

SCENE 1

(Jenkins greets guests at the front door while Albie and Rebecca circulate among the guests. Frequently, they have a minor argument about “the will.” Rebecca tells Albie that he needs to “have the courage to stand up to your father.”)

JENKINS

(Walks to the landing on the staircase and quiets the crowd.) Permit me to welcome all of you to the Armbruster Mansion. First, a moment of silence for His Late Majesty, King George V. This great house along with the entire British Empire is in mourning over the loss of a good and honest monarch. May God rest his soul. *(Orchestrates several seconds of silence.)* I am Jenkins, Sir Hugo’s butler and, due to a recent cutback in staff, also his personal valet. I’ve been in service to the gentleman for the past 20 years, and along with our maid, Lily Fish, have organized this surprise 70th birthday party. As you know, Sir Hugo was knighted after the Great War of 1914-1918 for his journalistic contributions to king and country. He has continued that tradition as the publisher of “The London Daily Truth.” It is indeed a pleasure to . . .

ALBIE

(Approaches Jenkins from the crowd.) Just a moment, Jenkins. Shouldn’t I be the one to welcome our guests? After all, as my father’s only heir, I’ll be the master of this house one day. You’re just a servant. Be cognizant of your status.

REBECCA

(Speaks with strong Cockney accent.) You tell ‘im, Albie. I knew when we met at that motorcar race that you’d make somethin’ o’ yourself – I just wasn’t sure what that would be – or even when.

JENKINS

(Irritated.) I beg your pardon, sir. Your father rarely sees you unless you want something. You're constantly at the races and seem to live only for the day that he dies and leaves everything to you. *(Descends stairs to continue the conversation.)* We both know that he has more affection for his cats than he has for you. And as for your wife, Rebecca . . . well . . .

REBECCA

What's that you're tryin' to say? I call that blasphemy 'cause it ain't true. Me and the ol' man have a warm and close relationship.

JENKINS

You don't do yourself justice, madame. Your relationship is more than warm. Often, it reaches the boiling point.

REBECCA

Oh, ta, Jenkins. *(Hesitates.)* I think.

JENKINS

I believe he puts you in the same category as the racecars that your husband so readily enjoys. A hot property with very little control that is easily misguided and expensive to maintain. *(Smiles at Rebecca who seems confused.)*

REBECCA

Oh, ta, again. *(Looks at Albie.)* I think.

ALBIE

Enough of that. If you know so much about my father, then you'll know the answer to this question. *(Leans close and speaks in a low voice.)* Is he changing his will?

JENKINS

(Looks around, then at Albie. He leans closer.) His will, sir?

ALBIE

Yes, his will. If anyone in this house knows about it, you will.

JENKINS

Maybe I will, but I won't . . .

REBECCA

You won't what?

JENKINS

I won't – well – whisper about the will.

ALBIE

Why won't you? Or will you?

JENKINS

(Confused.) Will I or won't I what, sir?

ALBIE

(Raises his voice.) The will, man. Confound it, the will.

JENKINS

Oh, are you referring to the will that disinherits you and leaves Sir Hugo's entire estate to the Royal Feline Society?

ALBIE and REBECCA

(Loud gasps.)

JENKINS

I know nothing about it. *(Turns and walks away smirking as Albie and Rebecca whisper to each other. Maude Adamly enters with a flourish, blowing kisses and waving to the guests. She is carrying a wrapped parcel.)*

MAUDE

(Speaks dramatically as if performing for an audience.) Bon soir. It's so rewarding to be with my fans on such an auspicious night. Everyone knows it wouldn't truly be a special occasion unless Maude Adamly, famed actress and renowned beauty, is present. Please, no autographs. Forget my many accolades and world-famous prominent admirers. Tonight, I'm simply one of you.

JENKINS

(Applauding.) Madame, nothing about you is simple.

MAUDE

Jenkins, you are too kind. *(She hands him her wrap and the parcel. He hangs up her wrap and continues to hold the parcel.)* Regardless of my recent problems, I had to be here. I know I'm still in Hugo's plans, despite what he might have said. *(Turns to audience, poses and speaks dramatically while gesturing.)* The past is merely a prologue to a future abundant with mystical mysteries wrapped in uncertainty and tied together with anticipation. What would life be without the slings and arrows of a wondrous, yet threatening world that can just as easily tear us apart as put us back together? And, it is that togetherness which gives us our reason to exist and to love. *(Takes a bow.)*

JENKINS

(Applauding while juggling the parcel.) You're looking well, madame. I read that you've returned to your starring role in "The Lady Can Be Lethal." I must say, you didn't lose a single scintillating syllable while you were recuperating.

MAUDE

(Speaks to guests.) Yes, I'm receiving my usual rave reviews from the critics. I so missed my adoring public during my recent hiatus. *(Gestures toward parcel in Jenkins's hands.)* Place my gift for Sir Hugo in a safe place, will you, Jenkins? I chose something for him that I know will – shall we say - be in his head for a long time. *(Smiles while gritting her teeth as she speaks.)* If he doesn't like it, I might just throw it at him. *(Smiles.)*

JENKINS

Of course, madame. I'll put it right here. *(Places parcel in a spot where everyone can see it.)* I'm sure he'll open it later tonight.

ANGUS

(Enters wearing a trenchcoat and carrying a briefcase. He speaks with a Scottish accent.) What a miserable night for driving, Jenkins. I worked late at the newspaper, and took a shortcut through the bog. Then, I nearly tripped over that bloody blue Burmese cat on the way in. I think that's the cat that the boss calls Sidney.

JENKINS

Through the bog, Mr. McZogg?

ANGUS

Aye. In the fog.

ALBIE

Through the bog in the fog?

ANGUS

That's right, lad. It wouldn't have been so bad, but a car in front of me was taking up most of the road. He was a . . . a . . . a . . .

MAUDE

(Gestures dramatically.) A roadhog.

ANGUS

Aye, that he was.

ALBIE

So, McZogg, you encountered a roadhog while driving through the bog in the fog?

JENKINS

(Points finger in the air.) By George, I think he's got it. *(Smiles sheepishly, looks around, then loses smile.)*

ANGUS

(Jenkins takes his trenchcoat and reaches for the briefcase. Angus holds on to the briefcase.) Did I make it in time, Jenkins? Is the boss here yet?

JENKINS

He should arrive any minute, sir. He was with his associates at the Royal Berkshire Country Club. You know how he loves to discuss golf and brag about his prowess and endurance.

MAUDE

(Chuckling.) Prowess and endurance? Not so much lately, Jenkins. Take my word for it.

ANGUS

(Reaches into briefcase and pulls out copies of the newspaper.) I've brought copies of today's newspaper with me, Jenkins. Feel free to give them to your guests. *(Jenkins takes newspapers. Speaks to Jenkins and gestures with the briefcase.)* I have a

very important editorial to discuss with Sir Hugo. It concerns our new king, Edward VIII. It's only right that our readers know everything about him.

JENKINS

(Takes briefcase.) I'll put your briefcase here in his study, sir. I hope your editorial presents a more accurate description of world events than the articles that Sir Hugo has been writing.

ANGUS

Our newspaper is named "The London Daily Truth" and that's what our readers expect – the truth. *(Speaks to guests.)* As the editor, to me only the truth will do.

JENKINS

(Tries to applaud with his hands full, but is unsuccessful.) Bravo, sir. It's what I would expect from a true gentleman of the press.

SHEILA

(Surreptitiously enters.) Gentleman? Surely, you can't be talking about Hugo Armbruster.

JENKINS

Sheila Stanton? Is it you? What are you doing here? I'd heard you'd left England years ago. *(Puts briefcase in study, hangs up trenchcoat, places newspapers in a central location and talks to Sheila while "butlering".)*

SHEILA

Good to see you, too, Jenkins. After all these years, I'm a little surprised that you recognize me. When one studies with the finest porcelain artists in all of Europe, it can't help but change a person. I'm so much more aware now of what needs to be done – and I intend to do it.

JENKINS

(Stammering.) You . . . you . . . you'll have to leave before Sir Hugo gets here.
(Tries to escort her out, but she resists.)

SHEILA

Not just yet, Jenkins. I heard about this party and realized that it would be a perfect time to remind Hugo Armbruster of his true character. *(Looks around.)* It's been at least 15 years since I've been here, but I still remember my way around the mansion. That's why it was convenient for me to sneak through the door that leads in from the garage. The old man still likes his felines, I see. A red Abyssinian cat stared at me suspiciously as I passed by it - then hissed. It certainly has Hugo's manners. *(Moves closer to Jenkins.)* We both realize my father would have wanted me to be here to confront your esteemed employer about his past misdeeds. You know all about those misdeeds, don't you?

JENKINS

Well . . . ah . . . but you can't be here.

SHEILA

But I AM here. *(Takes off coat and tosses it on banister.)* And, I intend to stay here.

ALBIE

Don't make a scene, Jenkins. Let her stay. *(To Sheila.)* Stanton! Stanton! *(To Jenkins.)* Didn't my father have a business partner named Stanton? I believe he died penniless about a decade ago.

SHEILA

Penniless, stripped of his dignity and of his rightful spot in British history. A daughter doesn't forget those things. *(Stares wistfully into space, then abruptly turns around.)* And now I'm back in England and I won't leave until everything is rectified.

LILY

(Walks in from kitchen holding a dustpan and brush. Opens closet door and puts them inside, then closes door. Speaks to Jenkins.) Don't say anything to him, Jenkins. Sir Hugo has so much crystal that he won't miss one glass. Besides, it wasn't the dear thing's fault. No, it was me, Lily Fish, who tripped over him.

JENKINS

You've been feeding Harold in the kitchen again, haven't you, Fish?

LILY

He's such a sweet cat – and quite a handsome boy. You won't find another white Manx cat in all of England that can match him.

JENKINS

You know that Harold is Sir Hugo's favorite cat. He gets quite stropky if Harold isn't in his study when he arrives home. Harold's purring puts him in an agreeable mood.

LILY

You don't have to tell me. He puts Harold right there in his lap, even when he's talking with people. White cat hair is all over the study. Who do you think has to clean it up? Me, of course. Harold would have a lot more freedom if Malcolm, the black Devon Rex, would stop picking on him. It's so unfair. Harold is much smaller than Malcolm. Don't fret, Jenkins. I'll make sure Harold is in the study, and Sir Hugo won't even know he was gone. *(Starts to go back to the kitchen, then points to a large parcel in a corner by the door.)* Oh, I forgot to tell you. While you were away this afternoon, a messenger arrived with that envelope. He said to make sure Sir Hugo has it as soon as he gets home. *(Starts to walk away, then turns around.)* Something about signatures. *(Albie and Rebecca turn their heads quickly, look at each other and walk toward Jenkins.)*

JENKINS

(Picks up parcel and reads the label. Albie and Rebecca try to secretly look over his shoulders.) Marley, Barley and Oates, Solicitors at Law. Confidential and personal material for Sir Hugo Smythe Armbruster. *(Albie and Rebecca stare at each other. Jenkins moves parcel up and down in his hands.)* It's quite a hefty parcel. *(Thinks for a second.)* I'll wager it's the . . . *(Stops in mid-sentence when he notices Albie and Rebecca standing behind him. Stares at them. They back off and start to whisper to each other. Talks to Lily.)* I'll secure this in Sir Hugo's desk. I know he'll want to take care of everything tonight.

(SFX Car pulling in and braking.)

LILY

(Puts hand to ear.) Did you hear that? It sounds like the old man's new Bentley just pulled into the garage.

JENKINS

(Hurriedly puts the parcel in the study. Albie and Rebecca scrutinize the location of the parcel. Jenkins climbs stairs to landing.) Everyone, please pay attention. I've instructed the chauffeur, Hubert Krumm, to distract Sir Hugo and give us ample time to rehearse his arrival. He'll enter through this door *(Points to door.)* and when he reaches this point, *(Indicates spot near bottom of the stairs.)* all of you will shout in unison, "Surprise." Let's try that.

ALBIE

(Walks toward office door and stands in front of it) I'll portray my father, Jenkins. After all, it won't be long until I'll be making my arrival through this door.

REBECCA

(Yelling across the room.) You meant to say where WE'LL be arrivin', didn't you, my love?