

A Slip in Time

by
T. James Belich

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CHARACTERS

DATCH HUDSON (M)	A private eye
DR. LANCE RICE (M)	A physicist
LENYA MARITZA (F)	A single English woman
BUTLER (M/F)	Duncan, Lenya's butler
CLARANCE MACDONALD (M)	A Scottish art collector
FLORENCE RAULI (F)	A Broadway actress
WILLIAM MACDONALD (M)	A cinematographer, Clarence's older brother
TELEGRAM DELIVERER (F)	A deliverer of telegrams
JEAN-LUC LEMAY (M)	A French painter
MARIE ARLIN (F)	An engineer
JACK ANDERSON (M)	A free-lance pilot
PHYSICIAN (M/F)	A medical doctor
SERGEANT ROBERT PARSON (M)	A police sergeant
OFFICER ROLAN (M/F)	A police officer

Total Roles: 14 (7 Male, 4 Female, 3 Male or Female)

Production History

A Slip in Time was first performed by the Willerby Methodist Drama Group in Kingston-upon-Hull, England on November 6th, 7th, and 8th, 1997. It was directed by Tym Huckin with the following cast:

DATCH HUDSON	Dave McCready
DR. LANCE RICE	Sean Wilson
LENYA MARITZA	Barbara Flowers
BUTLER	Jeremy Cook
CLARANCE MACDONALD	Alun Friend
FLORENCE RAULI	Charlotte Walker
WILLIAM MACDONALD	Chris Dunnachie
TELEGRAM DELIVERER	Stuart Hickson
JEAN-LUC LEMAY	Tym Huckin
MARIE ARLIN	Anne Brabbs
JACK ANDERSON	Rob Watkinson
PHYSICIAN	Andy Wharam
SERGEANT ROBERT PARSON	Dave Wescott
OFFICER ROLAN	Barry Cowles

A Slip in Time has since been performed by:

The Bayside Youth Theatre Ensemble in Mordialloc, Australia on November 29th, 30th, and 31st, 1997. It was directed by George Iliakis.

Van Buren High School in Van Buren, Arkansas on April 6th and 7th, 2001. It was directed by Pamela Bibbs.

Te Awamutu College at the Little Theatre in Te Awamutu, New Zealand on October 16th, 17th, and 18th, 2001. It was directed by Patrick Jansen.

Granger High School in Granger, Washington on May 21st and 22nd, 2003. It was directed by Bill Roulston.

Whiteoak High School in Mowrystown, Ohio on April 7th, 8th, and 9th, 2006. It was directed by Sarah Lomske.

PROLOGUE

(The lights come up on a road which leads across the stage. The sound of rain and thunder is heard, and occasionally flashes of light illuminate the otherwise dimly lit stage. DETECTIVE DATCH HUDSON enters wearing a hat and trench coat. He carries an umbrella and slowly walks across the stage.)

HUDSON: It was a dark and stormy night, and the rain was pouring down. But that's nothing new, this is Seattle, it rains all the time here. The fact that I was heading home at this hour, the moon already high in the nighttime sky, wasn't new either. It had been a long day. I had just finished up a tough case and was looking forward to a peaceful day tomorrow with a cup of coffee and a good book. I soon found out that wasn't to be, but then that wouldn't be new either. I shielded myself with my umbrella, the one with the handle carved in the shape of a wolf. A past client gave it to me, one whose case I had solved and knew how much it rained. Of course, clients are always grateful when I solve their case, today's had been as well. I pondered this as the rain dripped from my hat and added to the puddle on the ground. Today had been another typical day, routine, if you could use that word to describe the life of a private eye, which I would consider debatable. Routine for me, anyway, or so I thought. Monotony might not be my middle name, but I knew what to expect from life. A challenging case, a few bullets aimed my way, and a wet trench coat. Just the way I liked it. No, I thought, the same pattern again, only with a few different colors. I thought I knew what to expect, but that would soon change. Something new was about to happen that would break the pattern forever. *(Pause)* He appeared seemingly out of nowhere, not unusual for a dark and stormy night, but the flash of light let me know that "out of nowhere" was literally where he came from. *(By this time HUDSON is almost completely across the stage. There is a large flash, such as that from a flashpot. After the flash we see that a second man has appeared on the road near HUDSON. The second man does not see HUDSON.)* He fell onto the road with a bewildered look, one I've seen before. It was the look of a man with a mystery to solve. The look of a man who needed a private eye. I looked down the road to where I lived. The coffee would have to wait. *(The lights fade to black.)*

ACT 1

SCENE 1

(Fade up onto the living room of a house. It is the following evening. The room appears to be set for a small party. LENYA MARITZA, an English woman, enters, tidying things up a bit.)

LENYA: Jeeves! *(The BUTLER enters from the kitchen.)*

BUTLER: Duncan, Madame.

LENYA: *(Still tidying up)* Yes, of course. Could you make sure that Maurice has all the appetizers ready?

BUTLER: Of course, Madame. *(He exits into the kitchen.)*

LENYA: *(To herself)* This will be such fun! It's been so long since I've thrown a party, and so long since we've all been together. Lance does have such good ideas. I just hope that everyone... *(She is interrupted by a knock at the door. She answers it, and opens the door to reveal CLARANCE MACDONALD, a Scottish art collector.)*

CLARANCE: *(With Scottish accent)* Good evening, Lenya!

LENYA: Good evening, Clarence! Do come in. *(CLARANCE enters and removes his coat. LENYA takes it and sets it on a nearby coat rack.)*

CLARANCE: Thank you.

LENYA: Make yourself comfortable, I need to go check on a few things.

(She goes into the kitchen while CLARANCE examines a painting on the wall opposite the kitchen door. After a few moments there is a knock at the door. CLARANCE, engrossed in the painting, does not respond. After a few moments there is another knock, louder this time, and CLARANCE looks around. Seeing no one else, he goes to answer the door. At the door is FLORENCE RAULI, an actress.)

CLARANCE: Lassie! *(They hug and FLORENCE enters the house.)*

FLORENCE: Clarence, it's been too long! *(She looks around.)* Where's our hostess?

CLARANCE: In the kitchen, checking on a few things. *(FLORENCE sets her coat on the coat rack.)*

FLORENCE: That Lenya, she always did have to do everything herself. Tsk! That's why she has a butler and a cook. *(CLARANCE goes back over to the painting.)*

CLARANCE: So I hear. Comes from having to manage everything herself for so long, I suppose. *(FLORENCE sits on the couch.)*

FLORENCE: I suppose. Though you'd think now, with this inheritance of hers, she'd take a little time to relax. *(FLORENCE looks around.)* This is a splendid house!

CLARANCE: Aye, and a fine choice of artwork too! *(FLORENCE looks over at the painting and laughs.)*

FLORENCE: You and your paintings, Clarence! I'll make a thespian of you yet. *(CLARANCE chuckles.)*

CLARANCE: You can try, lass, you can try. *(There is a pause as he continues to admire the painting and FLORENCE admires the decor. A few moments later LENYA enters carrying a tray of appetizers.)*

FLORENCE: Lenya! *(LENYA sets down the tray.)*

LENYA: Florence, so wonderful to see you again! *(FLORENCE stands and they hug.)*
How was your flight?

FLORENCE: Absolutely dreadful! New York to Seattle, non-stop, and you know how much I hate airplanes. *(She smiles.)* But it's good to be here.

LENYA: Can I get either of you anything to drink? Some tea or coffee perhaps?

FLORENCE: Some tea would be delightful, but let your butler get that! Sit down and relax for once. *(The two of them sit on the couch.)*

LENYA: You're right, dear, I just can't help myself. It's been years since we've all been together, and I want everything to be just right. *(She calls) Jeeves! (The BUTLER enters from the kitchen.)*

BUTLER: Duncan, Madame, Duncan.

LENYA: Oh yes, silly me. Duncan, Florence would like a cup of tea. What about you, Clarence? *(CLARANCE turns away from the painting.)*

CLARANCE: Aye? What's that?

LENYA: Tear yourself away from that painting and come have something to drink. *(CLARANCE crosses to the couch.)*

CLARANCE: All right. *(To the BUTLER)* A cup of coffee, two lumps please.

BUTLER: Very good, sir. *(To LENYA)* And you, Madame?

LENYA: A cup of tea for me please.

BUTLER: Right away, Madame. *(He exits and FLORENCE laughs.)*

FLORENCE: Jeeves! How very English of you, Lenya! Now what have you been up to in this rainy city of yours?

CLARANCE: Attending a few art shows from the looks of it.

LENYA: Goodness no! I hired a decorator to do all that. I don't quite have your refined taste in artwork. What style is this one, Clarence? *(There is a knock at the door.)* Let me get that. *(She stands, crosses to the front door, and opens it. CLARANCE's older brother, WILLIAM MACDONALD, a cinematographer, and DR. LANCE RICE enter. Both wear long coats and carry umbrellas. LANCE looks exactly like the second man in the prologue, only less haggard. They are, in fact, the same person.)* Will! Lance! Do come in! *(CLARANCE and FLORENCE turn and the five all greet each other with various "Hello"s and "Good evening"s as WILLIAM and LANCE remove their coats and set them on the coat rack.)*

CLARANCE: *(Grinning)* Good evening, Will. It seems you lost our bet, I beat you here.

WILLIAM: Aye, so you did. *(He gestures to LANCE)* The Dr.'s "superior" electric car died a few miles back. It took us awhile to flag down a taxi.

LANCE: How was I to know all this rain would short circuit the battery? I don't usually drive through hurricanes!

LENYA: You exaggerate, Lance! *(She looks out the window.)* It's not raining that hard.

LANCE: Oh? *(LANCE sits.)* Lenya, your front lawn looks like a swimming pool! *(FLORENCE sits.)*

FLORENCE: Lance, her front lawn is a swimming pool.

LANCE: Oh, well, that would explain that then.

WILLIAM: *(Dryly)* The brilliant Dr. and his astute powers of observation. *(Everyone laughs, and LANCE looks a bit sheepish.)*

LENYA: You're such a card, Lance! *(WILLIAM reaches into his pocket and pulls out a ten. He hands it to CLARANCE who pockets it.)*

WILLIAM: *(To LANCE)* That's the last time I bet on one of your inventions. *(LANCE shrugs.)*

LANCE: I warned you that the prototype still had some glitches to work out.

WILLIAM: Aye, like getting it to drive. *(All laugh again.)*

FLORENCE: *(To LANCE)* So what else have you been working on? Besides finding ways to deprive poor Will of his money?

LANCE: Well, I have a few other projects that I've been working on, nothing terribly exciting.

CLARANCE: Go ahead, tell us.

LENYA: Yes, do tell! We're all quite curious. *(Everyone listens to hear what LANCE has to say. As he is about to speak the BUTLER enters with the drinks.)*

BUTLER: Your drinks. *(He goes around and hands people their drinks.)*

LENYA: How thoughtless of me! *(To WILLIAM and LANCE)* I didn't offer either of you anything to drink!

LANCE: Nothing for me, thanks. But these appetizers look delicious. *(He samples one.)*

WILLIAM: I could use something to warm me up. *(To BUTLER)* Coffee. Cream, no sugar.

BUTLER: Very good, sir. *(He leaves.)*

LANCE: *(Munching)* This is a wonderful house, Lenya.

LENYA: Thank you, you must see the upstairs. You would love the library, Lance, my uncle was a great collector of books.

LANCE: Really, mind if I take a look?

LENYA: Not at all. *(LANCE and LENYA both stand.)* Here, let me show you. *(WILLIAM stands.)*

WILLIAM: I'll join you. *(The three exit up the stairs.)*

FLORENCE: That Lance. You have your paintings, Clarence, and he has his books. One can't take either of you away from them for very long.

CLARANCE: We all have our weak spots. You and the theatre, for example, Jack and flying. (FLORENCE *looks towards the door.*)

FLORENCE: Speaking of Jack, where can he be? And Marie? And Jean-Luc?

CLARANCE: The rain has slowed them down, that's all, they'll get here. (*There is a knock at the door.*) You see? That's them now. (*He answers the door. A TELEGRAM DELIVERER is there.*)

TELEGRAM DELIVERER: Telegram for Lenya Maritza.

CLARANCE: She's upstairs, I'll give it to her. (*He takes the telegram and the TELEGRAM DELIVERER exits. CLARANCE shuts the door, walks over to the stairs, and calls upstairs.*) Lenya!

LENYA: (*From upstairs*) Just a moment! (*She enters.*) Yes?

CLARANCE: A telegram just came for you. (*He hands her the telegram.*)

LENYA: Thank you, Clarence. A telegram, how odd! I didn't think anyone sent telegrams these days. (*She crosses to the couch and sits down. The other two sit on either side and look on, curious.*)

FLORENCE: What does it say? (LENYA *opens the telegram and reads it.*)

LENYA: "They say a stitch in time saves nine, but beware: A slip in time kills nine." (*There is an ominous pause.*) How very strange!

FLORENCE: What on earth does that mean? What's a "slip in time"?

CLARANCE: Who's it from, Lenya?

LENYA: It doesn't say, but what a disturbing message! And so cryptic!

FLORENCE: I wouldn't worry about it. Someone is probably just playing some sort of trick on you.

LENYA: Well, it's not a very funny one!

CLARANCE: Forget about it, lassie, it's probably nothing.

LENYA: You're right, I'm sure. It's just a little unsettling, that's all. (LENYA *tosses the telegram onto the table.*) Let's just forget about that horrid little message and enjoy ourselves. (They begin chatting and sipping their drinks. The lights dim on the house, but the action still continues.) Tell us about your last show, Florence...

(The lights come up on the road. HUDSON and LANCE enter. LANCE again appears as he did in the prologue. He should be able to easily switch between costumes and appearances. This LANCE will appear to be on the verge of a nervous breakdown, in contrast to the other LANCE who is calm and composed. HUDSON points to the house.)

HUDSON: Is this the one, Dr. Rice? (LANCE *nods.*)

LANCE: Yes, this is where it all happened. (He *shudders.*) All those bodies! And they blamed me! (He *buries his face in his hands.*) They were my friends, my friends...

HUDSON: Calm down, it's all right. The house looks peaceful enough.

LANCE: I told you, that's because it hasn't happened yet! At least, not for them.

HUDSON: (With *skepticism*) Or your other self? (LANCE *nods and then sees HUDSON's skeptical look.*)

LANCE: You don't believe me, do you, Mr. Hudson?

HUDSON: Of course I believe you, Dr. I just like to see these things for myself, you understand. Do you have any idea who might be responsible for framing you?

LANCE: I think it might have been one of the other guests.

HUDSON: One of the dead guests?

LANCE: No! One of the others must have survived, somehow. I don't know. The bodies kept disappearing, the police couldn't find them. I was the only one left.

HUDSON: I see. (HUDSON *looks at his watch.*) It's about 8 o'clock now, and the first murder will take place around...

LANCE: 8:10, that's only minutes from now! (Urgently) You must hurry, Detective! Don't let them die!

HUDSON: Don't worry, Dr., I'll take care of everything. Now, if there's really another one of you in that house, I'd best go in alone. Wait somewhere nearby, if I have any more questions I'll find you. (LANCE *nods.*)

LANCE: All right. Thank you, Detective.

HUDSON: When I solve your case, then you can thank me. (*LANCE exits as HUDSON walks slowly towards the house, thinking.*) Last night Dr. Rice and I had a long chat about his case, one which promises to be one of the most baffling and difficult of my career. He claimed to know that each guest in that house would be murdered this very night, except for him and one unknown other. According to his story, he would be framed for the murders, so he needed me to catch the real killer. A normal enough story, a normal enough case, except for his use of past tense. The unbelievable part was *how* he knew all this would happen, unless I could prevent it. Is he telling the truth? Or is this some sort of elaborate game in which I now play a part? As of yet, I didn't know. Just how could this scientist know of events to come? The only certainty I have is that the truth would all become clear, in time. (*HUDSON places special emphasis on the word "time," as if there's a hidden meaning. He continues to walk towards the house as the lights go out on the road and the lights come back up on the house.*)

LENYA: (*Laughing*) Really, Clarence, that is too much!

FLORENCE: Only you would do such a thing!

CLARANCE: (*Looking sheepish*) Well, the painting looked like an original Monet. (*There is a knock at the door. LENYA stands.*)

LENYA: That must be the others. (*She answers the door and HUDSON enters. HUDSON pulls out his badge and shows it to LENYA.*)

HUDSON: Evening ma'am. Datch Hudson, private eye. Are you Lenya Maritza?

LENYA: Why yes, I am. What can I do for you, Detective Hudson? (*HUDSON puts away his badge.*)

HUDSON: Miss Maritza, I'll get straight to the point: I have reason to believe that you and your guests are all in grave danger.

LENYA: Danger? Danger of what?

HUDSON: Of being murdered.

CLARANCE: What's that?

FLORENCE: That's crazy! Who would want to murder us?

LENYA: Mr. Hudson, surely you must be mistaken!

HUDSON: Perhaps, but I'm not willing to take that chance. *(He takes out a small notepad.)* I'd like to know the names and occupations of everyone expected to be here tonight. *(LENYA sits down again.)*

LENYA: Well, let's see, there's myself, Lenya Maritza, I run a small florist shop. *(HUDSON writes all this down and remains standing.)*

HUDSON: Which has earned you enough to buy this house?

LENYA: Goodness no! This house used to belong to my uncle. He left everything to me in his will. *(HUDSON nods.)*

HUDSON: I see, my condolences. *(To CLARANCE and FLORENCE)* And you two are?

FLORENCE: Florence Rauli, I'm an actress in New York.

CLARANCE: Clarence MacDonald, I own an art gallery in Glasgow, Scotland. *(HUDSON nods and turns back to LENYA.)*

HUDSON: And the other guests?

LENYA: There's also Clarence's brother, William MacDonald, a cinematographer, he's upstairs with Dr. Lance Rice...

HUDSON: Yes, I've heard of him, specializes in temporal mechanics I'm told.

LENYA: That's right. The other three guests haven't arrived yet. Jean-Luc LeMay, he's a painter, Marie Arlin, she's an engineer, and Jack Anderson, who is a free-lance pilot. *(HUDSON finishes writing.)*

HUDSON: ...free-lance pilot. *(He closes the notepad and puts it away.)* Would any of you know the time? *(FLORENCE looks at her watch.)*

FLORENCE: It's almost ten after eight.

HUDSON: Thank you. You say Monsieur LeMay hasn't arrived yet?

LENYA: That's right, but he should be here quite soon. *(There is a knock at the door.)* That should be him now. *(She answers the door. JEAN-LUC, MARIE, and JACK all enter.)* Good evening everyone! *(JEAN-LUC kisses LENYA on the cheek in the traditional French greeting.)*

JEAN-LUC: Bon soir, mon ami! *(There are further greetings back and forth as the three newcomers come in and remove their coats. As this is happening, WILLIAM and*

LANCE *enter*. When HUDSON sees LANCE, he looks mildly surprised as if he didn't really expect to see him there.)

LANCE: Bonjour, Jean-Luc!

JEAN-LUC: Bon soir, Lance! (LANCE walks over to JEAN-LUC and shakes his hand. LANCE's other hand is in his pocket. As they are shaking hands the lights go out. There are a number of surprised exclamations from the GUESTS.)

HUDSON: Please! Everyone remain calm and stay where you are! (After a few moments the lights go back on. JEAN-LUC is dead and has fallen into LANCE's arms. LANCE has a terrified look on his face and removes his hand from his pocket. Everyone sees the dead body and reacts accordingly.)

MARIE: Jean-Luc!

WILLIAM: Great Scott, he's dead!

LANCE: I didn't do it! (The BUTLER enters with WILLIAM's coffee. He drops the tray.)

BUTLER: Oh dear.

HUDSON: (To the audience as the lights fade.) Ever just have one of those days?

SCENE 2

(A light comes up on HUDSON who stands at the edge of the house. The seven GUESTS are all seated behind him. They are frozen in a tableau until HUDSON joins them and the lights come up. A PHYSICIAN is standing near the front door.)

HUDSON: *(To himself)* Dr. Rice's first "prediction" has come true. Jean-Luc LeMay was murdered at 8:10 PM on the night in question. Cause of death: poison. And, true to his word, Dr. Rice's "other self" is present. Based on this, I must now assume that the rest of the information he has given me will also be accurate. My job now is to prevent the deaths of the other guests, catch the murderer, and clear the name of Dr. Lance Rice. *(HUDSON steps back into the living room and talks with the PHYSICIAN. As the lights come up on the room, the action resumes. The GUESTS are all scattered around the room. MARIE is sitting in the middle of the couch, crying. FLORENCE and LENYA are on either side of her, trying to keep her calm. LANCE is sitting in a chair, a look of disbelief on his face. WILLIAM sits in another chair, quietly drinking a cup of coffee. CLARANCE is standing near LANCE's chair, quietly talking with him while also watching HUDSON and the PHYSICIAN anxiously. JACK leans against a wall, the only one who appears calm. JEAN-LUC's body has been removed.)*

LANCE: *(Softly)* He just fell into my hands...

CLARANCE: There, there, laddie, it's all right.

PHYSICIAN: There's no doubt about it, Mr. Hudson, death was caused by a highly concentrated toxin. He died almost immediately. An autopsy should shed some light on the exact substance used.

HUDSON: Any idea how the poison was administered? *(The PHYSICIAN shakes his head.)*

PHYSICIAN: No, but the autopsy should reveal more. I'll contact you here as soon as I learn anything further.

HUDSON: Thank you. *(The PHYSICIAN nods and leaves. The TELEGRAM DELIVERER arrives at the door just as the PHYSICIAN is leaving. HUDSON sees her.)* Yes, what is it?

TELEGRAM DELIVERER: I have a telegram for Lenya Maritza. *(HUDSON reaches for the telegram.)*

HUDSON: I'll take that. *(The TELEGRAM DELIVERER gives it to HUDSON and leaves. HUDSON opens the telegram and reads it.)* "The first of the nine has fallen, and before the dawn breaks the rest shall follow. You cannot run, you cannot hide."

(HUDSON *puzzles over the telegram for a moment before speaking to the GUESTS.*) Do any of you know what this might mean?

WILLIAM: Not a clue.

JACK: You got me, never was one for riddles.

HUDSON: What about the rest of you? (LENYA *looks up.*)

LENYA: What's that?

HUDSON: Do you know what this telegram might be about?

LENYA: Oh dear, not another telegram.

HUDSON: You've received another? Let me see it. (LENYA *picks up the telegram.*)

LENYA: Here it is, horrid thing! (HUDSON *takes it and reads it. After a few moments he looks up.*)

HUDSON: A slip in time kills nine... (LANCE *looks up.*)

LANCE: What?

HUDSON: This telegram, it says that a slip in time kills nine. (LANCE *looks horrified.*)

LANCE: Oh dear... (HUDSON *walks over to him.*)

HUDSON: What's that, Dr.? Do you know what these telegrams mean? (By now the GUESTS *are starting to pay more attention to what is going on.*)

LANCE: (*Quietly*) I've been working on a technology that loosens a particle in time, allowing it to be vibrated back in forth in time by small amounts. I've been studying the energy it gives off as a potential power source.

HUDSON: What connection does that have with the telegrams?

LANCE: I call the process a time slip. Or as the telegram more poetically puts it, a slip in time.

LENYA: But why on earth are those telegrams being sent to me?

MARIE: And why murder poor Jean-Luc?

CLARANCE: Aye, what did he do?

HUDSON: These telegrams indicate a connection between Dr. Rice's research and the murder of Monsieur LeMay. It's possible that whoever killed Monsieur LeMay is after Dr. Rice's research.

WILLIAM: Do you think whoever killed Jean-Luc may try and kill the rest of us?

LANCE: All to get my research? (HUDSON *nods.*)

HUDSON: It's possible. I admit that I am at a loss to explain why.

FLORENCE: That's crazy!

HUDSON: Is it?

LENYA: Oh dear, how frightfully upsetting. None of us are safe!

JACK: I'm sure the good detective will keep a watchful eye on the rest of us. The murderer won't have the element of surprise next time.

WILLIAM: There had better not be a next time.

HUDSON: I've already called for back-up, this house will soon be surrounded by police. No one will be able to get in or out.

JACK: Including us, I suppose.

HUDSON: Yes, I'm afraid you will all have to remain here for now.

FLORENCE: Why shouldn't we be allowed to leave? We're not safe here!

CLARANCE: Aye, here we're just sitting ducks!

LENYA: We're all going to be killed! (*The GUESTS all start echoing this with comments like "She's right!" or "We've got to get out of here!" HUDSON shouts over the hubbub.*)

HUDSON: All right, that's enough!!! (*Everyone is suddenly quiet.*) That's better. Now listen here, none of you are going to leave this house until the murderer has been caught. And I assure you, he will be. If the murderer is one of you, he won't be able to leave. If he's not, he'll be back to kill someone else. When he tries again, he will be caught. Is that very clear? (*Everyone answers "Yes," nods, or gives some other form of affirmation.*) Good. (*There is a knock at the door.*) I'll get that. (*HUDSON answers the door and SERGEANT ROBERT PARSON enters.*)

PARSON: Datch, good to see you. I just wish we didn't always meet under such unpleasant circumstances.

HUDSON: Same here, old friend. You've got the place surrounded? (PARSON *nods.*)

PARSON: A mouse won't be able to get in or out without us knowing it.

HUDSON: Keep a close watch, Bob. We don't want the murderer slipping through our fingers.

PARSON: I will. (PARSON *looks at the assembled crowd.*) You be careful, it looks like you have your hands full. (PARSON *is about to leave when HUDSON stops him.*)

HUDSON: Oh, my "informant" will be somewhere nearby, in case I need him. Make sure no one shoots first and asks questions later.

PARSON: Is he the one you mentioned earlier? (HUDSON *nods.*) All right then, we know who to watch for.

HUDSON: And send in someone in here to help me keep an eye on things, I can't be everywhere at once.

PARSON: Will do. (*He leaves.*)

JACK: What was that all about, Mr. Hudson? What informant?

HUDSON: A man contacted me last night to inform me that you would all be murdered here tonight.

MARIE: Your information didn't help you save Jean-Luc! What makes you think this mysterious informant will be any help now? Who is he?

HUDSON: I'm afraid I can't reveal that.

FLORENCE: Did he have any clue who would attempt to murder us?

HUDSON: He seemed to think that it was one of you.

CLARANCE: That's ridiculous! We've all been friends for years!

WILLIAM: Aye, why would we kill each other over Lance's research?

HUDSON: A new source of energy could be very valuable. It'd be worth a lot of money to the right people. I assume, Dr., that the project is still confidential.

LANCE: Well, yes, of course, until I can patent it.

HUDSON: So what if someone wanted to steal it, before you could patent it, and take all the credit and the profits. That's a possible motive for murder.

MARIE: All right, you have a possible motive, now what? Do we just wait here until the murderer tries again?

FLORENCE: Yes, what sort of a plan is that?

WILLIAM: This is insane, I'm leaving! I'm not going to sit around and wait to be killed! *(He gets up and starts to leave.)*

HUDSON: Mr. MacDonald, hold it right there! *(HUDSON moves to stop WILLIAM.)*

JACK: Will, don't be a fool!

WILLIAM: Out of my way! *(He shoves HUDSON aside just as OFFICER ROLAN enters.)*

HUDSON: Stop him! *(HUDSON and ROLAN restrain WILLIAM and forcibly sit him back down.)* You're all staying right here. Everyone, just relax. This is a party, enjoy yourselves. *(To LENYA)* Perhaps some dinner might help?

LENYA: Perhaps. *(Calling)* Jeeves... Duncan, whatever your name is! *(The BUTLER enters.)*

BUTLER: Duncan.

LENYA: Yes, Duncan, tell Maurice that we're ready for dinner.

BUTLER: At once, Madame. *(He exits, LENYA gets up to follow.)*

LENYA: Come along everyone.

HUDSON: I'll be questioning each of you in turn. *(To WILLIAM)* Mr. MacDonald, I'd like to speak with you first. *(LENYA exits into the kitchen followed by the other GUESTS, except for WILLIAM.)* Officer Rolan, keep an eye on things in there.

ROLAN: Certainly, Detective. *(He follows the others into the kitchen. After everyone else has left, HUDSON surveys the room for a short time while WILLIAM sits. There is absolute silence.)*

HUDSON: That was a very suspicious action, attempting to escape like that.

WILLIAM: Aye.

HUDSON: One might think you were trying to get away because you're guilty.

WILLIAM: I have no need for Lance's research. It's a poor motive for killing Jean-Luc anyway.

HUDSON: Just how long have you known Dr. Rice?

WILLIAM: A long time, we met in college. We took a few classes together.

HUDSON: I see. So have you and Dr. Rice always been on good terms?

WILLIAM: *(Hesitantly)* Aye, pretty much.

HUDSON: Pretty much? Was there ever a time when you didn't get along? Any major disagreements between the two of you? *(WILLIAM remains silent.)* Surely, in all this time, something happened between you two.

WILLIAM: Once, many years ago.

HUDSON: Go on, Mr. MacDonald.

WILLIAM: Lance called me about some project he was starting. My film career was doing well, and he needed funding.

HUDSON: He wanted you to provide the financial backing for his research. *(WILLIAM nods.)*

WILLIAM: He said that if his idea worked, it could potentially be very valuable. But it sounded risky. A number of universities had already turned down his request for a research grant. So I told him that I couldn't give him any financial assistance. He tried to change my mind, but in the end I still said no and he hung up, very angry. I had never seen him like that before. It was months before we spoke again.

HUDSON: Do you know what the research was about?

WILLIAM: No, he was very secretive on that point. It could have been the beginnings of his time slip research for all I know.

HUDSON: Really? How interesting. It seems that the project you rejected has become one of great value, perhaps one worth killing for.

WILLIAM: One might say that. *(Beat)*

HUDSON: Now, where exactly were you standing when the lights went out, just before Monsieur LeMay was killed. (*WILLIAM walks to the bottom of the stairway.*)

WILLIAM: Right here, Lance and I had just come downstairs. The lights went out moments later. (*HUDSON studies the position, relating it to where JEAN-LUC had been standing.*)

HUDSON: Yes, I see.

WILLIAM: We're all old friends here, Detective, good friends. I didn't kill Jean-Luc and I seriously doubt that anyone here did.

HUDSON: Whether or not you're correct on that point remains to be seen, Mr. MacDonald. Just how well did you know Monsieur LeMay?

WILLIAM: Fairly well, though not as well as Marie did, the two of them were very close. I've never had any disagreements with Jean-Luc. He was a friendly sort, never had an enemy at all, as far as I could tell.

HUDSON: Thank you, Mr. MacDonald, that'll be all. Tell Miss Arlin that I'd like to speak with her next.

WILLIAM: All right. (*He gets up and goes into the kitchen. HUDSON speaks to himself, thinking.*)

HUDSON: A suspicious testimony, part of me said I had found the motive I was looking for, as well as the opportunity. But I had the feeling that I only possessed the first piece of this very intriguing puzzle. (*MARIE enters.*) Hello, Miss Arlin.

MARIE: Hello, Detective. I don't mean to seem rude, but please ask what you have to and let's get this over with.

HUDSON: Are you in a hurry?

MARIE: No, it's just that I don't want to talk about Jean-Luc right now.

HUDSON: I understand that, but right now it's important that you answer a few questions, including some about Monsieur LeMay. (*MARIE nods silently.*) Let's start with how long you knew him.

MARIE: For many years, almost all my life. We've known... we knew each other back in high school. He was a foreign exchange student.

HUDSON: I understand the two of you were close.

MARIE: Very, I knew him better than anyone else here. Why did it have to be him?

HUDSON: I intend to find that out. Were there ever any disagreements between the two of you?

MARIE: No, never.

HUDSON: Are you sure?

MARIE: Yes I'm sure! I don't forget things like that.

HUDSON: All right then, what about Dr. Rice? Was there ever a time when the two of you were not on the best of terms?

MARIE: If I wanted to get back at Lance for anything, why on earth would I kill my best friend to do it?

HUDSON: A good question, one to which I don't have a good answer. I'm sure that everyone here has reasons why they wouldn't kill Monsieur LeMay, but that doesn't alter the fact that someone did. At this point I'm not discounting any possibility. However, all this does not answer my original question: Was there ever a time when you and Dr. Rice did not get along? *(MARIE says nothing.)* Was there, Miss Arlin?

MARIE: *(Softly)* Please don't ask me that Detective.

HUDSON: I'm afraid I have to. I need to know any possible motives that you might have. *(MARIE starts crying.)*

MARIE: No, I can't tell you, I just can't!

HUDSON: What can't you tell me? *(Louder)* What are you hiding?

MARIE: You'll arrest me!

HUDSON: *(Sharply)* I can arrest you for withholding information pertinent to this case.

MARIE: I don't care! What's done is done. I'm not going to tell you my life's story just to satisfy your curiosity! Jean-Luc is dead! I didn't kill him! None of us did! Please, just go away! *(FLORENCE enters from the kitchen.)*

FLORENCE: What's all the racket out here? *(She sees MARIE.)* Marie! *(To HUDSON.)* Can't you leave her alone?

HUDSON: This is a murder investigation, leaving you alone is not in my job description. *(To MARIE.)* We can continue this later, Miss Arlin. *(MARIE nods and quickly exits.)* As long as you're here, Miss Rauli, I'd like to speak with you next. Please, sit down. *(FLORENCE sits.)*

FLORENCE: *(Formally)* I want you to know that I have no need for any of Lance's gadgets or any reason to kill Jean-Luc over any of them.

HUDSON: I suppose you expect me to leave it at that and let you go, hm?

FLORENCE: No, not really.

HUDSON: Well then, did you have any other reason for wanting Monsieur LeMay dead?

FLORENCE: Of course not, don't be absurd. Why would any of us want him dead?

HUDSON: That's what I intend to find out.

FLORENCE: You seem so sure that one of us is the killer, why? Anyone could have poisoned him. The murderer didn't have to be in the same room as Jean-Luc when he died.

HUDSON: That's a very interesting hypothesis, especially when the physician declared his death to be instantaneous. How else would Monsieur LeMay have been poisoned by such a potent toxin?

FLORENCE: I'm sure there are a number of ways, is it now my job to think of them all? I thought that was your department.

HUDSON: Touché, Miss Rauli.

FLORENCE: The point is that the murderer need not be one of us.

HUDSON: Perhaps. *(Pause)* Now, speaking of people's jobs, what exactly do you do for a living?

FLORENCE: I told you, I'm an actress.

HUDSON: Has that always been your occupation?

FLORENCE: Not always. I had a number of odd jobs before I got my break in the theatre. *(HUDSON pulls out some papers.)* What are those?

HUDSON: Thanks to my informant, I had the names and occupations of everyone here before I arrived. *(FLORENCE looks shocked.)*

FLORENCE: What? But you asked for that information shortly after you arrived. *(With realization)* You deceived us!

HUDSON: Yes, I did. It's always interesting to see what details people leave out. *(He flips through the papers.)* Take yourself, for instance. It seems that you were once an agent for the FBI. *(FLORENCE tries to grab the papers.)*

FLORENCE: Where did you get those?

HUDSON: I have my sources. *(He looks through the papers.)* Now this is interesting, you were once on the trail of a suspected spy: Jean-Luc LeMay. *(He stops reading and looks at FLORENCE.)* Now, do we keep playing this game, or do you tell me what I want to know? *(FLORENCE glares at HUDSON and then begins.)*

FLORENCE: Yes, I used to be an FBI agent. During the Cold War I was assigned to investigate Jean-Luc. The government suspected him of selling technological secrets to the Soviet Union. Since we were good friends tracking him was a simple matter. As far as I know, he never suspected that I was on his trail.

HUDSON: And were you prepared to turn your "friend" over to the government if he was indeed a Soviet spy?

FLORENCE: If I had to, it was my duty.

HUDSON: So what happened? According to my sources Monsieur LeMay was never arrested for espionage.

FLORENCE: No. The FBI never had any evidence against him, getting that was my job. One night I searched his apartment, but all I found was a pile of burnt papers in the fireplace, presumably the evidence I needed. *(Pause)* The FBI assumed I was trying to cover up for my friend, and I was fired.

HUDSON: That incident must have left you rather bitter towards Monsieur LeMay.

FLORENCE: Yes, a little, but not enough to kill him over it. Besides, that incident doesn't have anything to do with Lance's research, now does it?

HUDSON: Maybe it does, maybe it doesn't, maybe multiple motives are at work here. You said that you had no need for any of Dr. Rice's "gadgets," and that may be true, but perhaps those you once worked for do.

FLORENCE: What are you suggesting? *(HUDSON flips through a few more papers.)*

HUDSON: That the FBI wanted Dr. Rice's research, and wanted you to get it.

FLORENCE: That's insane! (FLORENCE *pauses.*) But true. The FBI has offered to give me my job back if I can obtain Lance's research.

HUDSON: Obtain, as in steal? (FLORENCE *nods.* HUDSON *whistles.*) And the FBI is sanctioning this?

FLORENCE: Not officially, of course. The FBI as a whole doesn't know about this, only those who made me the offer. (She looks at HUDSON.) I realize how this looks.

HUDSON: It looks like a motive for murder. (Beat) Thank you Miss Rauli, that's all for now. (FLORENCE *stands.*)

FLORENCE: (*Vindictively*) Who's your next victim?

HUDSON: Mr. Anderson.

FLORENCE: I'll send him in. (She exits into the kitchen.)

HUDSON: (*To himself*) And so the web of deceit grows tighter as we discover hidden motives and dark secrets. Four guests to go. (HUDSON *thinks about this.*) Seven guests left, plus LeMay is eight. (JACK *appears in the kitchen doorway.*) But if "a slip in time kills nine," then who's the ninth?

JACK: I've been wondering that myself, Detective. (HUDSON *turns.*)

HUDSON: Mr. Anderson, take a seat. (JACK *sits.*)

JACK: No need for formalities, Detective, call me Jack.

HUDSON: All right. If I might make an observation, Jack, you seem to be the only one here who has remained calm about this whole affair.

JACK: I used to be a fighter pilot. I learned to keep my cool. Don't get me wrong, Detective, Jean-Luc and I were good friends, his murder has shaken me up a bit. I'd never do anything to hurt him.

HUDSON: Or Dr. Rice?

JACK: Or him. (Pause) Though he may still hold a grudge against me.

HUDSON: (*Interested*) Oh? Why is that?

JACK: A number of years ago he asked me if I could help him transport some of his equipment, some it was rather volatile. I told him that ground transportation would probably be safer. To be honest, I didn't feel like blowing a hole in my

plane, not even for a friend. He tried to change my mind, but I refused to fly unsafe cargo.

HUDSON: And he got angry?

JACK: He thought I was betraying him and started ranting about how no one would help him get his research started.

HUDSON: Do you know what research he was working on at that time?

JACK: I'm not sure.

HUDSON: His time slip research perhaps?

JACK: It could have been. Lance has always been secretive about his research. All he showed me was a list of equipment and supplies.

HUDSON: I see. Are you trying to suggest that Dr. Rice might have a reason to kill you?

JACK: Not at all, Detective. Lance is a good friend, I don't think he'd let a little grudge go that far. I was just trying to answer your question.

HUDSON: Yes, but I get the suspicious feeling that you're trying to direct me away from something you don't want me to know. *(JACK looks surprised.)*

JACK: Detective! I.. *(HUDSON cuts him off.)*

HUDSON: Jack, so far everyone has told me what good friends you all are, how none of you would ever have a reason to hurt Monsieur LeMay or try to steal Dr. Rice's work. *(Louder)* Well someone *did* have a reason and I want to know who! *(JACK is silent, there is a pause.)* Well? Aren't you going to try and convince me that the murderer isn't one of you?

JACK: No, because I think you're right.

HUDSON: I believe that's the first truly honest statement any of you have given me. *(HUDSON paces across the room and thinks. After a short while he speaks and gestures to JACK that he may go.)* This business about "the nine" still puzzles me. *(JACK stands.)*

JACK: Yes, there are only eight of us. And if one of us is the murderer, that only leaves seven. *(HUDSON nods. JACK starts heading towards the kitchen.)*

HUDSON: Which then leaves two, unless the murderer is counting himself as one of the nine.

JACK: As a red herring?

HUDSON: Exactly. But even if that's the case, we're still left with one question. *(By this time HUDSON has crossed over to the kitchen door and is standing just to one side of it. JACK entered the kitchen moments before.)* Who is the ninth? *(At this moment the lights go out.)*

JACK'S VOICE: Not again!

ROLAN'S VOICE: Nobody move!

HUDSON: I'm coming in! *(HUDSON starts to enter the kitchen as the lights come back on. At that moment CLARANCE falls out of the kitchen door, a knife in his back. A note is attached to the knife. HUDSON catches the body. HUDSON then looks at his watch and speaks to himself.)* Too soon. *(LENYA rushes out of the kitchen.)*

LENYA: Clarence! *(The other GUESTS crowd in the doorway as WILLIAM comes out of the kitchen.)*

WILLIAM: Brother! *(To HUDSON)* This is all your fault. You're supposed to be protecting us! *(JACK sees the note.)*

JACK: What's that? *(HUDSON looks at the note.)*

HUDSON: See what it says, Jack. *(JACK takes the note and reads it while walking towards the center of the room.)*

JACK: "Number two. You are the ninth, Detective." *(JACK looks at HUDSON.)* I think you just got your answer. *(The lights fade to black.)*

SCENE 3

(The remaining GUESTS, along with HUDSON, PARSON, and the PHYSICIAN, are assembled in the living room. Some of the GUESTS are nervously sipping drinks. The PHYSICIAN is again talking with HUDSON.)

PHYSICIAN: Death was caused by a knife wound just below the tenth vertebrae. Death was almost instantaneous.

HUDSON: *(To PARSON)* Any prints on the knife?

PARSON: Yes, everyone's. The knife has been identified as one of the serving knives used by the guests at dinner. *(HUDSON sighs.)*

HUDSON: Not much of a lead there.

PARSON: No, but it was a clever move on the murderer's part.

HUDSON: *(Dryly)* When I figure out who that is, I'll congratulate him for it. *(To PHYSICIAN)* Let me know if the autopsy turns up anything else.

PHYSICIAN: *(Nodding)* Of course, Detective. *(He exits.)*

HUDSON: *(To PARSON)* Bob, I want you to send someone along to watch the autopsies. I want to know for a fact that the victims are, without a doubt, dead.

PARSON: Sure thing, Datch. Officer Rolan said to tell you he'd be back soon.

HUDSON: Thanks. *(PARSON starts to leave.)* And tell my informant that we need to have another talk. *(PARSON nods and leaves.)*

FLORENCE: Now what, Detective? Do you keep us here to be picked off one by one?

HUDSON: *(Sternly)* Now I get some answers. This is a dangerous game you're all playing, sitting there trying to hide the truth while a murderer, as you so eloquently put it, Miss Rauli, picks you off one by one. Before Mr. MacDonald was killed it was possible that the murderer was not one of you. But now I know the murderer must be in this house.

WILLIAM: How do you know that it wasn't one of Lenya's servants?

HUDSON: Because, Mr. MacDonald, they were all in a separate room, being safely watched by police, per my orders.

JACK: You're clever, Mr. Hudson, but are you clever enough to catch this murderer?

HUDSON: You make it sound as if this was some sort of game.

JACK: Maybe to the murderer it is.

LANCE: A game of cat and mouse, only we don't know who's the cat.

HUDSON: Well put, Dr. Rice.

LENYA: How close are you to finding this killer, Detective? Your interrogations didn't seem to help you protect Clarence.

WILLIAM: *(Coldly)* Aye, his blood is on your head.

HUDSON: My questionings so far, Miss Maritza, have in fact been quite enlightening. I have a few questions for you next. *(To everyone.)* I want the rest of you to add anything you think is relevant. I advise you to add anything you can. The next victim could be you. *(ROLAN enters the house carrying a box full of flashlights.)*

ROLAN: Here you go, Detective. *(He sets them on the table in the center of the room. MARIE takes one of the flashlights.)*

MARIE: Flashlights?

HUDSON: Yes, I want each of you to carry one around with you at all times in case the lights go out again. I assume they will. *(To ROLAN.)* Go check the fuse box and see if it's been tampered with. I want to know how the power is being shut off.

LENYA: It's down in the basement. *(She points to the hallway.)* The stairs are on the right. *(ROLAN nods and exits.)*

HUDSON: All right, let's begin. Miss Maritza, how long have you known the good Dr. here?

LENYA: A long time.

HUDSON: Where did the two of you first meet?

LENYA: Back in high school, wasn't it, Lance? *(LANCE nods.)*

LANCE: Yes, I think it was Florence who first introduced us.

HUDSON: And you were good friends even back then?

LENYA: Yes we were. Mr. Hudson, I don't quite see where all this is leading.

HUDSON: Then indulge my curiosity. In all the time the two of you have been friends, has there ever been a time... *(WILLIAM, FLORENCE, MARIE, and JACK all say the next part together.)*

WFMJ: ...when you didn't get along? *(LANCE and LENYA both look slightly confused, not having heard this question before.)*

HUDSON: Yes, what they said.

LENYA: Just the time when he blew up the basement of my old house. *(LANCE looks a little embarrassed.)*

LANCE: That was an accident.

LENYA: *(To HUDSON)* He was having trouble finding a place to work on some of his research, so I let him use part of my basement to conduct a few experiments in. I didn't realize that they were quite so volatile.

HUDSON: You can't have been too pleased about that.

LENYA: Not at the time, but he paid for the repairs and there wasn't any permanent damage.

HUDSON: Did you let Dr. Rice continue using your basement after that? *(LENYA looks at HUDSON as if he's crazy.)*

LENYA: Would you?

HUDSON: No, I suppose not.

FLORENCE: Where do you think this is going to get you, Detective?

WILLIAM: Aye, this all seems rather pointless.

JACK: I think I have to agree, Mr. Hudson, you don't seem to be getting anywhere. *(HUDSON just looks at him.)* Not that I'm questioning your methods, of course. *(There is a knock at the door.)* I'll get that. *(JACK opens the door and looks. He listens briefly and then speaks to an unseen person.)* All right, I'll tell him. *(JACK closes the door and turns to HUDSON.)* Sergeant Parson says your informant is waiting for you. *(ROLAN enters.)*

HUDSON: All right. *(To GUESTS)* I'll be back soon. I suggest you try and think of who might have had a reason to kill your two friends. *(To ROLAN)* You're in charge until I'm back, take good notes.

ROLAN: Of course, Detective. *(HUDSON exits and the lights go out on the house. The lights come up on the road as HUDSON comes out of the house. PARSON enters on the road.)*

HUDSON: Where's Dr. Rice?

PARSON: He'll be here in a few minutes. I need to talk to you alone first.

HUDSON: What about?

PARSON: Dr. Rice's emotional state is degrading rapidly. To put it bluntly, he's losing his mind. I don't know if his information can be trusted.

HUDSON: Maybe not, but he's all we've got. *(Pause)*

PARSON: Do you really think he's who he says he is, the Dr. Rice of the future?

HUDSON: I don't see any other explanation. There are undoubtedly two of them, and Dr. Rice doesn't have a twin brother.

PARSON: I know, but time travel? Is it really possible?

HUDSON: Dr. Rice's research involves time travel on the sub-atomic scale, so it's conceivable that in the future his experiments will be able to send a person back in time. But the psychological effects of doing so could be unpredictable. His actions here are altering our future, his past, and the changes he's making could be driving him mad.

PARSON: Has his information been accurate so far?

HUDSON: For the most part. The first murder occurred precisely as he said it would, but the second happened too early. Right person, wrong time.

PARSON: Sounds as if your early arrival has upset the murderer's time table. *(HUDSON nods.)*

HUDSON: It seems that way, but I hope that the murderer's order will remain intact. At least I have a good idea of who'll be next. Any other concerns, Bob? If not, I need to speak with Dr. Rice.

PARSON: Just one, Datch: Can you trust him? *(HUDSON looks at PARSON, uncertain how to answer.)* Just think about that, old friend. I'll get Dr. Rice. *(PARSON exits. A few moments later the future LANCE enters.)*

LANCE: You wanted to speak with me, Mr. Hudson?

HUDSON: Yes, Dr. It appears that we have a little problem. Clarence MacDonald wasn't killed at the time you said he would.

LANCE: Clarence, dead? And Jean-Luc too?

HUDSON: I'm sorry, I wasn't able to save them. But Dr., listen to me, Clarence was killed too early. (LANCE begins pacing anxiously.)

LANCE: Then it's started, things are changing, they aren't how I remember them. My past is being altered, altered... (HUDSON grabs LANCE.)

HUDSON: Dr. Rice! Pull yourself together! I still need your help. What do you know about the telegrams?

LANCE: They knew, they knew what I had been researching. They knew about my time slip. But they couldn't have...

HUDSON: The telegram said that "a slip in time kills nine." Am I the ninth? Did the murderer kill me?

LANCE: He tried. You were the only one that survived the murder attempts.

HUDSON: Me, and you.

LANCE: What?

HUDSON: You're one of the nine, aren't you? One of the nine the murderer wanted to kill?

LANCE: Yes, but...

HUDSON: Then why are you still alive?

LANCE: The murderer has done far worse than kill me, he's destroyed me. I was the primary target all along. I've been framed for the deaths of my friends, my research has been stolen, and now... now I'm losing my mind. (LANCE sinks slowly to the ground.) ...losing my mind...

HUDSON: Dr. Rice!

LANCE: Please, no more questions, nothing makes sense anymore.

HUDSON: (Kneeling) Just a few more, this is important. I'm trying to save your friends.

LANCE: Yes, save them, Detective. Please, save them.

HUDSON: Why did you come to me? *(LANCE is silent.)* Wasn't I the one sent to investigate the murders? Wasn't I the one who had you arrested? *(LANCE nods.)*

LANCE: Yes, the murderer made you think I did it. *(LANCE weakly grabs HUDSON's coat.)* But I didn't! I didn't! You have to stop him before he destroys me again.

HUDSON: I'll try. One last question, who do you think framed you and killed the other guests?

LANCE: I'm not sure, it could have been any of them!

HUDSON: Please, if you have any idea.

LANCE: I don't know, I tell you! *(By this time it's obvious LANCE's sanity is slipping and that further questions would be of no use.)* Oh, I don't know, I just don't know... it wasn't supposed to happen like this... *(PARSON re-enters. HUDSON crosses to him and they talk quietly.)*

HUDSON: He's losing it. The strain of coming back into his past must be overwhelming.

PARSON: I thought you might like to know that the bodies of Monsieur LeMay and Mr. MacDonald have disappeared from the morgue.

HUDSON: Before the autopsy? *(PARSON nods.)*

PARSON: As far as we know, he *(PARSON points to LANCE)* could be right and their deaths might have been faked. But they still wouldn't be able to get back into the house.

HUDSON: True, which means our murderer must still be in the house. Logically then, the murderer would wait to fake his death until he's killed everyone else.

PARSON: Except when have you known a murderer to be logical? I think you should also consider the possibility that more than one, maybe all, of the guests are conspiring together to destroy Dr. Rice.

HUDSON: That's a definite possibility. Dr. Rice has invented what could become one of the greatest breakthroughs of this century. Some people might do anything to possess it, even betray an old friend. *(PARSON gestures to LANCE.)*

PARSON: I'll take care of him. You go and catch a murderer, Datch. *(PARSON walks over to LANCE and helps him to his feet.)* Come on, Dr. Rice, the Detective is finished with his questions now. *(The two exit. HUDSON speaks to himself.)*

HUDSON: This case is becoming more baffling by the minute, and time is running out. If I don't learn which guest is behind these murders soon, there won't be any guests left to save. *(He exits and the lights fade to black. If desired, an intermission may take place at this point.)*

ACT 2

SCENE 1

(The lights fade up on the house where the remaining six GUESTS are assembled. PARSON and ROLAN are also present. ROLAN is trying to get some information out of the GUESTS. As this is happening, HUDSON enters, but no one except PARSON notices his arrival. PARSON greets HUDSON with a nod and the two watch silently for awhile.)

ROLAN: Miss Arlin, could you please explain what happened between you and Dr. Rice?

MARIE: That's none of your business, Officer!

FLORENCE: You just leave her alone! She told you that she doesn't want to talk about it!

WILLIAM: This isn't getting us anywhere!

LANCE: Agreed!

JACK: Everybody! Calm down! Fighting with each other isn't going to help. We need to figure out who here is a murderer!

FLORENCE: You're beginning to sound just like the Detective!

LENYA: Jack, do you really think anyone here would have killed Jean-Luc or Clarence?

MARIE: I could never have hurt Jean-Luc!

WILLIAM: And I could never have killed my own brother!

JACK: I think that we should consider the possibility. We know the murderer must be in this house.

LANCE: Just whose side are you on, Jack?

ROLAN: *(Exasperated)* Please! This isn't helping!

HUDSON: Glad to see you're all being so cooperative.

FLORENCE: *(Sharply)* So you're back from your little chat, are you?

WILLIAM: *(Sarcastically)* Learn anything interesting?

ROLAN: Hope you had more luck than I did, Detective.

HUDSON: Some. *(He looks at PARSON.)* It was interesting. *(PARSON nods.)*

PARSON: I'll leave you to your investigation, Datch, yell if you need me.

MARIE: If he doesn't, the next victim will. *(PARSON nods grimly and leaves.)*

LANCE: So, Detective, what now? More questions? Or do you let us continue to rip out each other's throats?

WILLIAM: Probably the latter.

HUDSON: *(To ROLAN)* Did you learn anything? *(ROLAN shakes his head.)* I thought not. What's the word on the fuse box?

ROLAN: There's no evidence of any tampering, it appears to be in perfect working order.

HUDSON: Not much of a lead there. *(To LANCE)* To answer your question, Dr., yes, I'm going to continue my investigation until I get some answers.

FLORENCE: I think we've all had enough of your questions! *(There is a chorus of affirmatives from the other GUESTS. WILLIAM and LANCE both stand.)*

MARIE: How many times do we have to tell you that we're innocent?

HUDSON: Miss Arlin, I've met many people in this profession, but none innocent. *(WILLIAM and LANCE start moving towards HUDSON.)*

WILLIAM: We've had enough of your accusations, and we've had enough of you, Detective.

LANCE: Unless you have definite proof that one of us is the killer, I suggest that you leave now.

HUDSON: I warn you both: Obstructing justice is a serious offense.

LENYA: We don't care. You've worn out your welcome, Detective!

JACK: Mr. Hudson is just doing his duty! *(ROLAN looks at HUDSON questioningly, but HUDSON motions for him to stay where he is.)*

MARIE: Will, Lance, sit down!

LANCE: We've taken all we're going to take from you, Detective. We're not answering any more of your questions.

HUDSON: Really? And what do you have to hide, Dr. Rice? *(To WILLIAM)* Or you? *(To all the GUESTS.)* Or any of you? *(The GUESTS pause for a moment to think about this.)* I've questioned five of you so far, and you'll all been evasive, trying to keep me away from your hidden motives. From what I've been able to determine, you *all* have motives for murder. If you really want me to leave, I will. But if I leave, you will too, only you'll leave wearing handcuffs.

MARIE: You'd arrest all of us?

HUDSON: If I had to. *(WILLIAM and LANCE reluctantly sit down.)*

WILLIAM: All right then, continue. But I insist that you investigate my brother's death further.

HUDSON: The deaths of Monsieur LeMay and your brother are linked. When I know the answer to one, I'll know the answer to both. Now, the time has come to question the one who is at the center of this little conspiracy: Dr. Rice. Dr., perhaps you can shed some more light on why anyone would want to kill for your research.

LANCE: As I've said, the time slip could become a very valuable power source.

HUDSON: Valuable enough to kill over?

LANCE: I would have to say so. It could be the biggest breakthrough since the atomic bomb. *(HUDSON whistles.)*

HUDSON: That's quite an achievement, certainly Nobel Prize material, no wonder you've kept it secret. Would you say the time slip has the same destructive potential as the atom bomb?

LANCE: Yes, it unfortunately has the capability to be used as a very deadly weapon.

HUDSON: Which would make it worth even more to the right people.

JACK: Are you suggesting that the "right people" could be us?

HUDSON: I think it's very possible. If not you, then perhaps someone that you work for. *(FLORENCE shifts uncomfortably at that statement.)*

MARIE: You are a paranoid man, Mr. Hudson. You look into every nook and cranny of people's lives searching for only lies and deceptions.

HUDSON: I'm a private eye, Miss Arlin, that's my job.

LENYA: *(Sarcastically)* Perhaps you need a change of profession.

HUDSON: Maybe so, but that can wait until this case is over.

MARIE: I'm beginning to think that will never happen.

WILLIAM: It'll end, if only because we're all dead.

HUDSON: Or when I discover who's after what could be the greatest weapon on the planet.

JACK: Which could be any of us, couldn't it?

HUDSON: I believe I've said that, yes.

FLORENCE: *(With realization)* What about Lance? *(LANCE looks startled.)*

LANCE: Me? Why would I kill anyone to get my own research?

WILLIAM: Aye! That would be crazy!

LENYA: He's the only one you don't suspect, isn't he?

HUDSON: Don't worry, you're all under suspicion, if that makes any of you feel better.

FLORENCE: I wouldn't go that far. *(In the next line we see a hint of the future LANCE.)*

LANCE: Don't you see what they're doing, Detective? They're trying to turn you against me! *(HUDSON looks at his watch.)*

HUDSON: *(To himself so no one else hears.)* Less than a minute.

LANCE: *(To all)* I didn't kill anyone!

JACK: Then prove it, Lance! *(The lights go out.)*

HUDSON: Everyone turn on your flashlights! *(The GUESTS scramble to obey, but before the flashlights start going on, the lights come back on. LANCE falls forward and is caught by WILLIAM. Everyone is shocked, especially HUDSON.)* This isn't right.

JACK: *(Very shaken)* All right, that's proof enough.

MARIE: Not Lance too! We're all going to die! *(HUDSON examines the body.)*

HUDSON: Looks like poison, just like Monsieur LeMay. *(There is a knock at the door.)* Someone get that! *(HUDSON sets LANCE's body carefully down in a chair.)*

MARIE: I will. *(She gets up and answers the door. The TELEGRAM DELIVERER is there with a telegram.)*

TELEGRAM DELIVERER: Telegram for Miss Maritza. Again.

MARIE: I'll give it to her. *(The TELEGRAM DELIVERER gives MARIE the telegram, sees the body, and quickly leaves.)*

LENYA: Oh dear, not another one! Go ahead and read it, Marie, though I'm not sure I want to know what it says. *(MARIE opens the telegram and reads. Everyone listens.)*

MARIE: "Strike three, and another guest is out. Six innings to go. It's been too easy so far, Detective, hope this last murder doesn't leave you in the dark."

WILLIAM: Now what is that supposed to mean? *(The lights go out again.)*

HUDSON: Flashlights everyone!

JACK: What in the... they don't work!

FLORENCE: He's right! Mine's dead!

WILLIAM: Aye, mine too!

MARIE: How's that possible? One of them must work!

HUDSON: One would think so. Officer Rolan!

ROLAN: Yes?

HUDSON: Get Sergeant Parson. I'm placing everyone here under arrest. *(To the GUESTS)* It's for your own safety. *(ROLAN goes to the door.)*

JACK: No argument from me.

LENYA: Me neither, I'd rather be in a police station than dead! *(ROLAN tries the front door.)*

ROLAN: It's locked!

HUDSON: *(Walking over to the door)* From the outside? *(He tries the door but it remains shut.)* How is that possible? Well, keep trying. *(To JACK and WILLIAM)* Could you two bring the Dr.'s body into another room? I think we'd all feel better without the company of a corpse in a dark room.

JACK: Agreed. *(He and WILLIAM pick up LANCE and exit into the hallway.)*

FLORENCE: Speaking of dark, we could use some light, any light.

HUDSON: Yes. Miss Maritza, do you have any candles? Or perhaps a kerosene lamp?

LENYA: I know I have some candles somewhere, and I might have a lamp.

HUDSON: See if you can find them. Miss Arlin, you go with her. I don't want anyone wandering around alone. *(JACK and WILLIAM re-enter.)*

LENYA: All right, this way Marie. *(The two of them exit into the kitchen.)*

HUDSON: *(To ROLAN)* Any luck?

ROLAN: None, the door is stuck tight. I wonder if Miss Maritza has a toolbox lying around someplace. It'd help if I had a few tools to work with.

HUDSON: We can ask.

WILLIAM: I'll go ask Lenya where she might keep one.

FLORENCE: I'll go with you. *(They exit into the kitchen.)*

HUDSON: So much for keeping an eye on everyone.

JACK: I take it this isn't one of your more successful investigations, Detective.

HUDSON: To be honest, I've had better cases. There's something different about this one, that's certain. *(HUDSON goes to look out the window.)* It would have to be a cloudy night, can't see a thing out there. *(JACK picks up the phone and listens.)*

JACK: The telephone's dead.

HUDSON: It always is. I'm going to see if I can find another way out of the house. Stay here, Jack. *(HUDSON exits into the hallway.)*

JACK: And then there was one.

ROLAN: I'm still here, Mr. Anderson.

JACK: I'll feel better if you were a locksmith.

ROLAN: I'm doing the best I can. *(ROLAN continues to work on the door, with little success.)*

JACK: *(To himself)* It's just me and a junior locksmith.

(JACK glances back at the ROLAN and then quietly sneaks upstairs. ROLAN continues to try and open the door. Soon a mysterious FIGURE dressed in a dark cloak and hood enters from the hallway. The audience should not be able to tell who it is. The FIGURE hits ROLAN on the head and knocks him out. The FIGURE then takes ROLAN's gun. The FIGURE then looks into the kitchen before exiting upstairs. MARIE enters from the kitchen carrying a lit candle.)

MARIE: Mr. Hudson, Lenya has found a few candles. *(Pause)* Detective? Are you there? *(No answer. MARIE sees ROLAN.)* Oh dear! I must find Mr. Hudson. *(She exits upstairs. WILLIAM and FLORENCE enter from the hallway.)*

WILLIAM: Lenya? Are you there?

FLORENCE: Where can she be? *(She crosses to the front door.)* And what happened to him? He's out cold!

WILLIAM: One less cop for us to worry about at the moment. *(WILLIAM points to the kitchen.)* Check the kitchen again, I'll look upstairs.

FLORENCE: Are you sure we should split up?

WILLIAM: We're bound to find her faster that way.

FLORENCE: All right. *(WILLIAM starts upstairs.)* Will. *(He stops.)*

WILLIAM: Yes?

FLORENCE: Maybe we should tell the Detective.

WILLIAM: Are you crazy? He'd lock us up in a minute!

FLORENCE: Maybe, maybe not. If we come forward now, he might be more inclined to believe us. *(Pause)* Unless you're the killer and you don't want anyone to suspect you.

WILLIAM: Do you really think that I would have killed Clarence?

FLORENCE: Oh, I don't know what to think! It could have been any of us. Look at us, we have our own plans, there's no reason why any of the others couldn't have a hidden agenda of their own.

WILLIAM: So let the Detective go after one of them!

FLORENCE: Will, he already knows about me and the FBI. (WILLIAM *crosses to FLORENCE.*)

WILLIAM: What? How did he find that out?

FLORENCE: I don't know, but he did. But he thinks I want Lance's time slip so that I can get my job at the FBI back.

WILLIAM: Then he doesn't know who we're really working for?

FLORENCE: No, not yet.

WILLIAM: Let's make sure it stays that way.

FLORENCE: Are you sure we shouldn't tell him?

WILLIAM: All we have to do is survive this "party" and continue our work. If we can blame someone else for the murders, our job will be that much easier. Let's just find Lenya and see if we can get this door open.

FLORENCE: Agreed, the sooner we get out of this house, the better!

(WILLIAM *exits upstairs and FLORENCE goes into the kitchen. Soon MARIE and JACK enter from the hallway. MARIE still has the candle. She points to ROLAN.*)

MARIE: Someone attacked him, Jack. I've been trying to find Mr. Hudson.

JACK: He's trying to find another way out of the house. (JACK *looks at the ROLAN.*) It looks like someone hit him on the head. I wonder who did this?

MARIE: The murderer I'd imagine. (She *sits in a chair.*)

JACK: I'm surprised the murderer only knocked him out, he's lucky.

MARIE: It's probably because he isn't part of "the nine." This murderer seems to be very particular. (JACK *nods. There is a short pause.*)

JACK: Marie, I think you should tell the Detective about what happened between you and Lance.

MARIE: What? No, I can't! Now that Lance is dead, the Detective will surely think that I killed him.

JACK: You can prove your innocence.

MARIE: Jack, I threatened his life, how do you think that will sound in a court of law?

JACK: A threat isn't enough to convict you, not without any further evidence. Besides, that was a long time ago. And even if you did have a reason to want Lance dead, what about Clarence? Or Jean-Luc? And what possible motive could you have for wanting Lance's work. (MARIE *is silent.*) You don't have motive, do you? (MARIE *says nothing.* JACK *sits on the couch.*) You do have a motive?

MARIE: I'm afraid so, and it goes beyond the incident between Lance and I. I don't dare tell the Detective about that, much less anything else.

JACK: What can't you tell him? That Lance asked you to help him and you said no?

MARIE: There's more to it than that, and you know it. The Detective will figure that out, and I don't feel like telling him how I threatened Lance's life. That's exactly what he's looking for.

JACK: That happens, people make idle threats.

MARIE: With a welding torch?

JACK: I still can't believe you did that.

MARIE: I was having a bad day! (JACK *sighs.*)

JACK: Anyway, you said there was more? (MARIE *nods.*)

MARIE: Yes. Jean-Luc and I were hired to sabotage Lance's time slip experiments so that some French lab could pick up the work.

JACK: What? Marie! How could you even think of betraying Lance like that?

MARIE: It's not what you think! Jean-Luc's employers hired him first, and then blackmailed me into helping him.

JACK: Why would Jean-Luc involve himself in that sort of activity?

MARIE: Because he was a spy. (JACK *looks shocked.*) It surprised me too. I think he originally worked for the Russians before going to work for someone in France.

JACK: What on Earth are they blackmailing you for?

MARIE: We don't need to talk about that. Do you see why I can't tell the Detective anything? What happened between Lance and I is only the tip of the iceberg.

JACK: Everyone has their secrets, Marie. You're not the only one who looks guilty.

MARIE: I suppose, but that doesn't make me feel better about mine.

JACK: If you didn't commit the murders, then all you have to do is tell the truth and you'll have nothing to worry about.

MARIE: *(Swaying)* Maybe you're right, Jack. I suppose we should talk to the Detective now.

JACK: Just what I was thinking. Let's go find him.

(The two exit upstairs, MARIE with the candle. Shortly after they exit, LENYA enters from the kitchen. She is carrying a lit candle, a box of unlit candles, and some matches.)

LENYA: I've found some candles, but I couldn't find the lamp. I've searched absolutely everywhere for it. Hello? Is anyone there? *(LENYA sees ROLAN.)* Oh dear! He's been attacked! *(She crosses to the table and sets down the candles and matches.)* I wonder where everyone else has gone to, I don't like sitting here all alone. *(HUDSON enters from the kitchen.)* Detective, there you are! I've found some candles.

HUDSON: Good. *(He sees the ROLAN.)* What happened to him?

LENYA: I don't know, he was like that when I got here. *(HUDSON looks around.)*

HUDSON: No one else is here? I thought Marie went with you.

LENYA: Marie was with me, but she came back here after I found the candles. I was still looking for the lamp you see.

HUDSON: *(Irritated)* None of you seem to realize what grave danger you're all in! No one should be wandering around by themselves! *(He picks up a candle and lights it.)*

LENYA: *(Sitting in a chair.)* What an awful party this has become! I'm sorry we've been so terrible to you, Detective. I'll try to be more cooperative.

HUDSON: Thank you, that would be most appreciated. *(He sits in another chair.)* I've noticed, so far, that there has been very little mention of Clarence MacDonald. Perhaps you might be able to shed some light on how he fits into this puzzle.

LENYA: Well, I can tell you right now that William was undoubtedly telling the truth when he said he wouldn't kill his brother, hardly a bit of disagreement between those two!

HUDSON: What about his relationship with Dr. Rice?

LENYA: Do you still think this is all about Lance's work? Why kill Jean-Luc and Clarence when Lance is the target?

HUDSON: Possibly as distractions. We've seen from the telegrams that you are all targeted for murder. If you all are killed, the murderer can disguise his true motive with "extra deaths." Though I'll admit that obtaining the time slip is only one possible motive. I have a feeling there's more behind these murders than just that.

LENYA: These "extra deaths" appear to be successfully confusing you, Detective.

HUDSON: That they are, Miss Maritza. What else can you tell me about Clarence?

LENYA: Now that I think about it, I do remember some sort of disagreement between Clarence and Lance.

HUDSON: About what?

LENYA: Well, I told you about how Lance blew up my basement.

HUDSON: Yes...

LENYA: When he first asked about using my basement, he mentioned that Clarence had given him some money to fund his research, but not nearly as much Lance needed. Clarence told me later that he didn't want to invest too heavily in Lance's research without knowing what it was about. I didn't think anything of it at the time, but considering this whole dreadful affair...

HUDSON: ...there might be more to that event than you first thought.

LENYA: Exactly.

HUDSON: Anything else?

LENYA: Not that I can think of. You'd do better to ask William, he knew both Lance and Clarence much better than I did.

HUDSON: What about your relationship with Clarence?

LENYA: We always got along splendidly. Back before I received the inheritance, he was always there with a little extra money to help me get by. I don't know what I would have done if it hadn't been for his help. He was a good friend, Detective. *(Pause. LENYA looks around.)* None of the others are back yet.

HUDSON: No, and that worries me. Did Mr. MacDonald or Miss Rauli ever find you about the tools?

LENYA: Tools? For what?

HUDSON: To help get the door open.

LENYA: No, they didn't. Would you like me to try and find some?

HUDSON: Yes, we'll all be safer once we get out of this house.

LENYA: Follow me.

(The two stand and exit into the hallway, each carrying a candle. Moments later WILLIAM enters from the kitchen as MARIE and JACK enter from upstairs. MARIE still has her candle.)

WILLIAM: Who's there?

MARIE: It's us, Marie and Jack. Is that you, Will?

WILLIAM: Yes, have you two seen Lenya? I still can't find her!

MARIE: When I last saw her she was still looking for a kerosene lamp. *(She sees the box of candles and crosses to the table.)* But she must have been here. Look, here are the rest of the candles. *(JACK and WILLIAM both cross to the table and light a candle.)*

JACK: Will, where's Florence? I thought she was with you.

WILLIAM: We spilt up to cover more ground.

MARIE: Will! No one should be wandering around alone at a time like this!

WILLIAM: We thought we'd find Lenya faster that way! The sooner we get that blasted door open, the better!

JACK: We all want out of here, Will, but it'd be nice if the rest of us were still alive!

WILLIAM: She'll be all right! *(FLORENCE enters from the kitchen.)* See? There she is!

FLORENCE: Good news! I ran into Lenya and the Detective, they're going to find some tools.
(MARIE *sinks into a chair.*)

MARIE: Good! Maybe then we can get someplace safe and straighten out this mess.

JACK: Will, Florence, I think it would be best if we all told the Detective everything.

WILLIAM: And have him throw us all in prison? No thanks!

MARIE: If we don't tell him, he might throw us all in jail anyway!

FLORENCE: He can't do that without proof! (JACK *sits.*)

JACK: Our refusal to cooperate is all the proof he needs. If we all come clean, we may find the real answer to this puzzle and save those of us that are still alive. (*There is a pause as they all think about this.*)

WILLIAM: Aye, you may be right.

FLORENCE: Will!

WILLIAM: (*To FLORENCE*) It's not like we've stolen his work yet! (*FLORENCE glares at WILLIAM. JACK stares at WILLIAM and FLORENCE.*)

JACK: You two were the ones hired to steal Lance's work?

FLORENCE: (*Irritated*) Yes, what's it to you? (*JACK pulls out a FBI badge and shows it to her.*)

JACK: FBI. (*WILLIAM and FLORENCE stare at the badge.*) I've been on your trail for weeks. You two are good.

FLORENCE: (*Curtly*) I was in the FBI once myself, I've had practice. (*JACK puts away his badge.*)

JACK: I must say, I'm surprised to learn it's been you I've been looking for all this time.

WILLIAM: Aye, and I'm surprised that it's been you tracking us.

FLORENCE: So now we know your secret, and you know ours. What's yours, Marie?

MARIE: (*Sighing*) Jean-Luc and I were hired to sabotage Lance's work so that a French lab could pick up where he left off.

FLORENCE: Ah, so Jean-Luc is... was working for someone in France. Didn't the Russians pay him enough? (MARIE *shrugs.*)

MARIE: I don't know. I didn't want to get involved, but Jean-Luc's employers didn't leave me much of a choice.

WILLIAM: Blackmail? (MARIE *nods.*) That's hardly fair. (To FLORENCE.) At least we're in this because we chose to be. (FLORENCE *nods to WILLIAM.*)

FLORENCE: So do you intend to turn us all in, Jack?

JACK: That depends. I have no real evidence against you, and the research has yet to be stolen or sabotaged, right?

FLORENCE: Right. (MARIE *nods.*)

JACK: Then as long as none of you succeed in your "assignments," I know nothing. (The other three all look relieved and thank JACK.)

WILLIAM: (To FLORENCE) Our employer won't be pleased, but at least we won't get caught. (FLORENCE *nods.*)

JACK: By the way, who is your employer?

FLORENCE: As long as you know nothing, it doesn't matter, does it?

JACK: (To himself) It was worth a try. (Pause.)

MARIE: So now what? None of this helps us discover who killed the others or prove our own innocence.

WILLIAM: Aye, we still have valid motives for murder!

JACK: True, but your goals would be better accomplished *without* killing anyone. Murder attracts too much attention.

WILLIAM: True, but at least one of us here *has* committed murder, whether it was intended or prompted by the sudden arrival of the Detective.

FLORENCE: He's right, and we've all had the opportunity.

MARIE: I just want this nightmare of a night to be over before someone else gets killed.

JACK: So do I, I wish the Detective would hurry back.

WILLIAM: Aye, where has he gone off to? When we ask him to leave, he stays put. Now that we could use him, he's nowhere to be found! *(HUDSON and LENYA enter from the hallway. HUDSON is carrying a hatchet.)*

LENYA: Hello all!

FLORENCE: Lenya, there you are! And there you are, Detective.

HUDSON: Been looking for me? I thought you might be. *(HUDSON sits on the couch, still holding the hatchet.)*

MARIE: Aren't you going to open the door?

WILLIAM: Aye, that's what the hatchet's for, isn't it?

HUDSON: Yes it is, but first I think it's time to wrap this up. *(All the GUESTS begin sitting down in chairs, or on the couch.)* Now that you have had time to talk amongst yourselves, it's time you told me what you know. *(The lights fade to black.)*

SCENE 2

(The same room, a short time later. A number of candles are burning around the room, giving it a fair bit of light. The fireplace is also lit. The front door has been opened and ROLAN is now conscious. The remaining GUESTS (LENYA, JACK, MARIE, WILLIAM, and FLORENCE) are being handcuffed by ROLAN and PARSON. Everyone is frozen in a tableau until HUDSON joins PARSON and ROLAN.)

HUDSON: The guests had finally become cooperative. Threatening to leave them trapped in a dark house with a murderer had increased their willingness to talk. After they were finished, the answer struck me like a lightning bolt. I had been played for a sap the entire time. But now that I know who the culprit is, it's time to set the trap and see if the rat will take the bait. *(HUDSON joins PARSON and ROLAN near the door and the action resumes. HUDSON quietly confers with PARSON and ROLAN for a short time, after which PARSON and ROLAN both nod, and HUDSON turns to the GUESTS.)* After you've all been handcuffed, Officer Rolan will take you into the kitchen to ask you a few final questions.

JACK: What charge are you making against us, Detective? Do you believe we're all murderers?

FLORENCE: With five suspects and only three murders at least one of us must be innocent.

HUDSON: I doubt you all had a hand in the actual killings, those who did will be determined later. However, it is clear that none of you are as innocent in this affair as you would like me to believe. Granted, no human in this world is fully innocent, but...

FLORENCE: The charge, Detective?

HUDSON: Yes, of course. I charge the five of you with conspiracy against the person of Dr. Lance Rice, as well as attempted theft and sabotage of his research. Based on what you have all told me, I'm convinced that I now have the evidence to back that up.

MARIE: If you're so convinced that we're all working against Lance, then how do you explain the deaths of Jean-Luc and Clarence? Did we just accidentally bump them off?

HUDSON: Always possible. Missed targets, distractions, rivalry, you tell me. Lance may not be the only one you have something against. If there's one thing I've learned from all the cases I've seen, it's that a planned murder never goes as planned.

LENYA: Small comfort to us.

HUDSON: Comfort is not my department, Miss Maritza, justice is. (PARSON *throws HUDSON a questioning glance to which HUDSON nods an affirmative. When the two being speaking to each other, it should be faintly obvious that they are performing a scene.*)

PARSON: It would be my department as well, and with that in mind Officer Rolan and I will take custody of the suspects.

HUDSON: Of course, Bob, be my guest. (ROLAN *leads the GUESTS into the kitchen.*)

PARSON: Excellent job, Datch, as always.

HUDSON: Thank you, old friend. I couldn't have done it without your help.

PARSON: So you always say, but sometimes I wonder. (PARSON *exits into the kitchen.*)

HUDSON: No, my friend, on this case I have definitely needed the help of others. The help of one more will be all I need to put this murderer behind bars. (The TELEGRAM DELIVERER, *in truth* AGENT BROCKTON, *appears at the open door and knocks.*) Just in time. (HUDSON *addresses BROCKTON.*) Come in. (BROCKTON *enters the house and shows HUDSON her badge.*)

BROCKTON: Agent Brockton, FBI. Detective Hudson I presume?

HUDSON: You presume correctly. A pleasure to meet you. (They *shake hands.*)

BROCKTON: Same here, Detective. Of course, we've already met

HUDSON: That we have. A clever disguise, I didn't even see through it at first, and I was watching for you.

BROCKTON: I want to thank you for the tip. We've been watching Dr. Rice and his research for years now. We guessed something like this might happen. (BROCKTON *lowers her voice.*) You may find this hard to believe, but there are some individuals within the FBI who are secretly after the time slip.

HUDSON: Actually, that doesn't sound so far-fetched. In fact, one of our suspects could probably further your information in that area.

BROCKTON: I had hoped for that. I'm also here to inform you that, in light of the circumstances surrounding Dr. Rice's death, the FBI has been instructed to take custody of his research.

HUDSON: Oh?

BROCKTON: The government feels that the time slip needs protection to keep events like this from happening again.

HUDSON: What sort of protection did you have in mind?

BROCKTON: The FBI is going to transfer the time slip to a top secret government laboratory where it will be studied by our top scientists. Dr. Rice doesn't have any living relatives, so we don't anticipate any legal hassles. With the potential military applications of Dr. Rice's discoveries, the government has decided that it's safest to keep the whole affair under wraps.

HUDSON: That could be difficult once word gets out about the murders here tonight. The media will be all over this case.

BROCKTON: The media won't hear a word about the time slip.

HUDSON: Then how will you explain the murders, or the arrests we've made?

BROCKTON: You don't need to worry about that, Detective, the FBI will take care of everything. The time slip is going to disappear, as is any connection it ever had with Dr. Rice.

HUDSON: Disappear?

BROCKTON: Completely.

HUDSON: That won't be an easy task.

BROCKTON: No, but it's necessary. Dangerous parties are after this research, and we can't make it easy for them to find.

HUDSON: For a confidential experiment, quite a number of people seem to have heard of the time slip.

BROCKTON: Word gets around.

HUDSON: Does the government plan on taking credit for Dr. Rice's work?

BROCKTON: A necessary precaution. If we made the true inventor known, it might attract attention to those who know the truth, namely the guests here tonight.

HUDSON: Some of the "dangerous parties" you referred to have employees among the guests. They already know the truth.

BROCKTON: Which is why we can't allow that information to spread any further. The FBI will take custody of the guests, and we'll see that all the loose ends are tied up. You've done your duty, Detective. I'll take it from here. Where are the guests now?

HUDSON: In the kitchen. *(He points to the kitchen door.)* Right through there.

BROCKTON: Then if you'll excuse me, I have some questions of my own for the suspects.

HUDSON: Of course. *(BROCKTON exits into the kitchen. HUDSON speaks to himself.)* It looked all wrapped up. Take away the guests and, well, that would be that, one more case solved. Not the most exciting ending, I hope the murderer agrees.

(HUDSON sits on the couch and waits. Moments later the FIGURE enters from upstairs and walks silently up behind HUDSON. The FIGURE points a gun at HUDSON's head.)

FIGURE: Where are they taking it, Detective?

HUDSON: Where are they taking what? *(HUDSON begins to turn around.)*

FIGURE: Don't turn around, just answer the question: Where are they taking the time slip?

HUDSON: I have no idea. I'm not part of the FBI. You'd have better luck asking Agent Brockton. She would know.

FIGURE: I'm not asking Agent Brockton, I'm asking you. I want the research and you will tell me where it is being taken.

HUDSON: I told you, I don't know. Am I to be number four?

FIGURE: If you don't tell me what I want to know. You're part of the nine, after all.

HUDSON: I'm telling you the truth when I say I don't know, so you might as well pull the trigger.

FIGURE: Don't tempt me. *(Slight pause)* So has the great Detective Hudson finally run out of questions?

HUDSON: What do you mean?

FIGURE: I would think you'd want to know who I am before you die.

HUDSON: Why would I bother asking a question I already know the answer to?

FIGURE: You're lying.

HUDSON: Oh? What makes you say that?

FIGURE: You're clever, Detective, but not clever enough. You won't fool me with that ploy.

HUDSON: If you say so.

FIGURE: If you really knew who I was, why would you arrest the wrong people?

HUDSON: Why indeed. *(A sudden thought strikes the FIGURE.)*

FIGURE: Unless... *(At this precise moment BROCKTON enters from the kitchen, PARSON enters from upstairs, and ROLAN enters from the hallway. Each of them have a gun pointed at the FIGURE. HUDSON stands and takes the FIGURE's gun.)*

HUDSON: Unless what? Unless it was to set a trap for the real murderer?

FIGURE: Yes.

HUDSON: And that's exactly what it was, Dr. Rice.

FIGURE: You're very good, Detective.

(The FIGURE lowers his hood revealing him to be LANCE. As he does so LENYA, JACK, MARIE, WILLIAM, and FLORENCE all enter from the kitchen and cluster near the kitchen door. The GUESTS have all had their handcuffs removed.)

LENYA: Lance, you're alive!

WILLIAM: *(Shocked)* You killed Clarence?

MARIE: And Jean-Luc? *(LANCE says nothing, but simply glares at HUDSON.)*

FLORENCE: *(To HUDSON)* How did you know, Detective?

HUDSON: Once I had all the pieces, it really wasn't too difficult to figure out. *(HUDSON walks down stage as he delivers his explanation.)* It became clear that numerous parties were after Dr. Rice's research, intending to steal or sabotage it. But murder Dr. Rice and the rest of you? *(HUDSON shakes his head.)* No, that would attract far too much attention. Theft and sabotage can be done much more quietly. The murderer *wanted* us to believe that Dr. Rice was the target. *(HUDSON turns to LANCE.)* You knew that people were after your work and arranged all this, in part, to fake your own death. The scientific community would have expected you

to use your work for the common good. But if everyone believed you to be dead, you could take your research to a more lucrative market and make a tidy profit.

LANCE: *(Coldly)* Very impressive, Detective. *(He gets a strange look in his eye and reaches out one hand to HUDSON.)* My congratulations. *(HUDSON reaches to shake his hand, but at the last moment grabs LANCE's wrist. With his other hand he removes LANCE's ring. HUDSON then releases LANCE and examines the ring. A few moments later he removes a small needle.)*

HUDSON: Very clever, Dr. With this needle hidden in your ring, you were able to poison Monsieur LeMay merely by shaking his hand. I'm willing to bet you used a similar trick to make yourself appear dead. *(LANCE only stares vehemently at HUDSON.)*

JACK: Detective, are you saying that the rest of us were the real targets all along?

HUDSON: Exactly. This was more about revenge than research.

LENYA: Why would you want revenge on us, Lance, we're your friends!

LANCE: Friends? You call yourself my friends? Friends like Will and Florence who plotted to steal my work? Or Marie and Jean-Luc who were going to sabotage it? When I started my time slip research, I asked each of you for help and you all refused me!

PARSON: *(Standing)* I think Agent Brockton and I can take it from here, Datch. Good work.

BROCKTON: Good work, Detective. *(PARSON signals to ROLAN who begins to escort LANCE out of the house.)*

HUDSON: Wait. *(They stop.)* Perhaps you could do us a favor, Dr. Rice, and restore the power? *(HUDSON gestures to the ceiling. LANCE reaches into his cloak and removes a small control device which he tosses to HUDSON.)*

LANCE: Another small puzzle for you, Detective. *(HUDSON nods to PARSON who follows LANCE, ROLAN and BROCKTON out the front door. LANCE pauses just before exiting and turns back to HUDSON.)* I shall remember you, Detective Datch Hudson. I shall have my revenge, in time. *(LANCE exits with PARSON, ROLAN, and BROCKTON.)*

HUDSON: You will try, that I'm sure of. *(HUDSON fiddles with the device for a few moments, after which the lights go back on.)* There we are, much better. *(The remaining GUESTS move into the living room and begin to sit down. MARIE walks over to HUDSON and looks at the device curiously.)*

MARIE: What exactly is it?

HUDSON: From what we can tell, Dr. Rice has set up some sort of device in the house which generates large amounts of electrical interference. It neutralized all of the electrical devices in the house, preventing both the lights and our flashlights from working. *(HUDSON holds up the control device.)* This is what controls it. It was another clue that we were dealing with a scientist. *(MARIE nods and sits.)*

WILLIAM: So what do you intend to do with the rest of us, Detective?

HUDSON: What do you mean?

WILLIAM: You know that some of us were involved in... well, not quite legitimate activities.

HUDSON: Ah yes, that. *(HUDSON looks at JACK.)* Well, if Agent Anderson promises to keep an eye on you all, that's good enough for me. *(JACK nods.)*

JACK: Consider it done, Detective.

HUDSON: Will that do?

FLORENCE: I think that would be acceptable.

MARIE: So do I, thank you.

HUDSON: You're quite welcome, all of you. *(HUDSON walks over to the coat rack and dons his hat and trench coat.)*

LENYA: Are you leaving now? *(HUDSON nods.)*

HUDSON: My job here is done. *(He tips his hat to the GUESTS.)* A good night to all of you. *(There is a chorus of "Good night"s and "Good-bye, Detective"s as HUDSON exits the house.)*

LENYA: Would anyone care for a cup of tea? I know I could certainly use one after this dreadful affair!

FLORENCE: Some tea would be delightful, Lenya.

WILLIAM: Aye, that would taste good right now.

LENYA: Jack? Marie?

JACK: I think I'll have a cup as well.

MARIE: Me too.

LENYA: *(Calling)* Duncan! *(The BUTLER enters from the kitchen.)* Five cups of tea please.

BUTLER: At once, Madame.

(The BUTLER returns to the kitchen. The lights on the house fade to black as the GUESTS begin to chat. A light comes up on HUDSON who meets PARSON on the road.)

HUDSON: Everything under control, Bob? *(PARSON nods.)*

PARSON: Sure is. Agent Brockton is going to see that Dr. Rice's work is donated to the scientific community, and the Dr. Rice of our time is being brought to Police Headquarters.

HUDSON: And the Dr. Rice of the future?

PARSON: Vanished without a trace. He can't have escaped. We were watching him too carefully. He's just... gone. *(HUDSON ponders this for a moment.)*

HUDSON: He tried to change what couldn't be changed, and it looks like he's paid the price for his interference. It's too bad. He was a brilliant scientist. He could have done a lot of good with his discovery.

PARSON: Greed gets the best of many a man. *(HUDSON nods.)*

HUDSON: So it does. Goodnight, Bob.

PARSON: Goodnight, Datch. *(PARSON exits. HUDSON stands in thought for a few moments after PARSON leaves.)*

HUDSON: *(To himself, nodding)* So it does indeed. *(The lights fade to black.)*

FINIS