

MURDER AT THE FANCY-DRESS BALL

a whodunnit in four acts

by

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first night: 28th September 1989
revised and enlarged in 2005

The persons of the play (in order of appearance)

8 female / 6 male

The Announcer can be played by a boy or a girl

- Gail A young chambermaid
- Peggy A waitress, hired for the fancy-dress ball
- Abdul The butler. He is a Gurkha and became Colonel Gordon's batman in the first Gulf War.
- Sarah Lady Sarah Gordon-Ogilvy. The lady of the house. She is the chairwoman of the Horticultural Society of the Scottish Highlands
- Jocelyn Lady Jocelyn Murray. A friend of Lady Sarah's
- Moira Moira Gordon-Ogilvy. The daughter
- Colonel Colonel Ian Gordon-Ogilvy, the master of the house. He is a newly retired colonel of the The Queen's Own Highlanders, a Scottish elite regiment
- Smith Teresa Smith. A reporter from `People`, an American magazine. She wants to interview the colonel about his experiences in Iraq.
- Fiona Fiona Stewart. A friend of Lady Sarah's
- Robert Robert Stewart, her husband. He is an old friend of the colonel's. He is the headmaster of the famous Dufftown Public School
- Timmy Timothy Macpherson. Moira's boyfriend
- Henry Henry Brown, a waiter at the Gleneagles Hotel near Edinburgh. He is a fan of the Scottish flora and has invited himself to the fancy-dress ball.
- Prince C. (He also plays Prince Charles)
- Elizabeth Lady Elizabeth Mountbatten. Chairwoman of the English Horticultural Society. She is related to Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh
- Announcer Announcer

The story takes place in the living-room of the Gordon Manor House ten miles outside Dufftown in the Scottish Highlands on July 2nd 2005.

ACT ONE

Scene 1

A large old room with some portraits and a set of bagpipes on the walls. There are some armchairs, a large sofa and a small table in the middle of the room. There is another small table with a telephone on it in a corner. There is a floor lamp in one corner and there are some bookshelves with flower pots and some books on them on one side. French doors open out into the gardens. The room is quite a mess with lots of dirty glasses and cups on the table.

(Gail, with a tray, and Peggy, with a duster, enter and have a look around the room. Gail puts down her tray and immediately starts rearranging the chairs while Peggy drops onto a sofa with a sigh)

Gail Just look at that! What a mess!

Peggy It just makes me feel sick. Why can't they show a little more consideration for the staff?

Gail What do you mean? Aren't the Gordons nice, polite and well-behaved? Especially the Colonel - he's a real gentleman!

Peggy A gentleman? *(she snorts)* A parasite - that's what I call him!

Gail Don't be unfair - and please - do give me a hand now. We're running a bit late.

(Peggy stands up reluctantly, walks over to the stereo set and switches it on. It plays „Edelweiss“ from the musical „The Sound of Music“. Peggy waltzes some steps with her duster, then switches it off.)

Peggy That's a bit too lame for a good morning's work. Let's try something faster.

(She selects another tune and turns to Gail)

Peggy Shall we dance, darling?

Gail *(laughing)* You're completely crazy!

(Gail joins her in a wild hip hop dance. After some moments Abdul enters, looks at the two girls disapprovingly and shouts)

Abdul Stop it right now!

(The two girls freeze. Abdul switches off the music.)

Abdul What do you think you're doing?

Gail We were just having a little fun.

Abdul You're not here to have fun - you're here to do a job!

Peggy *(she stands at attention and salutes)* Aye, aye, sir!

Abdul Don't let me catch you again - or I'll have to report you to the Colonel!

(He leaves. Gail quickly and efficiently starts working. Peggy is still standing at attention. Suddenly she shouts)

Peggy Attention! *(she stamps her feet three times)*
Present arms! *(she presents her duster)*
Start work! *(she goose-steps across the room and dusts in a military style - but quite inefficiently. Gail giggles)*

Gail You're so funny, Peg. But aren't you afraid of losing your job?

Peggy I'm only hired until after Lady Sarah's show, remember?

Gail And then?

Peggy Who knows? I've been in and out of jobs for so long I don't really care.

(Both are working now as Lady Sarah Gordon-Ogilvy enters the room with a clipboard in her hand. Gail drops a curtsy, Peggy does not seem to have seen her.)

Gail Good morning, Lady Sarah!

Sarah Good morning, girls. I'm afraid, it was quite a long meeting last night. We had to go over all the details of tonight's charity event. But everything's organised now. By the way, you'll have to wear fancy-dresses, too.

Gail Oh, really? I thought this was only for the guests.

Sarah No, no, even Abdul will come dressed up!

(She takes out her mobile phone and dials a number.)

Sarah This is Lady Sarah Gordon-Ogilvy. I'd like to speak to Lady Jocelyn Murray, please. --- Oh, she's on her way here? --- I see, thank you very much.

(Abdul enters, followed by Lady Jocelyn Murray)

Abdul Lady Jocelyn, madam!

(Abdul leaves)

Jocelyn Hello, darling. *(they kiss)* I've left the roses for the balcony with Abdul.

Sarah Thank you very much, dear. By the way, I just phoned you.

Jocelyn What about?

Sarah About the fancy-dress.

Jocelyn Oh, please, Sarah! Let's not start again! We were arguing about it for two hours last night! I will not wear anything!

Sarah How shocking! So you'll come as Eve?

Jocelyn Don't try to make fun of me, dear! It simply can't be. At the last fancy-dress ball I dressed up as a camel, and everybody thought I was a cow! It was horrible!

Sarah But even Abdul will dress up!

Jocelyn How?

Sarah I mustn't tell you. It's his secret.

Jocelyn Oh, come on Sarah, do tell me!

Sarah All right, but don't tell anybody. He'll come as an old lady.

Jocelyn *(giggling)* What, Abdul an old lady? That'll be weird!

Sarah Let's go to the gardens.

(She sees Peggy arranging some flowers)

Sarah Don't touch my flowers, Peggy! How often must I repeat this?

Peggy I'm sorry, Lady Sarah, I thought.....

Sarah Don't think, just do what you're told!

(Lady Sarah and Lady Jocelyn go out into the gardens.)

Peggy Yes, Lady Sarah. - You stupid old cow! *(she spits)*

Scene 2

(Abdul enters with two vases)

Abdul Well, this looks better. Now please fetch the ladder and the banner. The Colonel wants this room ready by noon.

(Gail and Peggy leave. Abdul arranges some things and musters the room critically. Moira enters)

Moira Good morning, Abdul, have you seen Mum?

Abdul Good morning, Miss Moira. Yes, she's in the gardens with Lady Jocelyn.

Moira Oh, I can't disturb her then.

(Moira leaves. Gail and Peggy return with a ladder and a banner.)

Abdul Let's put it up here.

(He climbs up the ladder and Gail and Peggy help him with the banner. When they have finished, the banner reads 'Horticultural Society of the Scottish Highlands: 2005 Fund Raising Charity')

Gail Lady Sarah has just told us that all the servants must wear fancy-dress, too.

Abdul That's right.

Gail And you'll be dressing up as an old lady?

Abdul That's right. The Colonel's idea. He's even given me some of his wife's old dresses to choose from. But you mustn't tell her - or the Colonel will be in trouble!

Peggy You and the Colonel go back a long time, don't you?

Abdul That's right.

Peggy Tell us more!

Abdul Well, we met in the first Gulf War where I became his batman. When he retired last year I stayed with him as a butler, manservant and bodyguard.

Gail And you also fought in the second Gulf War?

Abdul That's right.

Peggy Did you see many battles?

Abdul No, we were hunting terrorists.

Gail Tell us more!

Abdul You don't want to know.

Peggy Oh, come on.

(Abdul climbs down the ladder and looks at their work.)

Abdul That's fixed then.

Peggy What do you think about this horticultural nonsense?

Abdul As a butler you don't think anything about your employer's whims. And I advise you to do the same.

(Lady Sarah and Lady Jocelyn enter and look at the banner.)

Sarah Oh, lovely! Very nice, indeed! Thank you, Abdul.

(Abdul, Peggy and Gail leave)

Jocelyn Okay, see you tonight then, darling.

Sarah And think about that fancy-dress again, dearest!

Jocelyn I won't. Bye, bye!

Scene 3

(Moira enters)

Moira Are you alone, Mum?

Sarah Hello, darling!

Moira Have you got a minute?

Sarah Look, I'm very busy at the moment.

Moira Mum, it's something personal.

Sarah All right, let's sit down!

Moira Well, Mum, tonight I'm going to introduce my boyfriend to you.

Sarah Your boyfriend? You've never said a word! Who is he?

Moira You don't know him. I met him in Inverness - three months ago. Oh, Mummy, he's so sweet - and so good-looking! His name's Timothy Macpherson.

Sarah Is he in the army?

Moira No, he isn't.

Sarah Poor Dad! He won't like him. You know that your Dad wants you to marry an officer from his old regiment.

Moira I don't want any of his Highlanders. They're so boring! Their only topics are their regiment, sports, fast cars and women!

Sarah So what does your Timothy do? Has he been to university?

Moira Yes of course. But he left after one term. He didn't like it. Now he works as an artist. You should see the pictures he's got in his studio.

(Colonel Ian Gordon enters the room. He is wearing a kilt.)

Colonel Who's got such fantastic pictures?

Moira Oh, hello Daddy. I was talking about Timothy Macpherson.

Colonel Do I know him?

Moira Not yet. But you'll meet him tonight. He's my boyfriend, you know.

Colonel I see. Is he in the army?

Moira No, sir! *(she salutes him)*

Sarah He's an artist.

Colonel An artist! Forget him, Moira! The men in our family join the army, the navy or the church. But they're not artists. We call in artists to have our portraits drawn - not to marry our daughters!

Moira Nobody's speaking of marrying yet, Dad. So just try to keep an open mind for once!

(She leaves in a fury)

Colonel What's the matter with her? I didn't tell her anything new, did I? You know, Sarah, there's this young lieutenant in my regiment. The perfect son-in-law. Good manners, old Highland family. He'll go far.

Sarah Ian, not every nice young man can be an officer in your old regiment! There are perfectly nice young men who are **not** in the army! Moira is old enough to choose for herself.

Colonel But an artist - for Christ's sake! They don't even have the money to support a wife and children!

(Abdul enters)

Abdul Mrs Smith has arrived, Colonel.

Sarah Mrs Smith?

Colonel Yes, dear, the reporter from „People“ who wants to write an article about me. She's quite late.
Show her in, Abdul!

(Abdul leaves)

Sarah I'd better leave you alone then.

(She leaves)

Scene 4

(Abdul and Teresa Smith, the reporter, enter)

Abdul Teresa Smith, Colonel.

Colonel Thank you, Abdul. How do you do, Mrs Smith?

(They shake hands)

Smith How do you do, sir, or do I call you 'Colonel'?

Colonel 'Colonel' is fine. What would you like to drink, Mrs Smith?

Smith Gin and tonic, please.

Colonel And a whisky for me, Abdul!

Smith I'm sorry I'm late, Colonel. But getting out of Edinburgh took ages. There were so many security checks all over Edinburgh because of the G8 summit. I underestimated it. Then there was a lot of very bad weather on the way - and it seems to be following me here.

(Abdul brings the drinks)

Abdul Here are your drinks!

Colonel Thank you. Cheers!

Smith Cheers!

Colonel I'm afraid we won't have the time for a long interview now. You may have noted that we're in the middle of the preparations for tonight's charity event for the Scottish Horticultural Society. My wife's the chairwoman, you see.

Smith I saw some posters on the way here.

Colonel So here's my plan. You'll stay overnight and we'll do the interview tomorrow morning. Tonight you're my guest at the fancy-dress ball. Just tell me what you'd like to be: a nurse, Maid Marian, a geisha or a cowgirl.

Smith That's fine with me. I've got plenty of time. I think, I'll be a cowgirl. I'm a good shot and at least I won't have to change my accent!

Colonel Splendid, splendid! Now about the interview. What would you like to concentrate on?

Smith I'm mostly interested in your experiences during the second Gulf War. I hear your regiment specialized in hunting down terrorists.

Colonel That's right. Al Qa'ida gave us a hard time - still does, as a matter of fact.

(He looks at his watch.)

Colonel Oh, it's time we changed into fancy-dress. Come on, let's turn you into a cowgirl!

(They leave.)

CURTAIN