christian name’ (*7). But by 1911 the days when a Briton might have shared a hut with a Malay were long gone. Government had been centralised and civil servant district officers had little time to venture from their desks.

As so often, it is in small ways that a sense of undercurrents of hostility become manifest. Lawlor tells us of football matches between the all-British Casuals and all-Malay Sultan Suleiman Club in which fisticuffs often resulted, with Malays on the sidelines urging their countrymen to ‘kill them’ and ‘break their bones’. Often abuse was hurled sufficient to interrupt the playing. This would have much upset Bennett Shaw, Headmaster of the Victoria Institution. He in 1898 had instituted Sports Days and was a keen advocate of playing up and playing the game in an English gentlemanly manner.

The excesses of football can be dismissed as merely letting off steam. Even the prejudiced Malay *Mail* seems to have thought this, comparing the ‘unsporting savagery’ to Millwall at its worst. But there remains a strong sense of Malaya as a powder-keg and of the Malays’ ‘exquisite manners’ as all part of the Asiatic mask which (said the British) is always inscrutable and usually dangerous. When the First World War finally *did* come, things got even worse. There was, for instance, a rice crisis leading to a drive to make Malaya self-sufficient in foodstuffs. This put new

pressure on the Malay peasant economy, provoking angry fears of land shortage and damaging an economy already recently reeling from the effects of the rubber slump.

The negative side of the Malayan canvas should never encourage us to see things too simply. We should not, that is, descend from the picture to the diagram. It is true that hospitals in Kuala Lumpur and beyond were often filthy and that there were numerous public health crises. But, there again, both in schooling and health there were some genuine attempts to build bridges. In 1905 in Singapore the King Edward VII College of Medicine was established as the *Straits and Federated Malay States Government Medical School*. Renamed the *King Edward VII Medical School* in 1913, and the *King Edward VII College of Medicine* in 1921, this in itself showed an awareness of the need for change.

Such developments as the above were undoubtedly positive. True, conditions took a long time to improve. True, there were no overnight successes. But at least things were getting better. In the early 19th century medical services had catered to a small segment. They had been confined mainly to British officials and soldiers, European merchants and seamen, sepoy and the local police. At this time the local population tended to seek medical assistance from practitioners of traditional medicine. There was no thought of equality of service.

The change came with the growth of the Straits Settlements. It was now recognised that there was a need to improve medical services for the local

population. In 1889, Principal Civil Medical Officer Dr. Max Simon attempted to establish a medical school to train qualified practitioners. This failed for lack of candidates but in September 1904, the tide turned. A businessman and philanthropist called Tan Jiak Kim petitioned the government for the establishment of a medical school. The government agreed. They accepted the petition on the condition that the Chinese community raise funding to a minimum of \$71,000.

The above is one sign that not all in Malayan race relations was gloomy. The Chinese and non-European communities responded with enthusiasm. Between them, they raised over \$87,000 for the school, Tan contributing \$12,000. This led on 28th September 1905 to an official opening by the Governor John Anderson. In 1911, there was further development. At about the time of Ethel's trial, the so-called Tan Teck Guan Building was being erected as a useful and elegant addition to the establishment.

iii.

We should not, then, claim too much for the Proudlock case. It is not a paradigm for all that was wrong with Malaya. But it does, I think, focus many of the tensions, the fears and the strains, both in one outpost and in international relations generally. My own approach is certainly to suggest this aspect. I even introduce Robespierre to remind us of the ever-present possibility of revolution. This is not as far-fetched as it sounds. According to Richard Curle, who knew the situation at first hand, the

British in Malaya so isolated themselves that they reminded him of ‘the imprisoned aristocrats of the French Revolution’ (*8).

The self-isolation of the British was probably less in Malaya than India. But it certainly had its effects. Such a deliberate fencing off – intended to keep them pure, respected and remote from native contamination – also helps to explain why any Eurasian blood in Ethel would be viewed with such disdain. The odd thing is that there was simultaneously a lot of blending. As we have seen, British men frequently kept native mistresses and some certainly produced mixed-blood offspring. Often these were rejected. Often too the women were seen purely (an ironic word) as chattels. They were an accoutrement to living, a compensation for hardships, and, above all, a physical relaxation and convenience.

Ethel’s own case has a further dimension which in the play gets only cursory coverage. This is her gynaecological problems which were addressed in court but not given press publication. One wonders whether these caused sexual difficulties within the marriage. They were certainly used by the defence to protect her from aspersions of voluntary extra-marital indulgence. Did William Proudlock fail to find full sexual satisfaction with Ethel? Or was the problem rather that he felt trapped into marriage through the pressure of her pre-marital pregnancy?

Whatever the truth of the above, the Proudlock case is certainly more than simply a case-study of marital breakdown. But how do I treat it, what have I changed, and what resources enabled me to write about it dramatically in the first place?

The first thing to say is that it is the sources which affect much of the treatment. At the time of writing, the fullest account of the case is *Murder on the Verandah* by Eric Lawlor. This was tremendously useful to me but it does make rather biased reading. Had I swallowed it whole, I would have seen almost no light in the Malayan tunnel. Even as it is, I imbibed far more criticism of the British and their systems than defence. This is not necessarily wrong. I can well believe that there were endless abuses and that the British were arrogant and often quite philistine. But it would have been nice to read an alternative – even perhaps to have had access to Dr. Cody's forthcoming thesis – to have achieved a more nuanced vision of events.

The fact that my main source is slanted does not mean that I kept entirely within its parameters. In my own version I try to obviate the negatives by presenting a more balanced view. The image of the jungle (contrasting but linked with the cave) is meant to suggest the infinite threads connecting all of us – all races, types, colours and creeds – and also the range of possibilities within every individual life-story. Flowers (mentioned throughout) are used partly to suggest those buds that do *not*

grow – that are nipped by early frost and, had they bloomed, might have made for a different outcome. At the same time, the river flowing endlessly in one direction reminds us that in all lives some elements (not least mortality) are fixed and inevitable.

The flower motif in the play partly accounts for the title *A Faithless Floréal*. Floréal – the month of flowers – was one of the re-named months instituted during the French Revolution. The fact that it started in April was a kind of bonus as many events in the play and its background have an April connection. Not only was it the month of Robespierre's birth. Ethel and William Proudlock married in April, Steward was murdered in April, the Sultan was besieged in April, and the same month saw French troops in large number entering Morocco. The Revolutionary re-naming of the months thus becomes a thematic link, while also relating to my consideration of the power and limitations of labels – a point also examined by E.M. Forster in *A Passage to India* through his treatment of Adela Quested.

The point about labels is that they cannot actually change an essence but they can change our view of it. Whether Ethel was or was not Eurasian is perhaps less important than whether she was thought to be so. The plain fact is that we are all to some extent at the mercy of our genetic inheritance. The raven does not hatch a lark. Environment is a factor but it does not obliterate the importance of the genes.

The personal history of Ethel Proudlock continues to fascinate. But both the play and its sources are as much about a community as about an individual. The interest of Lawlor's book is largely sociological. It is about misfits, outsiders, and exploiters. At the same time, it does bring out the personal suffering of – for instance – those colonial wives who expect Malaya to be a continuation of a P. and O. cruise, finding it instead an endless series of monotonous rubber trees.

When Lawlor's book was published, reviews were not flattering. Despite the richness of the research, it was thought to be fatally one-sided. I myself found it interesting and well written. However, I must acknowledge some of the flaws, if only to indicate what in the play I was trying to counteract – what in a sense I was trying to convey by my own rather different approach.

The main trend of the reviews is to dismiss the work as a caricature. But it does acknowledge the case as significant. A lower-middle-class anticipation of the Lord Erroll murder, the Proudlock affair 'was the great *cause célèbre* of British rule in Malaya, and as such was taken over wholesale by Somerset Maugham in *The Letter*'. This is the view of Frank McLynn in the *New Statesman* (March 12th, 1999) and in many ways he is right. Though Maugham changed names to protect the innocent (and indeed the guilty), the essence is the same. A woman commits manslaughter, claims she was defending her honour, but is then found to have murdered her lover when he announced he was leaving her.

As in the Happy Valley case in Kenya, ‘reputations are destroyed, individuals ostracised, appearance is preferred to reality and, most importantly, the credibility of the British ruling élite put on the line’.

McLynn’s review is in many ways par for the course. He admits that the story is interesting and that Lawlor tells it in a lively and readable way. However, he says, the book has serious flaws. In the first place, the story is a relatively straightforward one, and to plump out the volume the author turns the case into an excuse for a mini-social history of British Malaya, ‘which stretches beyond the requirements of contextualisation’. Secondly, having stretched his material in one direction, he (Lawlor) then distorts it in another, tendentiously arguing that the Proudlock case was the defining moment of the British in Malaya. It was (he claims) ‘the beginning of a downward path that culminated in the humiliation of the colonial rulers by the Japanese in 1941’. McLynn’s contention is that Lawlor nowhere makes out this case. In any event, it is contradicted by his assertion that the ruling élite put Ethel Proudlock on trial precisely because she was Eurasian – that she was in fact a sacrificial scapegoat *pour encourager les autres*.

The idea of Ethel as scapegoat seems to imply that the British had two aims. One was to warn against racial intermingling and the other to aim at damage-limitation. Included here is the idea that to have brought to trial a *genuine* memsahib on such charges might have destroyed British credibility with the natives. This last idea does not fully convince me and I have already expressed my misgivings.

There is (to me) another weak link in the chain – namely, that I fail to see any direct connection with later humiliation by the Japanese. For this reason I do not take my own play-version beyond the approach to the First World War. The only exception is in detailing the eventual individual fates of the main protagonists. Actually this is an area Mc.Lynn himself gets wrong. He asserts that William Proudlock ‘appears to have died in the [American] Midwest’. Actually he perished in Argentina, the plaque commemorating him having been turned up in my original research.

My decision to omit reference to the post-First World War period was only part of the change. I also, as already stated, tried to give a more rounded picture of what actually went on. This should at any rate suit some of the on-line reviewers who are often vitriolic in their contempt. A typical one refers to ‘an extraordinarily biased piece of speculative history that says more about what the author wants the past to be rather than what it probably was’. This, says the writer, ‘is tendentious stuff indeed and should not be classified as history in any shape or form’. In this nameless writer’s opinion, ‘If anyone is interested in the British in Malaya, a far more reliable and scholarly work is Margaret Shennan's "Out in the Midday Sun’.

The charge of bias is made by a number of reviewers. One (on line, by *hkvicky*) tell us that the story starts off well, albeit with a rather lacklustre account of an intriguing murder, but that the author then goes off on a rant against colonialism and the British, whereupon ‘the book becomes almost unreadable’. This particular reviewer apparently grew up in the

colonies and gets ‘fed up with inaccurate portrayals of colonial life’. Her father was an academic and her mother a teacher. Both ‘gave back’ to the community and she herself went to a Hong Kong multi-cultural school where most of her friends were Indian or Chinese.

There is no doubt that colonial systems varied and that there was plenty of good (and indeed philanthropic) practice as well as abuse and corruption. But Eric Lawlor is not describing Empire as a whole. He is dealing with one part of it. He also makes clear that Malaya was hardly the jewel in Britain’s imperial crown. For some years ‘Westminster did not care to become embroiled in Malaya’s Byzantine politics’. Nor – till various crashes - was it worried about economic interests. As long as London controlled the Straits of Malacca – crucial if it were to protect India and safeguard trade-routes to China – it had comparatively little need of Malaya.

Eventually of course all this changed. For decades investors in the Straits Settlements had complained to Britain that she was failing to protect their interests. They had, they said, invested large sums in Malaya’s tin-mines and, if Britain would not protect them, then Germany or Russia might. This explains why in 1874 the government reversed its policy, making protectorates of Perak, Selangor, Sungei Ujong and Pahang. Later this rule was extended to embrace the four northern states of Kelantan, Trengganu, Kedah and Perlis.

In the play I do not go into all these ramifications but I do make clear that even under the new system there was still scope for native involvement. True, Britain was the ultimate arbiter but Malaya's traditional rulers enjoyed more input than Lawlor admits. The official position was that each state had a Resident – a senior civil servant – who advised the Sultan. Obviously some Residents were high-handed but men like Sir Henry Conway Belfield (who in Africa was to champion native land-rights) certainly heeded the Sultans.

It may seem perverse that, having diluted the criticisms, I should then suggest that revolution or at least uprising was always possible. But I think both positions are tenable. Whatever the good-will of some of our colonial administrators, there were certainly many abuses. There was also 'exemplary' brutality. In 1915 farmers in Kelantan, protesting against a land-tax, torched European bungalows and looted the home of a district officer. The result was that the ringleader was not only killed but had his body suspended by the feet from a lamp-post. Nor were the British averse to short-sharp-shock treatment. When in 1875 Malays assassinated the first Resident of Perak, the British mounted a punitive expedition which left scores of people dead.

Not everyone will agree with my contention that revolution was at least possible. It is Eric Lawlor's belief that British rule was never seriously challenged. Britain, he thinks, was the *force majeure*, justice was limited, and the Sultans (though they might prevaricate) ultimately did as they were told. I only half believe this. It is true that there were no really long-lasting outbreaks. Most Malays lived in small villages along the coasts

and were pragmatic enough to know that they were no match for the Royal Navy whose gunboats patrolled the waterways and whose warships kept watch at sea. But, there again, it does not take much tinder to start a blaze. To' Janggut (the rebel-leader in Kelantan) would not rest, he said, until every white man had been driven from the state. The British must be expelled. That such an event never happened is significant but not conclusive. History is littered with revolution which began almost by accident or succeeded beyond the wildest dreams of their initiators.

It is worth here admitting that my own interest in the politics of revolution may have coloured my approach in the play. Prior to settling on the Proudlocks as a subject, I had intended to write a piece about Camille Desmoulins, with Robespierre as a significant character. This never materialised but I remain fascinated by the way rebel movements can gain their own momentum, hardening attitudes, increasing the stakes, and eventually often embroiling the initiators in their own destructive mechanisms. In the present play I originally included much more material about the onward sweep of protest movements, and the way attitudes on all sides can harden. Later, wishing to stress the element of the random, I changed the emphasis. Increasingly I wished to suggest a counter-flow of other possibilities and the complexity within each and every one of us.

The complexities within identity help to explain another feature of the play – namely, the threefold presentation of William Proudlock. At one point I even had four versions, but I reduced it to three, linking this with the frequent implication of the number three as associated with a fate-

force. There are three Moirai, three Parcae, three Norns and (in Shakespeare) three witches. Another link is with *The Merchant of Venice* and its plot of the three caskets. Broadly my aim was to have a good William (gold), a medium William (silver) and a bad William (lead).

The basically good William is William Number One. The mainly bad one is Number Two. Number Three is intermediate having both aspects, but tending, under pressure, to become more like Number Two. All are of course possible facets of a single personality separated out into three embodiments.

This still leaves the question of why the various aspects of William Proudlock need to be presented by more than one actor. Partly it is a matter of his own complications. This was a man who, to me, embodied a whole range of diverse and sometimes contradictory characteristics. He was admirable and unpleasant, worthy and unworthy, nobly supportive and obsessively self-centred. By separating these out I could focus them more sharply. I am hardly the first to divide a character psychologically into more than one component. Other examples are Jekyll and Hyde, *Ruddygore's* Sir Ruthven and Robin Oakapple, and the Garth of *Philadelphia, Here I Come*. Nonetheless, I hope I have bordered on originality in having three shades of character, each being distinct while still partaking of aspects of the other two.

Variations on character are, I hope, aided by other enriching devices. One of these is the use of a certain symbolic strand. Flowers have been

mentioned, and lamps and lights might be. Perhaps here I was subconsciously influenced by Sir Edward Grey's famous reference to the lamps going out all over Europe. Perhaps I was influenced by the lamps and lights symbolism in *A Passage to India*. At any rate, I did try to include patterns of light and dark and reference to illumination and obscurity. Clearly the British wished to keep William Proudlock's accusations away from the illumination of newspaper coverage. Clearly too there are *unclear* – probably shady - aspects in Ethel's past and in the precise relations between her and Steward, and the English and the Chinese characters.

The main symbolic thrust, however, concerns none of the above. It lies in the use of the jungle as opposed to the cave. The latter represents the mind of the creator and also possibly the minds of all those into whose consciousness William Proudlock happens to enter. It is a dark womb from which will emerge all kinds of possibilities suggested by the myriad growths of the jungle. Originally I included long passages about jungle growths and waxed lyrical in their poetic description. This, however, held up the action and had to be jettisoned.

Two other points are worth noting. The first is my use of musical allusion. Ethel, it is well known, appeared as First Bridesmaid in *Trial by Jury* and enjoyed singing extracts from *The Pirates of Penzance*. Her husband too liked Gilbert and Sullivan and was a good pianist with a side-interest in English folk song. I use all this in the course of the drama,

including some wry semi-quotations from *The Pirates* (e.g. in references to beautiful blue sky, terrible stories, and poor wandering ones). There are also some allusions to *H.M.S. Pinafore* (‘I am in reasonable health’), *Trial by Jury* (e.g. references to ‘all the legal furies’ and a ‘good job’), *Patience* (‘ridiculous preposterous’) and *The Mikado*. The latter applies both in direct quotation from Ethel and in sly references such as the ‘pretty teeth, nice hair’ remark which originally applied to Yum-Yum.

It is of course ironic that Ethel, having (as she would put it) starred in *Trial by Jury*, should end up on trial, in a system where no jury participation was allowed. But there is yet more that is of interest. In real life, Ethel played Melodia (a shepherdess) in *The Arcagettes*. This (significantly, I think) is an anti-suffragist burlesque. In 1910 it was performed in Kuala Lumpur on three separate occasions, all three being reviewed in the *Malay Mail*, which suggests that theatrical treats were something of a rarity. In the first review Ethel was picked out from among the chorus. All looked ‘delightful’, wearing dresses of similar design in varied colourings ‘with hats to match’ but only Ethel is highlighted : ‘Mrs. Proudlock wore a pink skirt with a bodice of green and a design of pink roses’.

The emphasis on Ethel suggests that she enjoyed the limelight and took trouble to stand out from the ranks. In terms of the play it encouraged me to include a minor *motif* of clothing. This is not entirely fortuitous. At the trial much was made of the pale green tea-gown in which Ethel received William Steward on the fatal night, with Justice Sercombe-Smith becoming almost obsessed by its low-cut nature. What was her purpose,

he asked, in putting on such a gown? Was it in order to look beautiful and hence enticing? Ethel's insistence was that she simply wished to remain cool. Nonetheless, there was considerable innuendo about why she should be wearing such a provocative garment.

It is important, I think, not to exaggerate Ethel's musical talents. If she is mentioned in one review of *The Arcagettes*, she fails to appear in the others. This is despite the fact that other ladies rise almost to star billing : Mrs. Ebdon, for instance, 'was the life and soul of the chorus'. Another young lady 'showed distinct promise', while a third was deemed outstanding. All this may seem very small fry but the fact remains that the audience at the last performance (on April 30th) included Sir John Anderson, the British High Commissioner. On this occasion, even the lively Mrs. Ebdon failed to charm : 'It is not for our humble pen to criticise the chorus' (says the *Mail*). 'We will merely say that they all worked with a will'. Perhaps the reviewer had by now seen the show so many times that he was getting tired of it.

The éclat caused by a fairly feeble piece like *The Arcagettes* is itself significant. It suggests something of the self-imposed isolation of the expatriate community, their cultural philistinism and the limitations of their environment. In *A Passage to India* the British club at least puts on *The Yeomen of The Guard*, though in the film version this is downgraded, morphing into a frothy 20's musical with an obligatory song-and-dance number. Clearly by his own choice E.M. Forster had wished to suggest not so much jollity as a resolute Britishness. In Kuala Lumpur, culture is

further demeaned but attendances boom. At its last performance (perhaps aided by the Governor's presence) *The Arcagettes* achieved packed houses. Word of the show had spread beyond K.L., and planters and miners flocked to it, including, it seems, William Steward.

It would not be worth detailing all this, did it not itself show something of the ambience of the play. The British imposes boundaries. They have no time for radical movements, they mock suffragettes, and their entertainments hark back to the Old Country. Actually there is a further significance for it has been suggested that Ethel's comparative going to ground between *The Arcagettes* and *Trial by Jury* (eleven months later) marks the time of her 'passionate affaire' with William Steward. It is even possible that seeing her looking pretty as Melodia was the spark to ignite it. Whatever the truth (and apart from Gilbert and Sullivan and the occasional *Greensleeves*) the British cultural scene remained relatively thin. When Madame Pavlova came to Kuala Lumpur her appearances had to be cancelled, almost certainly through lack of expatriate interest.

The above references indicate another factor. On the whole, as regards the little details the play can be taken as broadly accurate. To take a few examples, Dr. MacIntyre really was injured when a car rammed his rickshaw, Ethel really did sing *Poor Wandering One*, the Sultan really was something of a gourmet, and all William Proudlock's public roles in the fire brigade and various sporting teams are accurately recorded. This is not to say that I do not sometimes give my own twist to real material. One example occurs in the scene where one of the three William Proudlocks utters veiled threats to Dr. MacIntyre. This is my own

invention, used to illustrate the potentially dangerous nature of this particular William's character.

The above brings me to a final point about fact and fiction, invention and reality. Broadly speaking, all the public figures I introduce really existed and occupied the government and administrative roles I assign to them. There are, however, some composites and some fictional figures. Kester Ferguson is invented, or at least derives from a number of journalists who really did report on the rubber crisis, interview Ethel Proudlock, and write about Kuala Lumpur life. Also invented is Walter Corrigan, though he is in many ways typical of the independent breed of outstation planters. I make him a homosexual to reinforce the idea that many of my characters are outsiders, some of them on several levels.

The theme of the outsider is one to which I am often drawn but in this play it seems particularly appropriate. All the expatriates by being out of their home environment fall into this category but so too do natives who try to cross the boundaries. As for Ethel, she is an outsider not just as a colonial lady but also because of the possibility of a Eurasian contamination. The working-class background of her husband also contributes, both he and William Steward being excluded from the higher echelons.

The last point does require a little calibration. Proudlock and Steward were not the only ones to go to Malaya in search of status, money and/or adventure. But the point is that through the murder case they became notorious. Proudlock's ostracism is seen in the fact that he was dismissed

from his post at the Victoria Institution. Alienated and alien, he then compounded the matter by his attacks on the British administration. For a naturally edgy man, this augmented his outsider status. In the enclosed world of Kuala Lumpur any attempt to subvert or challenge the status quo was bound to encourage a counter-movement towards repudiation and expulsion.

The truthfulness of the above applies also elsewhere. It fits, for instance, with the various rumours about alternative versions of the murder scenario. Mabel March really did suggest that Proudlock had recruited Steward to seduce Ethel, and an Indian night-watchman really did claim to have seen a fully dressed Englishman swimming across the Klang River, presumably after jealously killing his rival. Both the rumoured scenarios are in the play, and originally both (and others) were presented in flashback, bathed in a green (jungle) light. Later, partly for reasons of drama-length, I reduced the number. Even so, taken together, they add to the complex weave of what might have been, while still being rooted in stories circulating at the time.

Which brings me to the Tans, and here I have to admit to a fair degree of invention. In real life both Steward and Proudlock *did* have Chinese mistresses, and almost certainly it was jealousy on Ethel's part that caused her to murder her lover. But in a play one needs somewhat tighter connections. I therefore made the two Chinese women sisters and gave them a father working as a translator for the *Malay Mail*. This reinforces

the theme of intricate connections, the more so as I give one of the sisters a sub-plot with the partly fictitious Mr. Corrigan.

The identity of the two men's Chinese mistresses is in fact impossible to confirm. One strong rumour at the time was that Proudlock's mistress was the mother of one of his pupils. Other rumours stated that he had several mistresses, not to mention occasional dalliance with his masculine servants. What is true is that one Chinese mistress accused him of stealing her jewellery and that he was seen in possession of some diamonds for which he could not account. This detail suggests that the mistress was comparatively prosperous. It is of course possible that she herself had stolen the gems from a previous contact or employer. If so, however, she would have been far less likely to draw attention to her own losses.

My invention of much of the Chinese scenario is augmented by one other invented fiction – namely the illness of Mr. Shaw. In real life he did have bouts of ill-health but they did not time themselves so conveniently. My aim in giving him the illness was to show a man who undergoes something of a learning-curve as a result of a physical (and partly mental) collapse but who is edged back into line by the pressure of the Establishment. It also made a change to have an incapacitated man being interviewed rather than having yet more confrontations between the able-bodied.

The inventions and adaptations do then exist, but this does not negate most of the case's main facts. The libel trial for instance is accurately rendered and all the accusations and counter-accusations between

Proudlock and Detective Inspector Wyatt are based on written testimony. Also accurate is the history of the Victoria Institution and the African concerns of Sir Henry Belfield. As for Sir Edward Grey, his involvements – both personal and political – are fully testified. His love-life with Lady Pamela is well documented and the letter from Proudlock’s father is rendered almost verbatim.

This, then, is the play. It is, like Hilary Mantel’s *Wolf Hall*, a proposition. I am not saying that everything happened as I present it, or even that all the characters were exactly as I claim. Why should they be? C.J. Sanson has made clear that his version of Cromwell is nothing like Mantel’s yet he still admires her inventions. This, I think, is a sensible view. When one makes literature out of reality one is entitled to tweak. Not only can we never know the full truth of events. In addition, it is justifiable to adjust the facts in the interests of a good narrative line, suspense, contrast and all the other theatrical and novelistic virtues. When Robespierre reached the end of his short career, he was at an impasse. Returning were as tedious as go o’er, there were enemies on his tail, he was trapped in his own momentum. But a playwright is not like that. We can change our scenarios. There are many possible ways in which this play might otherwise have developed – many alternative flowers in the spray of the bunch here presented.

Richard Moore,
Killiecrankie, 2021,
Revised Bridge of Tilt, Blair Atholl,
July 10th, 2026.

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(*1) “The Trial of Mrs. Proudlock : Law, Government and Society in British Malaya, 1911”.

(*2) Lawlor, *Murder on the Verandah*, Page 74.

(*3) Ibid, Page 77.

(*4) Ibid, Page 76.

(*5) Ibid, Page 223.

(*6) Ibid, Page 221.

(*7) Ibid, Page 213.

(*8) Ibid, Page 99.

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