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Characters (numbers in brackets : Speaking characters/Non-speaking characters)

Act One

1. The Raven (2/0)
2. The Tell-Tale Heart (5/0)
3. The Masque of the Red Death (4/1)

Act Two

1. The facts in the case of M. Valdemar (5/7)
2. The Angel of the Odd (4/1)
3. Hop Frog (7/0)

Characters

Recurring

Gothic Character Optional non-speaking character who appears between plays (M/F)
Narrator Voice over who announces each play and narrates (M/F)

The Raven

Poe The protagonist (M)
Raven Disembodied voice (M/F)

Tell-Tale Heart

Wilson Young man, protagonist (M/F)
Old Man An old man (M/F)
Policeman 1 A Policeman (M/F)
Policeman 2 A Policeman (M/F)
Policeman 3 A Policeman (M/F)

Masque of the Red Death

Prince Prospero Protagonist (M)
Dame A noble guest (F)
Duke A noble guest (M)
The Red Death A hooded figure. Non-speaking (M/F)

The facts in the case of M. Valdemar

Judge Courtroom Judge (M/F)
Accused Non-speaking criminal (M/F)
Physician Protagonist, referred to as Mr. L (M/F)
Subject Non-speaking subject of hypnosis (M/F)
Valdemar Dying man (M)
Doctor 1 Assistant to M. Valdemar (M/F)

Doctor 2 Assistant to M. Valdemar (**M/F**)

The Angel of the odd

Duff Protagonist in the Angel of the Odd (**M**)

Angel The Angel of the Odd (**M/F**)

Mary Potential suitor for Duff (**F**)

HopFrog

King A boorish tyrant (**M**)

Courtier 1 Sycophantic royal sympathiser (**M/F**)

Courtier 2 Sycophantic royal sympathiser (**M/F**)

Courtier 3 Sycophantic royal sympathiser (**M/F**)

Courtier 4 Sycophantic royal sympathiser (**M/F**)

Trippetta The court dancer (**F**)

Hopfrog The court jester (**M**)

Act 1

Scene 1 – Chamber

(Depending on your production, before each scene, a character dressed in Gothic attire enters morosely, carrying a placard with the name of the tale printed on it in elaborate Gothic writing. The character should then remain whilst the Narrator speaks and then exit in a similar manner to which they entered. This is optional however. You may also want the narrator to be dressed similarly and remain on-stage throughout each scene, speaking whilst reading from a large book. Alternatively, the Narrator can narrate through the P.A. system.)

Narrator: The Raven

(The chamber has a window stage right, a large chair near a table and a two-seat chair centre stage with a purple drape over it. The door stage left has a Raven above it but this must not be clear to the audience until the final part of the scene when a spotlight or similar illuminates it.)

(SFX. Wind outside. Poe enters carrying a cup and a large book.)

Poe: (Looking at his pocket-watch) Nearly midnight. I should have been asleep hours ago. I'm so tired I can hardly stand; not surprising really with that wind outside and this strange old house and so much on my mind. (He sits on the chair next to the table, placing the cup on the table) I'll just sit here for a few minutes, drink my cocoa and read this book I took from my library. (He turns the face of the book to the audience) 'Strange book of ancient knowledge'. (Opens the book and reads) 'Birds of ill omen – prophetic signs – '

(Poe begins to nod off. SFX. Tapping.)

Poe: (Wakes with a start) What was that?

(SFX. Tapping)

Poe: (Calmly settling back into his chair) A knock at the door? Just a visitor - nothing more... (confused) a visitor... at midnight? I remember the last time I heard that sound. (worried) It was a cold December night, not long had I lost my true love, Lenore. December, where the nights are longer, darker – I was finding distraction in my books; I realise now that ghost stories were a bad choice. With the tapping at the door and the room lit only by the dying fire, casting ghosts across the floor. Never had I craved daylight so much if only to help me think of my lost Lenore with a smile, rather than this, haunted by her

memory. Her perfume still lingers on the couch where she used to sit. **(He indicates the two seat chair.)**

(SFX. Tapping)

Poe: The last time, it was *him* - but this time, it's just a visitor; nothing more. I remember, in the darkness I saw the curtain move; it made a sound, it terrified me. To calm my fear I said aloud 'a visitor, a visitor at my chamber door. Nothing more'. **(Moves to the door and speaks loudly)** I'm sorry I took so long to answer the door – I was barely awake and you knocked so gently I could barely be sure it was a knock at all. **(To audience)** But, when I opened the door, just darkness – and nothing more. I gazed out into the quiet dark, inventing reasons for the sound, wondering, fearing – but still just darkness. The silence, my mind inventing until I realised – it was my lost love, I whispered into the dark – 'Lenore?'.

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(A whispered voice repeats the word 'Lenore' over the P.A. For added effect, members of the backstage crew could be positioned around the theatre and whisper the name in the darkness around the audience.)

Poe: The whisper, and nothing more. I sat once more, still afraid. **(Poe sits in the chair once more.)**

(SFX. Tapping)

Poe: This time I knew it, I was ready - I was listening for it. It wasn't the sound of my broken heart in my head; something outside my chamber louder than before. I needed to know, to explore. **(Poe moves to the window)** Was it the wind? The storm and nothing more? I threw open the window **(he mimes throwing open the window)** and in came not the storm – but a solitary bird. A dark and stately bird; a Raven. He could have flown straight from the pages of my ghost stories but this bird had purpose in his eye, he did not stop to investigate, he seemed not to even notice me or to check before landing and perching above my chamber door **(Poe follows the imagined bird from the window to the chamber door)**, upon my bust of Pallas. Pallas, the goddess of wisdom. The dark bird whose colour matched the emotions that gripped me that night, the bitter grief I felt for the loss of Lenore, sitting on the bust above my chamber door; emotion over wisdom.

(Poe sits in his chair once more.)

Poe: It fascinated me; stupefied me. I forgot my sadness, that the bird was nothing more than that; a bird. (**Addressing the darkness above his chamber door**) 'You sit as royalty, but you have no crest', I laughed. The bird did not share in my humour. 'Have you flown here from the land of the dead; from the plutonian shore? Tell me stately bird, what is your lordly name?' Quoth the Raven –

Raven: Nevermore

Poe: (**Puzzled**) The bird spoke. (**He stands and walks to the door**) At first I stared in amazement but then I know many birds have the ability to speak and this Raven was surely no different to them; but its reply made no sense. An irrelevant response that his name was 'nevermore'. I made it my duty to tell him so – 'many losses I have suffered, friends and hopes among them. When do *you* intend to leave me dark bird?'

Raven: Nevermore

Poe: This answer I understood. Through wisdom, through rational deduction, the bird had a master who would curse his own misfortune with that word. Never, nevermore. Yes, I thought. This is how the Raven knows the word – nevermore. Though stricken by grief, this bird of sorrow amused me. I took to my chair (**He sits and drags the chair nearer to the door**) and sat in front of the bird, the bust and the door. How grim, I thought, how ghastly and gaunt, I thought - what could he mean by 'nevermore'?

(**Poe pauses for a while to think. SFX. Wind outside**)

Poe: My amusement faded as we sat in still silence. It stared with its evil eyes until my mind turned back to the sorrow of my lost love. The violet velvet couch where she once sat (**he glances at the two-seat chair**), the lamp-light dancing shadows over the violet velvet couch where she will sit, nevermore.

(**Stands and walks to the couch**)

Poe: The air thickened, something was here in the dark with me. A scent, one I recognised - was it an angel? 'Wretch', I cried, 'Mine is a miserable soul indeed; are you here to offer me nepenthe? A potion to help me forget? To rest from my grief; to forget my lost Lenore? Will I ever take a moment's rest from the grief of my lost Lenore? Then quoth the Raven –

Raven: Nevermore

Poe: 'How do you know?', I asked the Raven, 'How do you know my future? Are you the devil or were you sent by him with dark messages? Maybe the storm carried you and you would merely shelter here, in this sad house; this desert land. Then why do you sit there undaunted, enchanted? Tell me truly', I asked, 'Tell me, will I ever find a cure for this sorrow? Tell me. Tell me.'
Quoth the raven –

Raven: Nevermore

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Poe: **(Reeling from the reply, he staggers upstage centre and kneels)** I was not worthy of such a sainted maiden as Lenore; so rare and so radiant. 'Raven', I said, knowing his reply would only confirm my darkest fear, 'When I too am taken by the angels, will my sorrow laden soul with Lenore's enfold?' Quoth the Raven –

Raven: Nevermore

Poe: **(Jumping up and walking to the door)** 'You lie', I shrieked, but the bird did not move. 'Leave me, back on the storm which brought you to me; back to the underworld. Leave not even a feather to remind me of your fiendish lies. Take your beak from my broken heart and leave the bust above my chamber door'. Quoth the Raven –

Raven: Nevermore

(A spotlight fades up on the Raven. Preferably behind or underneath the Raven which is perched on a bust. It is revealed to the audience that the bird has been there throughout the scene. It casts a shadow across the stage if possible.)

Poe: But there the Raven has remained; on the bust above my chamber door. Sorrow over wisdom. The only way out of this room, guarded by the symbol of my sorrow, to emerge from the loss of my love, Lenore. Cursed by this bird's presence as its shadow from my soul shall be lifted, nevermore.

(Lights off. Tabs closed.)

Scene 2 – Old Shop

(Spotlight on Gothic Character as it enters front of tabs carrying a sign saying ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’)

Narrator: The Tell-Tale Heart

(Gothic Character exits. Lights off. SFX. Faint sound of a heartbeat. Wilson enters front of tabs and is dimly lit. A red wash fades on and off now and then to accentuate parts of the dialogue, becoming more frequent as Wilson’s madness grows. Wilson sits on the floor and stares madly out into the audience.)

Wilson: **(Nervous and agitated)** How am I mad? I am nervous and this disease has heightened my senses. My hearing has become so acute. I can hear everything. I can hear it all; all in heaven and earth... and in hell. I heard many things in hell. So... how am I mad? **(He stands and moves slowly upstage, with a maddened stare fixed on the audience)** So how can I tell you my tale from that night and be so calm? Let me take you back to before it happened.

(The lights dim and the red wash matches the still faint heartbeat, flashing on and off a few times until the tabs open. Stage lights rise to reveal an old fashioned shop interior. An old man enters. He has a larger-than-normal weird-looking eye which must be obvious to the audience that it is different to his ‘normal’ eye.)

Old Man: Wilson my man, how are you on this fine day?

(Wilson continues to stare out into the audience as he speaks. The old man is oblivious to Wilson’s narration throughout and only reacts to his direct conversational dialogue)

Wilson: I don’t know why I thought it but when I did, there was no escaping it. There was no point to it; it was not driven by need. I loved the old man.

Old Man: Did you enjoy the broth I left for you on the stove? Does wonders on a cold day like this.

Wilson: **(To old man)** Yes, I did. Thank you.

Old Man: I have bought you a new coat. **(He fetches a coat from a table downstage)** That old one can’t be doing you much good with the holes in the sleeves. **(He chuckles)**

Wilson: (Smiling back weakly) You're too kind.

(Wilson takes the coat and tries it on. The old man lies down on the bed stage left and begins to snooze. The lights dim and the red wash begins to pulse in time with the now slightly louder heartbeat.)

Wilson: (To audience) He had never wronged me. I think it was his eye. Yes, it was this. His pale blue vulture's eye that chilled my blood whenever it fell on me. I had taken the decision to rid the world of this eye; rid the world of this old man forever. To commit this deed I was never so clever, so cautious with such prudence.

(The lights dim a little further. Wilson exits stage right and re-enters carrying a dark-lantern out in front of him. The red light still pulsing with the heartbeat.)

Wilson: I was never kinder to the man for the whole week before I killed him. Every night, about midnight, I turned the latch on the door and opened it. So gently. I carried this dark-lantern; closed so that no light shone out. I entered the old man's room slowly so not to disturb his sleep. An hour I took to enter the room fully – would a madman have been as wise? I moved to his bed (**he does so**) and undid the lantern so a single ray of light fell on the vulture's eye.

(Wilson moves upstage to address the audience, the heartbeat a little louder now)

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Wilson: This I did for seven nights; midnight, but the eye was always closed. Impossible to carry out the deed; the hellish deed. It was not the old man I hated but the eye. His *evil* eye. Then morning broke and I wandered boldly into his chamber.

(The lights rise fully. The heartbeat sound lowers in volume and the red light stops pulsing. Wilson hides the lantern behind his back. The old man awakens, rubs his eyes and sits up in bed; his feet on the floor to the side of the bed.)

Old Man: Wilson, you're here early today. Eager to get started I take it?

Wilson: I always spoke boldly, calling him by name and asking how his night had passed.

Old Man: Well, must get about my day. See you later.

(The old man exits stage right)

Wilson: **(Watching slyly as the old man leaves)** It was the eighth night that I carried out the deed. The eighth night of my desire to rid the world of the eye that did so haunt me. It finally allowed me power to carry out that which I had been compelled to do since that eye had started the hate. I waited all day for the man to return.

(The old man enters once more.)

Old Man: Wilson, how are you my man?

(Wilson hands him a cup from the table downstage)

Wilson: **(To audience)** I made him a night-time drink to see him off into his final dream.

Old Man: Cocoa. I shall sleep well after this.

(The old man drinks from the cup and climbs into bed. The lights dim, the heartbeat becomes audible once more and the red light begins to pulse as faintly as the heartbeat sound. Wilson moves stage right to enact that night's deeds.)

Wilson: My power was intense that night. I laughed at my feeling of triumph; that the old man could not even dream of my intentions. Had he heard me? He stirred but did I draw back? No! **(Wilson moves towards the bed)** The room black as pitch with the thick darkness and so I motioned to open the lantern but my thumb slipped. The clang of the tin fastening caused the old man to leap awake.

Old Man: **(Sitting up in bed but staring stage right, not at Wilson)** Who's there?

Wilson: I kept still; I did not move. For an entire hour I did not move.

(The old man stays upright in bed and Wilson waits)

Old Man: It is nothing but the wind in the chimney. It is only a mouse crossing the floor. It is merely a cricket which has made a single chirp.

Wilson: He had been trying to comfort himself but death had entered the room. I heard the groan; a groan of terror, mortal terror. I knew the sound, knew it well as the sound that rises from the pit of the soul. And now death approached with his black shadow before him though the old man did not feel *me* in his room.

(The heartbeat becomes a little more audible and the red pulses a little brighter)

Wilson: Though he had not lain down, I resolved to open the lantern. The width of a spider's thread I opened the lantern until the light fell upon the vulture's eye. It was open – *wide* open. I grew furious as I gazed upon it; the dull blue under the hideous veil chilled my bones. I saw nothing else, no man, no bed, no room. I had, by instinct it seems, focussed the light upon the evil eye.

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(The heartbeat grows louder. Wilson turns and directs his manic stare out to the audience)

Wilson: Do you recall I said before, madness is but a heightening of the senses? To my ears a low, dull quick sound like the muffled tick of a watch. It was the beating of the old man's heart. Like a drum stirs a soldier into courage, so it stirred me to my deed.

(Wilson moves back to the bed)

Wilson: I remained still throughout the increasing thud.

(The heartbeat becomes louder still)

Wilson: It grew louder and louder; do you mark me well? I am nervous, at the dead hour of night in the dreadful silence it is strange that this sound excited and terrified me. The heart grew louder, so loud I thought it could burst – had his terror grown so? And then it occurred to me – the sound could be heard by a neighbour! The old man's time had come.

(Lights off)

Wilson: I struck. I dragged the old man beneath the bed, there he stayed.

(The old man yells as he is dragged from the bed. The heartbeat stops. He slips down behind the bed (and off stage if possible) so he remains unseen for the remainder of the scene. Lights up so they dimly light the stage.)

Wilson: **(Staring into the audience from upstage centre)** I smiled to find the deed so far done. My hand on the heart that pulsed no more – the eye would trouble me no more. You still would not call me mad when you discover that I concealed the old man, in parts; head, heart and all under three planks of the floor. I replaced the boards so cunningly that no eye, not even his, could have detected any wrongdoing.

(SFX. Knock on the door)

Wilson: After I'd hidden all trace of my deed, it was 4am. Still dark as midnight a knock came on the street door. I went to answer it with a light heart for what now did I have to fear?

(Wilson exits stage right to answer the door. He returns with three policemen.)

Policeman 1: **(Removing his helmet and nodding)** Good evening sir

(Wilson leads the Policemen centre stage)

Policeman 2: A neighbour heard a man call out

Policeman 3: Said it came from this house

Policeman 1: They had suspicions of foul play

Policeman 2: We are duty bound to search the premises Sir.

Wilson: **(Calm and cheery)** Firstly, Gentlemen – Welcome! The shriek that was heard was my own – from a dream. The old man is away presently, visiting the country.

Policeman 3: Be that so, we must still perform our search.

(The policemen begin to search the room)

Wilson: **(To audience)** I took the visitors all over the house and bade them search *well*. I showed them the old man's treasures, secure and undisturbed. In my enthusiasm I brought chairs to the room.

(Wilson brings chairs from downstage and places them around the area in front of the bed for the Policemen to sit. He collects another chair from downstage and places it between the other three right in front of the bed)

Wilson: In the wild audacity of my perfect triumph I placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which the old man's head, heart and all did lie.

(The policemen take their seats as does Wilson)

Policeman 1: Indeed, your dream must have been terrifying sir. We have found no evidence of anything other than that.

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Policeman 2: (Conversationally) Did you hear of the new grocer in Butler street?

Policeman 1: I did not

Policeman 3: You must have, best turnips this side of Baltimore!

Policeman 1: I've always bought mine from Mr Tanner and I always will!

(The Policemen continue to stage-chat as Wilson addresses the audience)

Wilson: They sat, suspecting nothing, chatting familiar things. But I felt myself becoming pale and wished them gone. My head ached, my ears rang but they stayed chatting. The ringing –

(The heartbeat is heard once more and the red pulse returns faintly but both increase dramatically as the scene continues)

Wilson: The ringing – more distinct. I talked more freely **(he looks at the officers who are chatting and laughing)** to get rid of this sound but it grew and grew. It was soon plain that the sound was not in my head. More pale I grew and louder I spoke but the sound increased.

(The heartbeat is louder now. Still the officers sit and chat, oblivious to the sound)

Wilson: **(Loudly)** 'Ha ha', I laughed, but still I could not hide the sound. I talked more quickly, more vehemently, but the noise increased.

(The heartbeat is now at full volume and the red wash pulses at their brightest. The police officers continue to chat, oblivious as Wilson grows more and more panicked.)

Wilson: I stood and argued loudly about trivial things, gesticulating violently.

(Wilson gesticulates wildly then begins to pace the stage. The Police look on confused)

Wilson: Why would they not be gone? What *could* I do? **(to audience)** I foamed! I raved! I swore! I swung the chair on which I'd been sitting –

(Wilson scrapes the chair across the stage but still it does not cover the sound of the heartbeat. The policemen wait until Wilson stops dragging the chair and then go back to chatting to each other pleasantly)

Wilson: **(Flicking his gaze between the policemen with madness and confusion)** The sound is *so* loud... is it possible they cannot hear it? No – they heard! They suspected! They *knew*!

(Wilson nears each Policeman and speaks almost directly into the ear of each in turn)

Wilson: They are making a mockery of my horror. This I thought and this I *still* think. Anything is better than this agony. Anything was more tolerable than this ridicule. I could bear those deceitful smiles no longer!

(Wilson stands upstage and yells into the audience with his final moment of madness. The beating and red pulses continue, more quickly.)

Wilson: I felt that I must scream or die! And – now – again – hear it! Louder! Louder! Louder! *Louder!* ‘Villains!’, I shrieked, ‘pretend no more! I admit the deed!’

(Wilson moves back to the spot where he sat, the place he buried the old man)

Wilson: Here! Tear up the planks. Here it is – **(He removes a floorboard or perhaps the lid of a box and takes out a heart. He holds it aloft in his hand)** I murdered the old man and here it is, the beating of his *hideous* heart!

(Lights off. The heartbeat continues with the red flashes until the final beat which should be a double beat (i.e. two quavers versus two crochets) and then silence. Tabs closed.)

Scene 3 – Castle chamber

(The Gothic Character enters carrying a placard with the words ‘The Masque of the Red Death’ written on it in Gothic writing.)

Narrator: The Masque of the Red Death

(The Gothic Character exits. Red Death enters into a spotlight upstage centre, front of tabs. He is a tall figure in a red velvet cloak with hood. The figure inside cannot be seen save for skeletal hands and the face which is covered by a mask in the shape of a human skull. SFX. Eerie wind, thunder and ghostly whispers.)

Narrator: The Red Death had long devastated the country; no plague had ever been so fatal or so hideous. It travelled as blood and blood was its calling card. It was said to give sharp pains, dizziness and profuse bleeding from the pores bringing the end of the victim.

(Red Death raises a skeletal finger towards the audience)

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Narrator: Once the Red Death takes hold there is no stopping it and within half an hour, its job is done.

(SFX. Crack of thunder, spotlight off. Red Death should exit through the tabs. Once he has exited from the stage, the tabs open. A jaunty fanfare plays, the lights rise and Prince Prospero enters holding a flute of champagne and wearing elaborate opulent clothing.)

Prince: Welcome! Welcome one and all to my palace. The Palace of Prince Prospero. We have food to last a year, drink to last for two and entertainment of which you will never tire. I care not of this Red Death – I care not that half the townsfolk have surrendered to its fatal embrace; I have called you all to my presence, a thousand healthy and happy friends.

(Several revellers enter, stage chatting and acting generally jovial. They are all dressed to represent high social standing.)

Prince: Among you are Knights and Dames and we all will retire to the deep seclusion of this Castellated Palace.

Dame: **(Breaking from the throng and approaching the prince)** This is quite a magnificent place you have here Prince Prospero.

Prince: **(Smugly)** Yes, it isn't it? I designed it myself don't you know? It has many many rooms, each a reflection of a different part of my personality.

(The Dame purrs with admiration)

Prince: It is majestic, imposing yet dignified I feel.

(The Dame giggles and returns to the throng. The Prince has not yet finished and grabs the Duke who happens to be walking past on his way somewhere else. The Duke, irritated by the Prince's grabbing of his arm, attempts to remain amiable)

Prince: I was just saying how amazing my palace is.

Duke: Oh?

Prince: Yes, it is strong and tall with huge iron gates.

Duke: **(Confused)** Yes, we know. We brought furnaces and huge hammers. You made us weld the bolts so that nothing and nobody could get in *or* out; no matter how sudden our impulse of anguish or rage.

Prince: So I did. Ha! Well, we have enough food and wine to see us through this horrid plague. Those beyond my walls will no doubt fend for themselves – it is folly for us to pay sympathy or mind to them. There is nothing we can do but to revel and see this disease out.

Duke: Indeed. So, where is this entertainment you promised?

Prince: We have fools, improvisation, ballet dancers, musicians, beauty and wine!

(Depending on the scale of your production, each of these could be represented by an actor dressed as a Jester, a medieval actor, a ballet dancer, a musician playing a lute or similar and a woman in a large French style aristocratic dress and holding a fan)

Prince: Within there is only decadence – without is the *Red Death*. How long has this merriment lasted? Five, six months?

Duke: Nearer seven I'd say. This is a fabulous party!

(Something catches the Duke's eye and he wanders off downstage)

Prince: And now, friends and revellers - the pièce de résistance, a Masquerade ball!
(Each guest fetches a mask from downstage and returns centre stage with a partner. There is music and dancing as the Prince explains how the ball shall proceed.)

Prince: The ball shall take place amongst seven rooms. Only one shall you see at any time as they are far spaced and irregular. A window of stained glass dictates the colour of each as you can see, this is the blue room.

(A wash of blue turns the stage that colour as the dancing continues)

Prince: The second, purple with its ornaments and tapestries

(The wash turns purple)

Prince: The third green

(The stage is washed in green)

Prince: The fourth lighted in Orange, the fifth white and the sixth, violet.

(The stage is washed in orange, white and violet light in turn)

Prince: The seventh, black.

(The lights go out, the half tabs open and all the guests who are on stage, exit. The volume of the music lowers but does not fade entirely. The lights come up dimly in a red wash to light the stage sufficiently for the audience to see. There is a large ebony grandfather clock downstage. Spotlight on the prince)

Prince: It is shrouded in black velvet tapestries which hang on the ceiling and down the walls. The carpets just as such but in this chamber only, the colour of the stained glass does not reflect the colour of the furnishings. Its glass is scarlet, a deep blood colour. Because the braziers in the corridors beyond cast shapes around the room so ghastly in the extreme and produce so wild a look upon

the faces of those who enter, none of my guests were so bold to set foot within this black chamber.

(SFX. The clock ticks)

Prince: On the western wall there is a gigantic clock of ebony. Its pendulum can be heard swinging, dull, heavy, monotonous. When the hour strikes –

(The music stops. SFX. Clock chimes)

Prince: The sound is so clear and deep and musical but so peculiar that the musicians in the blue room pause momentarily. The Waltzers cease and there is brief unnerving of the guests.

(The Duke enters)

Duke: As that clock chimes, the brightest grow pale and the aged take hands to their foreheads in confusion and meditation. But –

(The clock ceases to chime. SFX. Ticking and light music as before)

Duke: As the echoes cease, the laughter returns, the music begins once more and each whispers in promises that when next the clock chimes, it will not hold them in similar emotion. Yet, when again the clock chimes –

(SFX. Clock chimes, more eerily than before)

Duke: So returns the same disconcert and tremulousness and meditation as before.

(Lights out. Half tabs close. The revellers return, the music plays at normal volume and the lights rise again with the blue wash of the blue room. The Duke joins the revellers down stage.)

Prince: Among the crowd move the anonymous faces hidden behind the grotesque and maddened masks.

Prince: There is much of the beautiful,

(A reveller moves upstage to show off their ‘beautiful’ mask)

Prince: The bizarre,

(A reveller shows off their ‘bizarre’ mask)

Prince: The terrible

(A reveller shows off their ‘terrible’ mask)

Prince: And of that which would have excited and disgusted.

(Several other revellers show off their masks by sweeping upstage, around the prince and ‘showing’ their costumes and masks to the audience. SFX. Clock chimes. The entire company freeze. The chimes stop, the music begins once more and the revellers begin moving and chatting again)

Prince: Laughter and revelry returns but will it again be silenced by the chiming of the clock in the black chamber? An hour hence and once more the chiming began – the chiming of midnight.

(SFX. Clock chimes twelve times as the Prince speaks. The Red Death enters and passes amongst the guests. He turns his face to the audience to reveal his skull mask, smiling and sinister.)

Prince: All six rooms were filled with revellers but the last, the black room contained none. And as the clock struck, a presence was felt among us. A presence that none of us had noticed before – rumour passed by whispers around the castle and there arose at length a buzz, a murmur of surprise and then finally –

(Lights off with the final chime of the clock. The company exit apart from the Prince and the cloaked figure. The stage is washed with red once more and the cloaked figure stands downstage with his back to the audience, facing the clock.)

Prince: Terror. Of Horror. Of Disgust.

(The Duke enters)

Duke: Nobody of ordinary appearance could have caused such a stir among the guests. This guest has pushed the boundary of what this night is about. Even the hearts of the reckless have been shaken and even those who are utterly lost, to whom life and death are equally humorous, this is a matter in which even they cannot find humour.

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Prince: **(Quietly, to audience)** It is felt by all present that this figure bears neither wit nor propriety with his gaunt and deathly appearance. Had he come? Had he assumed the robes and persona of the Red Death?

Duke: He has indeed assumed the appearance of the Red Death – his robes daubed in blood and even his mask sprinkled with the scarlet horror.

(The Prince approaches the figure slowly. As he nears him, the ‘Red Death’ turns to look over his shoulder and fix the Prince with a gaze. SFX. Crack of thunder.)

Narrator: When the eyes of Prince Prospero fell upon the spectral image he was gripped by convulsion, in the first instance with a strong shudder or terror but the next his brow reddened with rage

(The Prince falls to his knees, his back to the audience as the Red Death fixes him with a stare. SFX. Cracks of thunder.)

Prince: Who dares?

(The rest of the revellers enter, remaining stage left and are taken aback by what they see)

Prince: Who dares to insult us with this mockery? Seize him; unmask him that we may know whom we must hang at sunrise from the battlements!

(Some revellers make a half-hearted attempt to help the Prince by moving towards the figure. The figure turns to face the audience and fixes the Prince with a full glare. The company recede towards the wings.)

Narrator: No attempt was made to arrest the figure as he fixed the Prince with his deathly stare.

(The Prince removes a dagger from inside his cloak)

Prince: Unhand me stranger before you perish at my hand

(The Prince raises the dagger. The Red Death raises a hand and the dagger falls from the Prince’s grasp and hits the stage. The Prince follows, falling at the feet of the Red Death, dead.)

Narrator: The Prince lay dead and summoning the wild courage of despair, the throng of revellers threw themselves into the black apartment and grabbed at the figure, robes, mask and all.

(The revellers crowd around the figure removing the mask and robes. The actor inside these is concealed sufficiently to exit from the stage)

without being seen or perhaps transforms into one of the company trying to unmask him so he blends into the scene)

Narrator: The figure who had stood tall within the shadow of the ebony clock gasped in unutterable horror as they removed the disguise to find no tangible form beneath.

(The revellers break, one holding the empty robe and another, the mask. SFX. Crack of thunder. Lights flash as lightning. Lights off and the tabs close.)

Narrator: And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death. He had come like a thief in the night and one by one dropped the revellers in the blood-stained halls of their revel. They died each in the despairing posture of his fall. And the life of the ebony clock expired with the last of the revellers and the flames of the braziers went out and darkness and decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all.

(SFX. Thunder. Red and white spotlights flash and illuminate the stage. Along with the thunder, a spooky laugh could be added as the lights fade off.)

Narrator: **(with echo)** There will now be an interval of fifteen minutes; you are free to leave this room of course, but only if you dare.

(SFX. Crack of thunder. Lights flash to represent lightning. Sound fades and theatre lights rise.)

Act 2

Scene 1 – Court room

(The Gothic character enters holding a placard upon which is written ‘The facts in the case of M. Valdemar’)

Narrator: The facts in the case of M. Valdemar

(The Gothic character exits. The tabs open to reveal a court room with a Judge sitting in his dock, a position raised from the stage so he is above all of the other actors. The dock is a small wooden cabinet that he sits behind with a ledge on which he can bang a gavel. A man (the accused) stands before the judge. He is shabbily dressed and remains with his head down.)

Judge: Guilty! Take him away.

(Two policemen enter and lead the man offstage)

Judge: We shall now hear the case of M. Valdemar. Enter the accused.

(Lights rise to reveal a Jury sitting stage left. There are three to five people in the Jury depending on number of cast available. They will listen as the Physician gives an account to the court room.)

Judge: **(To jury)** It is for you to decide whether this Physician is a fraud or if he is as he says he is. Begin!

(Lights down on stage. Lights up, upstage to light the Physician who enters.)

Physician: Illusion! Illusion? ‘tis no illusion. Have you ever wanted to glimpse beyond the veil? To see behind the fabric between our world and the next? To see the wonder of afterlife, to see what surrounds us that we cannot see with mortal eyes?

(Spotlight rises on Judge)

Judge: This is immaterial. The facts are all we wish to hear. The facts in the case of M. Valdemar.

Physician: The case has caused discussion M’laud, I merely wish to discover whether your curiosity would lead you to the same ends?

Judge: It would have been a miracle had it not caused discussion Mr. L – and the fact your ‘deeds’ have made their way into the public arena; into society is why we are here.

Physician: It was not my intention to keep this from public knowledge; I merely intended further investigation beforehand. It is because I have been guarded about my deeds that garbled and exaggerated accounts have been passed on; there have been many unpleasant misrepresentations and a great deal of disbelief M'laud.

Judge: Then you have your chance to present the facts, Mr. L –. Begin.

(Tabs close with the Physician front of tabs. A subject enters front of tabs and stands facing the Physician. Both Physician and subject are lit by a spotlight. The Physician begins hypnotising the subject.)

Physician: From the experiments of Franz Anton Mesmer we learned about animal magnetism, hypnosis, mesmerism.

(Physician performs clichéd hypnotic trance inducing hand movements towards the subjects face. The subject falls into a trance.)

Physician: To cause the subject to fall into a state neither wakeful nor sleeping.

(The Physician snaps his fingers and the subject awakens. The subject then exits looking confused)

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Physician: **(To audience)** It was nine months ago; I supposed that Mesmer had missed one vital experiment. No person had been mesmerised at the edge of death. In such a state, would the patient be susceptible? Would it be more or less effective on one so close to passing from this world to the next? And, to what extent, rather, for how long a time, death may be arrested by it; such nature!

(Tabs open revealing the Jury once more. The Judge remains in darkness downstage. Valdemar enters and takes a seat on a chair which is standing centre stage. He has a white beard and black hair.)

Physician: I needed a man on whom I could test my theory. I chose my friend M. Ernest Valdemar, particularly noticeable for the sparseness of his person. He was a markedly nervous person which made him a perfect subject for mesmeric experiment. Then once he said to me –

Valdemar: I have been diagnosed with Tuberculosis. It shall not be long to my passing. You have helped so many times in the past, with my nervous attacks and anxieties; alas, I fear nothing will cure me of this.

Physician: He spoke to me many times, always calmly, of his approaching dissolution as a matter neither to be avoided nor regretted. It was of course natural that I should think of using M. Valdemar in my experiment.

Valdemar: I would allow the experiment of course. I have no relatives here who would interfere and you can be sure I have no scruples.

(Valdemar stands and paces the stage as the two men speak.)

Physician: We spoke frankly on the subject

Valdemar: I am vividly excited; though I have always offered myself to your experimentation, I have never truly offered my belief, fully, to what you do. My disease is of character that my exact release from life cannot be calculated. I shall send for you twenty four hours before my doctors predict my passing.

(Valdemar shakes the Physician's hand and exits. Spotlight up on Judge.)

Judge: You have still to explain the nature of your case Physician

(Light down on the Judge. Tabs closed. All lights off.)

Physician: **(Off stage, possibly over a PA system)** It was seven months hence when I heard again from M. Valdemar. His letter was such :

Valdemar: **(Off stage)** 'My Dear Mr. L – . You may well see me now. D – and F – are agreed that I cannot hold out beyond tomorrow midnight. I believe the time to be quite accurate. Yours, Valdemar.'

(Tabs open. Spotlight centre stage where a gurney/bed trolley stands. M. Valdemar is lying upon the trolley. How this is done is up to the production team. Whether the actor playing Valdemar is on the trolley or a dummy – in the climax to the scene, this will have to be exchanged for a skeleton or an actor in 'Zombie' makeup. Most effectively, the trolley should be pointing feet first towards the audience. The back of the trolley raised up slightly so the audience can see Valdemar's face. Two doctors in white coats are also in attendance, checking his pulse, reading charts etc. The Physician enters)

Physician: It had been ten days since I saw Valdemar and was appalled by the difference in him. His face was leaden and his emaciation extreme with broken skin and cheeks protruding; his breathing heavy and his pulse barely perceptible. However, when I had entered his chamber, he had been pencilling memoranda in a pocket book and took medicines unaided.

Physician: **(To the doctors)** An account of the patient condition?

Doctor 1: The left lung has become unusable; useless in fact.

Doctor 2: The right, partially ossified and almost unusable. The tubercles running one into another.

Doctor 1: The passing will be quick; around midnight tonight.

Physician: It was then seven in the evening.

(The doctors exit. The spotlight centre stage could now dim whilst the Physician addresses the audience. Half tabs could close to enable the doctors to re-enter unseen to replace Valdemar with the skeleton. The actor playing Valdemar should exit. The doctors stand either side of the bed which now contains the skeleton.)

Physician: **(To audience)** I spoke with M. Valdemar about his impending fate; of the experiment and **(with energy)** he professed himself quite willing, nay anxious that it was done. He commanded me to begin at once.

(Stage lights up again, just dimly enough for atmosphere but so that the bed and Physician are visible to the audience. The Physician stands behind the bed and all the while, moves his hands about Valdemar's head. The fact the subject is now a skeleton for the big reveal at the end of the scene, should not be known to the audience, so the head of the bed should be lowered from its previous position.)

Physician: Your honour, I now relate to the notes made by the Doctors there present when I began the experiment.

Doctor 1: **(Making notes)** I wrote it all down your honour. The entire horror; the terror of it all.

Doctor 2: And I remember the Physician asking the subject if he was entirely willing for the experiment to commence, to mesmerise him in his then condition.

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Doctor 1: He replied feebly

Doctor 2: Yet audibly

Doctor 1: 'Yes, I wish to be mesmerised'

Physician: – adding, 'I fear you have waited too long'

Doctor 2: And so the experiment began

(Lighting dims to reflect the now tense mood. A low drone could play over the PA, something to increase the tension)

Physician: With the first lateral stroke of my hand across his forehead he was induced. The agony he had displayed previous had now gone yet he still breathed. I proceeded without hesitation, gazing directly into the right eye of the sufferer,

whose gaze did not shift and although it looked stricken with panic, it remained still.

Doctor 1: His pulse could not be measured

Doctor 2: His breathing barely perceptible

Doctor 1: – and then, after quarter of an hour, it came.

Doctor 2: Valdemar passed

(Lights fade down. SFX. Thunder. Lights flicker and come back up)

Physician: The patient turned cold but in his wakeful eye, an uneasy expression of inward searching, like that of a sleepwalker.

Doctor 1: The patient was quite passed on, yet the Physician caused the eye to flicker

Doctor 2: The eye to close

(Lights fade off. Spotlight on the Judge.)

Judge: The facts Sir, only the facts

(Lights down on judge, stage lights fade back up, centre stage)

Doctor 1: I can assure you that this account is quite factual.

Doctor 2: In fact, come midnight, Valdemar was in an unusually perfect state of mesmeric trance.

Doctor 1: I resolved to stay with the patient all night whilst my colleague took leave, to return at day break. I can say that Valdemar was not dead; three hours hence his breathing was only just perceptible, measured by a mirror to the lips, no discernable pulse, unmoved, eyes closed, limbs rigid and cold as marble. Not dead.

Physician: I hazarded a conversation with the subject. M. Valdemar, are you asleep?

Doctor 1: He did not answer at first

Doctor 2: But –

Physician: There was a tremor in his lips so I repeated the question. Are you asleep? Are you asleep? Are you asleep?

Doctor 1: His entire frame shivered ever so slightly

Doctor 2: The eyelids trembled and the lips moved slowly and from between them –

(Valdemar's voice should emanate from the PA system, if possible have an effect applied to it which gives an eerie or ethereal impression. It should be slow and disturbing, possibly guttural.)

Valdemar: Yes. I am asleep now. Do not wake me. Let me die so!

Physician: Do you still feel pain, Valdemar?

Valdemar: No pain. I am dying.

Physician: I let him be and nothing more was done until morning.

Doctor 1: Astonished that the subject was still living I asked that the Physician spoke to the sleep-waker once more your honour.

Physician: M. Valdemar, do you still sleep?

Valdemar: Yes; still asleep -- dying.

(Lights down, spotlight up on Judge.)

Judge: Physician, we are no closer to discovering how M. Valdemar ended up being –

Physician: Your honour

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(Lights down on Judge, spotlight on Physician upstage. Physician speaks gravely into the audience)

Physician: The eyes rolled open; the pupils disappeared upwards, the skin turned to parchment and what life there was left, seemed to be extinguished like a candle flame. While death seemed to have claimed the man, his jaw fell open, his lips writhed away from the teeth and revealed a blackened tongue.

(Doctor 1 moves into the spot light to accentuate Physician's point)

Doctor 1: I am accustomed to death-bed horrors but so hideous and beyond conception was M. Valdemar's appearance, we all shrunk back from the bed.

(Doctor 2 moves into the spotlight)

Doctor 2: The tongue began to spasm and from the motionless jaw came a voice. Harsh.

Doctor 1: Broken

Physician: Hollow

Doctor 2: No similar sound has ever met the human ear

Doctor 1: Like it had come from a distant cavern in the earth

Physician: An unearthly sound; a sound to the ear much as gelatinous matters impress the sense of touch. I had asked him if he slept

(Valdemar's voice through the PA system should now take on a much more sinister and weird treatment, coming as it is from the 'afterlife'.)

Valdemar: Yes; -- No; -- I have been sleeping -- and now -- now -- I am dead.

Physician: None present tried to repress the unutterable and shuddering horror which these few words conveyed.

Doctor 1: For an hour, none of us spoke to one another and in any case, we spent most of the time trying to revive my colleague who had fainted.

Doctor 2: Once I had recovered, we addressed the condition of the patient once more.

Physician: No breath on the mirror; no blood could we draw from the arm and no other movement was visible save for the blackened tongue.

Doctor 1: It seemed to be attempting reply but no longer had sufficient volition

(Lights up on Judge)

Judge: Dead? Yet still talking?

Doctor 1: None but the Physician who held under the mesmeric spell could affect Valdemar into making sense. When I or my colleague asked a question, the reply was unintelligible.

Judge: What more of the tale to explain how the patient was discovered?

(Lights down on Judge)

Physician: The patient remained in the same condition for some time. We talked of awakening him but could not find good purpose. It was evident that death had been arrested by the mesmeric process. Awakening him would only serve to bring that final moment.

Doctor 1: We made daily calls for around seven months and the patient remained exactly the same.

(Spotlight only on the bed where Valdemar is lying. All other actors are now in darkness)

Physician: It was on Friday last that we decided we should awaken him. It is the unfortunate result of this which has given rise to this **(Pauses)** case.

(The Physician moves to the head of the bed and appears in the spotlight)

Physician: I made my customary passes (**he passes his hands over the head of the subject**) but for a time these were unsuccessful. After a moment, I saw an iris begin to descend accompanied by a profuse outflowing of yellow liquid from beneath the lids. I questioned the patient again – M. Valdemar, can you explain to us what are your feelings or wishes now?

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Doctor 1: (**Stepping bedside into the spotlight**) Colour returned to his cheeks and the tongue rolled violently beyond the open jaw.

Valdemar: (**Hideously, disturbingly**) For God's sake! Quick! Quick! Put me to sleep or awaken me! I say to you that I am dead!

(Lights up on the stage. The doctors look terrified, staring at the bed where the patient lies)

Physician: I was completely unmoved you understand; more unsure what to do than unnerved. And so, I attempted to awaken the patient. (**He moves his hands above the patients head**) I tried for a moment and soon realised that I would be successful; or at least that my success would be complete not long. I am sure that all present were prepared to see the patient awaken.

(Lights down. Spotlight on the bed. The doctors and the Physician move out of the light to a dark part of the stage so they cannot be seen. Only the bed and the patient should now be visible to the audience)

Physician: (**Gravely**) For what really occurred, however, it is quite impossible that any human being could have been prepared.

Valdemar: (**With echo or some ethereal style effect**) Dead!

Physician: I made passes, mesmeric passes

Valdemar: Dead!

Physician: His voice bursting from the tongue and not from the lips

Valdemar: Dead!

Physician: His skin about the entire frame at once, within the space of a single moment

Valdemar: Dead!

Physician: Crumbled, rotted away to reveal -

(The bed tips up, the sheets fall away to reveal a skeleton or, depending on the nature of the production, an actor in 'zombie' make-up)

Valdemar: (Loudly, to shock the audience) DEAD!

(Lights flash as lightning. SFX. Thunder. Lights off and tabs closed. The thunder crack should be allowed to continue then fade out a few seconds after the tabs close)

Scene 2 – Duff’s living room

(The Gothic character enters with a sign which reads ‘The Angel of the Odd’. The character then leaves and the lights dim.)

Narrator: (OS) There is a great deal of events in this world. Some make sense and others, do not. It is often said that when events cannot be explained that it is just ‘one of those days’. That may be fair; but when things go to plan, is it your own doing or is it something else? Fate? Kismet? Perhaps. And when those things happen that one cannot adequately explain? What then? Chance? Design? For Duff, our hero in the next tale, would discover that the key to happiness is to just let situations be what they are, instead of what you think they should be in The Angel of the Odd.

(Tabs open. Duff, a gruff middle-aged man, enters reading a newspaper. He should be wearing a ‘bald cap’ which will give the impression later that he has lost his hair. He wears a wig on top.)

Duff: War, poverty, unemployment and what’s this **(looks closer)** Cat eats dog? Well that’s not true at all. These newspapers are full of nonsense. Earlier today, I had a huge dinner, several bottles of wine and then read Griswold’s ‘Curiosities’. It was then I decided to take myself off to read something sane. Something real – or so I assumed. Now I feel completely foolish having believed that there are houses to let, lost dogs and cats and items for sale. Nothing in this paper can be true now that they announce so readily that a cat has eaten a dog in London Town. Apparently, it has rained frogs in South America and there is evidence of water flowing uphill? This is an absolute load of – **(notices something in the paper and reads)** ‘The avenues to death are numerous and strange. In London today a man died after swallowing a needle. It happened whilst playing ‘puff the dart’, a game in which a long needle is placed in a thin tube and blown at a target. The man, twenty three, did inhale and draw the needle into his throat. It entered the lungs and within a few days caused his death’.

(Duff paces the room for a while looking agitated)

Duff: This is really the top of it all. Contemptible falsehood. A poor poor hoax. How much money must they need to invent such tripe? Knowing of the gullibility of all who read these pages, set their wits to work in the imagination of improbable possibilities; of odd accidents, as they term them. However, to an intellect such as mine, to an understanding as deep as mine, I understand that the recent *increase* in these ‘odd accidents’ is by far the oddest thing yet. There is nothing singular about this man who swallowed the needle – it is in fact part of the entire hoax that is *this* newspaper.

(Lights off suddenly)

Duff: What is this about? Has the meter run out?

Narrator: Just then, Duff received a visitor.

(The ‘Angel of the odd’ enters behind Duff. The angel should appear as odd as possible. In Poe’s original story, the angel has beer kegs for legs, its body is a wine bottle and has two long bottles for arms, a box for a head and a funnel for a hat. The Angel speaks in a very strange but understandable rumbling/grumbling dialect. The angel must also adopt an odd accent and pull odd comical faces as it speaks. Lights come back on.)

Angel: Mein Gott! Whatta fool yous been for thinking dat!

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Duff: Woah! **(Looking around but not seeing the Angel)** What was that? **(pokes a finger into his ear)** Sometimes when I’ve had too much to drink I get a rumble in my ears but this was not that! Could it have been a man hitting a barrel with a stick? No – it was words. I could make out words. **(Duff paces, looking very confused still not noticing the angel downstage)** I admit I have had a few glasses but not so much I could not find who had spoken to me. If indeed it was words?

Angel: Haarrumph!! Yoo muss be sooo dunk dat yoo do not see be by your zide!

(Duff turns and finds himself nose to nose with the Angel. He jumps with fright.)

Angel: I say! You muss be dunk as a pig to not see be sitty here. And! I say you muss be a bigger fool, fool ab a goose for to disbelieb what hab been printed in de printers ob de papers. It’s de troof! Dat is what it is. De troof! Every single word ob it!

(Duff stands quivering in the Angel’s wake, backing away slightly)

Duff: What... who? Who are you and what do you want? **(Pauses. Moves to the side to try and look round the back of the angel without getting too close)** How did you get in here? What are you talking about?

Angel: Wooo! As for how I come’d here, dat ib none ob your pizzness. As for what I talks about, I be talks about what I tink ib proper to talks about. As for who I bees, why dat ib de bery ting I come’d here for to let you zee for yourself. Isn’t it? Hhmm!?

(The Angel leans into Duff, awaiting an answer and unsettling him)

Duff: **(Panicked)** You are a drunken thief. You mean to take all of my things and leave me to die. I shall ring the police and my footman and they will throw you to the street!

Angel: **(Giggling playfully)** He! He! He! Hu! Hu! Hu! Dat you cannot do!

Duff: What? Can't do? What can't I do?

Angel: Ring de bell sir. He! He! He!

(Duff tries to walk offstage past the Angel. The Angel extends an arm which hits Duff on the head and knocks him to the floor.)

Angel: You see? He! He! He! It ib best you stay dare Mr. Duff. And now you shall know who I bees. Look up at me.

(Duff, sitting on the floor looking scared, looks up at the Angel)

Angel: I am de Angel ob de Odd **(Grins comically)**

Duff: Very odd if I may say. I was always under the impression that Angels had wings.

Angel: **(Yelling)** Wings? What would I do wit dem? Do you take me for a chicken?

Duff: **(Scared)** No! Oh no – you are not a chicken, clearly. Certainly not.

Angel: **(Calmly)** Well then, sit still and behabe yourself or I will bop you with me bottle again. A chicken hab wings. A theatre hab wings. A sports field hab a wing. Angels do not hab wings and I am de Angel ob de Odd!

Duff: **(Stuttering)** In- indeed. How can I help, oh – Angel of – odd.

Angel: Help!?! Ha! What a lowly bred ting you must be to ask an Angel how he can help.

(Duff edges across the floor on his behind, towards a table upon which is a salt-cellar. He grabs it and throws it at the Angel but it misses and hits a large clock, stage right.)

Angel: No, you don't do dat! Naughty maaaaaan.

(The Angel bops Duff on the head comically with his 'bottle' arms. Duff gets closer to the floor with each bop. The Angel stops hitting Duff on the third bop and backs away.)

Angel: Oh my days! Dis man is eeder very dunk or bery soddy for throwing salt at my head. You muss not drink it so strong – you muss put water in de wine or you end up seeing tings! Yes!

Narrator: Curiously, the Angel poured water into a glass on the table from the end of its arm.

(The Angel empties the contents of one of his bottle-arms into a glass. This can be implied but if liquid is dispensed into the glass on the table, the liquid must be water. The Angel motions for Duff to get to his feet and take the glass. Duff does so gingerly, takes a sip and stands calmly before the Angel.)

Angel: It is my job to preside ober de doings of human kind. I bring about odd accidents ob which you are continually sceptic. Tut tut tut!!

Duff: You cannot possibly –

Angel: **(Raising a bottle arm)** You wanting de bopping again Mr. Duff?

Duff: No, but you can't possibly –

Angel: De bopping is coming Mr. Duff!

(Duff recoils and allows the Angel to continue)

Angel: You will not show me contempt Mr. Duff. I am de Angel ob de Odd and as you will refuse to being agreement, I will swear a vast oath! I shall bring about de correlation of cognition incongruous to your contretemps with my fundamentals! **(Bowing honourably)** Wishing you mush happidess and a liddle common sense.

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(The lights go off suddenly. The Angel exits. The lights come back on. Duff stands shaking a little, still sipping from his drink.)

Narrator: The wine Duff had drunk and the bopping the Angel gave left him feeling drowsy. He always took a fifteen minute nap after dinner but at six o'clock he had an appointment to keep.

Duff: **(Sipping water nervously)** I have an appointment. The insurance on my home expired yesterday and as some dispute had arisen, it was agreed that today, at six, I should meet the board of directors to settle the terms of renewal.

Narrator: Glancing at the clock, he noticed it was but half past five. More than enough time to walk to the insurance office.

Duff: I am very drowsy. My siestas have never exceeded twenty minutes and I can get to the office in five.

Narrator: Confident he could sleep, wake and walk to the office in twenty five minutes, Duff fell into a slumber.

(Duff lies down on a mattress, sofa or a blanket on the floor and sleeps. Lights off. Lights on again a few seconds later. Duff awakens and glances at the clock.)

Duff: I feel refreshed and the time is but five thirty three. I have slept for only three minutes? Ah! In this case, I shall take another nap. Plenty of time, yes, plenty of time.

(Lights off. Lights back on a few seconds later.)

Narrator: Duff awoke once more and glanced at his clock.

Duff: Five thirty three? **(Panicked)** But I have slept longer than a minute this time!

Narrator: On checking his pocket watch, he realised that his clock had ceased running.

Duff: Half past seven? I have slept two hours. **(Calm)** It makes no difference. I will call in the morning, apologise and conduct my business then. So what on earth is wrong with this clock?

(Duff walks over to the clock and picks up the salt cellar he threw at the angel earlier.)

Narrator: The salt cellar had fractured the glass; a shard protruding inwards and preventing the minute hand from progressing beyond thirty three minutes past the hour.

Duff: An accident. An *odd* accident, but an accident nonetheless. These things happen now and then I suppose! What am I saying? Things like this do not happen. They shouldn't happen. They can't happen! But this *did* happen. To get over this oddness, I shall take a good book to bed and retire for the night.

(Lights dim. Duff exits and brings back a book and a candle (either a flameless one or a representation of a candle.)

Narrator: So Duff took a candle and a book and climbed into bed

(Duff sits on the mattress, couch or floor and opens his book.)

Duff: The Angel of the Odd indeed. I shall read a few pages **(emits a huge yawn)** actually, today has been exhausting, I think I shall take to sleep instead.

(Duff puts the book down but knocks over the candle. He does not notice he has done this, turns over and begins to sleep.)

Narrator: Within moments, the room was on fire.

(Red and orange lights flash to represent fire)

Duff: **(Waking up, coughing)** What is that? Fire? But how?

(Duff gets out of bed and notices the candle)

Duff: How did that happen? Did a rat partake to steal my night light?

Narrator: In just a few minutes the entire building was wrapped in flames.

Duff: There is no way out but for the window.

(Duff moves to a window down stage)

Narrator: Luckily, a crowd had gathered and raised a long ladder.

(Duff climbs through the window and stands on the other side as if on a ladder)

Duff: How lucky I am! Saved!

(He suddenly looks panicked and looks down)

Narrator: Duff though he'd been saved but a large pig had broken loose from a nearby farm. Duff gazed down and noticed that the pig had something about it which reminded him of the Angel of the Odd.

Duff: Shoo! Get away from there I tell you!

Narrator: The pig had taken it into its head that its left shoulder needed scratching and could find no more convenient rubbing-post than that afforded by the foot of the ladder.

Duff: No! Shoo! Get away –

(Duff falls comically behind the window and yells as if falling to the ground. Lights fade off and tabs close.)

Narrator: Duff fell to the pavement below, but happily he did no more damage than a fracture to his arm. His house on fire, his arm fractured, his hair had been singed off in the fire and the loss of his house insurance made up Duff's mind.

(Duff enters front of tabs, arm in a sling and with his wig removed to reveal the bald cap. He uses a different wig to before, though it fits badly and is plainly obvious.)

Duff: At times like these, there is only one thing for it! I shall take a wife!

(Mary enters stage right, sobbing into a handkerchief)

Mary: I am torn with sorrow! I have recently lost my **(pauses to count on her fingers before continuing to wail her sorrow)** seventh husband! Oh if only there were a man who could mend my wounded spirit with the balm of his vows.

Duff: Lady! I see that you are in need of comfort.

Mary: Indeed but it is not a padded chair I seek

Duff: Please, you misread my intentions. I can see you require a companion to help you in your hour of grief.

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Mary: And you have money?

Duff: A little **(he kneels before her, taking her hand)** and many assets

Mary: Then we must at once be off to de church!

Duff: **(Suspiciously)** Sorry?

Mary: Er, *the* church, to be married!

(Mary strokes Duff's wig and her bracelet gets caught in the hair.)

Mary: I seem to have my bracelets caught in your hair sir. Let me try and tug them away

Duff: NO! don't...

(Mary lifts the wig off Duff's head to reveal the bald cap. She is disgusted and passes the wig between her hands for a moment before flinging it offstage)

Mary: Forgive my disdain and wrath, Sir, but I do not forgive lies and I like my men, well, hairy! Good Day!

Narrator: Duff, although disappointed, decided not to give up on his search for a wife and so met a lady of less implacable heart.

(Duff stands stage left. Francesca enters and stands stage right)

Narrator: They met regularly and though romance had not yet blossomed, Duff felt it would not be long before their hearts would entwine. One day, there was a chance meeting in a busy street in London.

(Though not necessary for this scene, there could be a backdrop of Victorian London and possibly some passers-by. Duff stops Francesca and moves towards her slowly, looking excited. She sees him, smiles and acts coy.)

Narrator: However, as Duff prepared to greet Francesca with one of his best considered bows, a small particle lodged itself in his eye.

Duff: **(grasping at his eye)** ooowwww!

Narrator: It rendered him, for that moment, completely blind.

(Francesca witnesses Duff writhing in pain, looks extremely indignant and walks off stage)

Narrator: Taking Duff's antics to be rude, passing her by ungreeted, she took her leave, never to be seen again.

Duff: This accident! It could have happened to anyone under the sun. At any time!

(The angel of the odd enters)

Angel: Wass he doing now? Sumting in de eye, huh? Mr. Duff?

Duff: **(Turning towards the voice)** Yes, quite a large sumting, er, something.

(The angel waves a bottle-arm over Duff's face and removes the 'something'. Duff recovers and sees the angel.)

Duff: You?

Angel: Don lookit me! I was juss passing and I saw you and de eye. Juss passing, yes.

(The angel leaves. The stage is now empty except for Duff who will mime the next few 'odd accidents')

Duff: I have nothing left to do but to throw myself in the river and let this world continue without me! Fortune has so determined to persecute me so I shall cheat it. It will haunt me no longer.

Narrator: Duff stood by the river

(Duff looks down at the stage then dips a toe in the imaginary river, looking a little uncertain)

Narrator: He then took off his clothes

(Duff takes off his trousers, underneath he has longjohns)

Duff: For there is no reason why we cannot leave this world as we enter it.

Narrator: Just then, a solitary crow swooped down and stole his trousers
(An actor dressed in black enters as a crow, steals the trousers and runs off stage)

Duff: Hey! Those are mine!!
(Duff runs off stage after the bird)

Narrator: He ran and ran until he no longer felt earth beneath his feet

Duff: **(Enters)** There is no longer earth beneath my... aaarrgghh!! **(He freezes whilst looking down at his feet about to fall)**

Narrator: He had thrown himself over a precipice. However, he should have been dashed to pieces but for the good fortune of grasping a rope which hung from a passing hot air balloon.

Duff: **(Mimes grabbing at a rope and hanging from it unless a rope can be dropped from above for Duff to grasp)** Oooh! That was lucky! **(shouting upwards)** I say! Mr. Balloon driver. Hello? **(pauses)** The fool cannot – or – the villain *will* not hear me!

Narrator: In time, Duff's grip on the rope weakened. He soon resigned himself to his fate that he would drop quietly into the sea

Duff: How awful. I had not time to find my trousers in pursuit of the crow and I have broken my arm in the fall from the ladder.
(OS or through the PA system so it seems the voice is coming from above Duff: the angel hums a jolly tune)

Duff: What is that? **(shouting above him)** Hello up there?

Narrator: The angel of the odd peered over the edge of the hot air balloon basket. By the look on his face he seemed to be on excellent terms with himself and the universe.

Duff: I... I... **(quietly)** I am too exhausted to speak.

Narrator: The angel glared at Duff for a few minutes in silence before finally speaking.

Angel: Who pe you? And what de deffil you be do down dare? Ey?

Duff: **(searching for a word)** Help!

Angel: Help? Not me. Dare is de bottle of wine. Help yourself und be tam'd!

Narrator: With those words, the angel let fall a heavy bottle of cherry wine. It dropped precisely upon Duff's head.

(Duff mimes being hit on the head by a bottle)

Duff: Oooooowww!! This is all too much, I may as well let go of this rope and be done with it.

Angel: Hold on! Don't be in de hurry! Don't! Will you allow me to drop another bottle on de head or have you got zober and come to you zenzes?

Narrator: Duff nodded twice

(Duff nods)

Narrator: The first to tell the angel he did not want another bottle and the second to tell of his sobriety and that he had positively come to his senses.

Angel: So you belief in me? At long last you belief, then, in de possibility of de odd?

(Duff nods)

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Angel: And you have belief in me, de angel of de odd?

(Duff nods)

Angel: And you acknowledge that you be de blind drunk and a fool?

(Duff nods)

Angel: Ok. Put your right hand into your left hand drouser pocket den. In recognition of your full zubbizzion to de angel of de odd.

Narrator: It was a simple request but Duff could not do it. His arm broken in the fall meant he could not let go of the rope with his other hand. He would have to let go altogether. And in any case, his trousers had been stolen by a crow.

(Duff looks sad and shakes his head in defeat)

Angel: **(Shouting)** Go to de deffil den!

Narrator: And with that, the angel drew a sharp knife across the rope and let Duff loose.

(Duff mimes falling from the rope, or if the rope is real, it is released so that it falls to the stage along with Duff. Lights flash, SFX. Glass smashing, general sound of breakages and a person tumbling and hitting the ground. The flashing ceases and the lights go off.)

Narrator: It just so happened that Duff fell from the balloon directly over his house, entered the ample chimney and emerged the other side covered in soot and ash, lying in the dining room hearth.

(Spotlight on Duff sitting centre stage looking stunned and his face covered in soot. (This should be stored in one of Duff's pockets and applied whilst the lights are off))

Duff: I have finally come to my senses after that fall. It is four in the morning, I am sitting in the ashes of an extinguished fire, my feet reposed on the wreck of a small table, sitting in dessert, a newspaper, some broken glass, shattered bottles and an empty jug of cherry wine!

(Duff looks at the audience with bewilderment. Spot light off.)

Narrator: Thus revenged himself the Angel of the Odd.

(Tabs close)

Scene 3 – Throne Room

(The Gothic character enters with a sign which reads ‘Hopfrog’. The character then leaves and the lights dim.)

Narrator: Hopfrog

(The king, a boorish man, enters front of tabs dressed in medieval royal attire. He is followed by four courtiers, all sycophants, dressed in velvet jackets and medieval style breeches.)

King: **(Belly laughing raucously)** Oh, I’ve never laughed so hard in my life. I laughed so hard, I thought my trousers would fall down.

(The king’s trousers fall down. The four courtiers look surprised for a moment and the king looks shocked. Then, as one, they all burst out laughing. The king retrieves his trousers from the floor. The tabs open to reveal the throne room with a large throne down stage centre. The Courtiers stand either side of the throne, two on each side)

King: Oh I love laughing. I live to laugh. I don’t know what I would do if I couldn’t laugh.

Courtier 1: You would be angry sire

King: That’s true. I would be angry and I would have to start cutting heads off like my father did. We can’t have that can we?

Courtier 3: No sire, that is why we try to make you laugh all the time!

King: So true. If it weren’t for my laughter I would just have to cut all of your heads off and be an evil old king – but as it is, I have the gift of laughter so everyone loves me. Isn’t that right?

Courtier 2: Yes, sire. That’s correct.

King: Hmm, I don’t seem to have laughed for over a minute. I’m starting to feel a bit tetchy! **(getting irritable)** I’m going to have to do something about it.

Courtier 4: Why not call for the court fool, Hopfrog?

King: **(Smiling)** Ah yes, my favourite fool. He makes me laugh so much with his weird little face and the way he walks. Oh, it is most amusing. Yes, call on Hopfrog.

Courtier 1: **(Shouting off stage)** Call on Hopfrog!

(Hopfrog, a small hunched man hobbles onto the stage. His stature should live up to his name in that he almost hops as he walks and appears as

frog-like as possible in his body shape and gait. The king and his four courtiers laugh raucously as Hopfrog makes his way in front of them.)

King: (Laughing) Look at his weird little face.

Courtier 1: (Laughing) And his stumpy little legs.

Courtier 2: (Laughing) And his arms, don't forget his arms!

(Hopfrog glares at his tormentors awaiting the laughter to cease. They all calm down until there is silence)

King: Go on then. Do something funny.

(Glaring at the king, Hopfrog does a little dance which causes the king and his courtiers to laugh raucously once again. Hopfrog is clearly annoyed.)

King: Of course, I love *seeing* funny things rather than hearing them. **(To courtier 2)** That's why I never laugh at your jokes.

Courtier 2: I did wonder about that sire.

King: No, it is practical jokes that tickle me most. The longer drawn out the joke, the better. The longer it takes to get to the punch line, the funnier the jest. **(To Courtier 4)** Is that not right?

Courtier 4: Oh, absolutely sire.

King: This is why I took Hopfrog here from his home country, far away, and brought him back here. He is a genius of practical jokes. Jokes to balance *our* wisdom. Jesters are ten a penny but in Hopfrog we have a triplicate treasure, someone to laugh with and laugh at. What say you?

(The king laughs once more. Hopfrog stands and glares. The courtiers agree and laugh along. As Hopfrog addresses the audience, the King and his Courtiers stage chatter.)

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Hopfrog: **(To audience)** My hatred for the king and his courtiers grows ever stronger. It is true that I do not look or walk as they do, but that gives no right to take me from my home and keep me here for their entertainment. All for crumbs that fall from the royal table; I would rather take my chances in the wild and somehow escape back to my home town; my home country.

(The king stage-laughs and chatters with his courtiers as the narrator speaks. HopFrog continues to dance for their entertainment.)

Narrator: Hopfrog was not the name given to our hero at birth, more bestowed upon him by his tormentors, the king and his courtiers because of the way he walked. It was something the king found much amusement in despite his own odd little waddle owing to the size of his stomach, and of the constitutional swelling of his head. Despite the great pain and difficulty with which Hopfrog moved, nature had bestowed great muscular power upon his arms. It enabled him to perform many feats of wonderful dexterity where trees, ropes or anything else that could be climbed was concerned. Indeed, if he were any kind of animal, it would be a squirrel - not a frog.

(Hopfrog ceases his dance and stands glaring at the king and courtiers who continue to point a laugh. Trippetta enters. She is a pretty girl who stands the same diminutive height as Hopfrog. She notices him looking glum and immediately takes the floor in front of the king.)

Trippetta: **(Whispering to Hopfrog)** Take your leave my love, I shall distract the king.

(Trippetta begins to dance in a quasi-ballet style as Hop frog takes the chance to exit. Medieval style music could be played to accompany the dance but is not essential.)

Narrator: Trippetta had also been taken from her homeland, by one of the king's victorious generals, and sent as a gift. Ending in similar circumstances, Hopfrog and Trippetta had kindled a bond of sworn friendship.

King: **(Noticing that Hopfrog has gone, stops laughing)** What is this? I didn't order dancing in my court! **(He watches angrily for a moment before being completely taken in)** However, this is quite enjoyable so I shall allow it to pass.

(Trippetta continues to dance for the king. The Courtiers are all transfixed.)

Narrator: Although Hopfrog provided a deal of sport for the king, he was by no means popular. It was always for Trippetta to use her charms and beauty to influence the king and court – which she did whenever she could for the benefit of Hopfrog.

(Trippetta finishes her dance and leaves)

King: I enjoyed that! Amazing really. They don't get paid a penny yet they entertain us with the same enthusiasm each time.

Courtier 1: It is because you are such a marvellous king sire!

King: (**Gazes at Courtier 1 in disdain**) No one likes a creep. (**Jovially**) Nevertheless, you are correct! This weekend I proclaim that we have a celebration of how entirely great I am. We shall have... erm... (**to Courtier 2**) what do we normally have at these things?

Courtier 2: Well, we usually allow Hopfrog the chance to bring his invention to these large events.

Courtier 1: He is very inventive Sire.

Courtier 3: His novel characters

Courtier 4: His costumes

Courtier 3: The games he invents!

Courtier 1: Yes Sire, nothing it seems can be done without his assistance.

King: Very well! Let the funny little man organise the entire thing. We shall have a feast for both stomach and heart on Saturday night!

(Lights off. Tabs closed.)

Narrator: The day of the celebration arrived. The hall was fitted out with splendour under Trippetta's guide. Every single device was employed to give flamboyance to their masquerade. The entire court was bubbling with expectation; what costumes would be worn? What characters may show up? Many had made up their minds well in advance, not an iota of indecision anywhere. Except in the case of the king and his four courtiers. Such was the proximity of the celebration, the king had no choice but to summon Hopfrog and his companion Trippetta to help them choose a costume for the fete.

(Tabs open. Tokens of the finery of the evening adorn the stage, for example, a royal banner hanging on the back wall or some silk drapes to the left and right of the stage. The king is on his throne surrounded by his courtiers. They are all drinking wine from goblets and laughing raucously. Trippetta and Hopfrog enter.)

King: Ah, here they are now. Let them drink with us so that they might get into the spirit of what is to come this evening.

Courtier 1: (**Stage whisper**) Sire, you cannot give wine to Hopfrog. It sends him mad.

King: (**Stage whisper**) I know! It will be a great practical joke – don't you think?

(Courtier 1 grimaces)

King: (**Loudly**) Come here, Hopfrog! Swallow this fine wine to the health of your absent friends.

(Hopfrog is clearly annoyed by this suggestion)

King: Then let us have your inventions; your characters, something novel, out of the ordinary! We are wearied by this infernal sameness. Come! Drink the wine; it will brighten your wits.

Hopfrog: **(To audience. Upset)** Today of all days. It is my birthday and he asks me to drink to absent friends?

(Hopfrog takes the goblet from the king's hand and drinks)

King: Ah! Ha ha! See what a glass of wine can do? Your eyes are shining already!

(The courtiers point a laugh. Hopfrog places the empty goblet on a table and slowly looks around at the king and his courtiers with an insane stare)

Courtier 3: And now to business!

King: Yes! Come lend us your assistance. Characters my fine fellow, we must have your characters. All of us; we need your characters.

(Hopfrog laughs a sarcastic annoyed laugh and then stays silent for a moment)

King: Come, come, have you nothing to suggest?

Hopfrog: **(With irritation)** I am endeavouring to think of something novel

King: **(Fiercely)** Endeavouring? What do you mean by that? **(realising)** Ha, you are sulking! You want more wine. Here, drink this!

(The king pours more wine into the goblet and offers it to Hopfrog. Trippetta steps forward but manages to restrain herself for a moment.)

King: **(Yelling)** Drink it! Drink I say; or by the devil in me –

(Trippetta steps forward at last and sinks to the feet of the king)

Trippetta: Please, my king. Can't you see how it affects him?

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(The king stares at her then looks to his courtiers to help him decide what to do. They shrug and look away, not wishing to get involved. Eventually, after some deliberation he pushes Trippetta away from him with his foot and throws the contents of the goblet in her face. She crawls

away from the king, sobbing. Hopfrog is visibly angered but stands where he is, clenching his fists and gnashing his teeth. Trippetta climbs to her feet and goes to stand next to Hopfrog looking very upset)

King: (**Pointing at Hopfrog**) I swear I can hear this man gritting his teeth!

Hopfrog: (**Suddenly cheerful**) Not at all, it was merely the sound of my brain formulating a plan for you and your courtiers on this night of celebration!

King: How so sudden do you come to an idea?

Hopfrog: (**With an undertone of malice**) Striking this girl and then throwing wine in her face brought many ideas to me. (**Sinisterly**) Many sublime ideas came to me at once sire. I have one wondrous idea which is from back in my own country.

King: Tell! (**He downs more wine and looks at Hopfrog greedily**)

Hopfrog: We often enacted this at our *own* masquerades but here it will be entirely new. Unfortunately, it does require the participation of five persons.

(**The king looks around at his courtiers who look at each other and count on their fingers**)

King: Why there are five of us sat here! What fortune!

Hopfrog: (**With thinly veiled sarcasm**) Yes, how coincidental.

King: Come! What is the diversion?

Hopfrog: We call it, the 'Five chained Orang-utans', and it really is excellent sport if well enacted.

King: (**Immediately, standing up and yelling**) *We* will enact it!

Hopfrog: (**Turning to Trippetta and winking**) The beauty of this game lies in the terror it occasions in both the men and the women of the court.

(**Trippetta smiles at Hopfrog**)

King: Capital!

Hopfrog: I will equip you as Orang-utans, leave all that to me. The resemblance shall be so striking that the company of masqueraders will take you for real beasts and of course, they will be as much terrified as astonished.

King: Oh, this is exquisite! Hopfrog, I will make a man of you.

Hopfrog: The chains will jangle and increase confusion. People will think you have escaped from your keepers. People will imagine all this real as you come rushing in with savage cries amid those dressed with such decadence.

King: We must put this into action immediately. The celebration starts in just a few hours.

(Hopfrog grins sadistically at the audience. Lights off. Tabs closed.)

Narrator: How Hopfrog equipped the royal party as Orang-utans was quite simple but effective enough. These animals, at the time of the story, had rarely been seen in any part of the civilised world. As Hopfrog supposed to make the party beast-like and sufficiently hideous, the truth of their identity was to be sufficiently concealed. Hopfrog adorned the king and his courtiers in tar and flax. Then a chain was passed between the members, around the waist of the king, tied and then around another of the party until they were all chained.

(Lights up. Trippetta enters front of tabs. Hopfrog follows after a moment.)

Hopfrog: Trippetta!

Trippetta: Hopfrog. Are you not readying the king for the celebration tonight?

Hopfrog: Indeed but I must ask you one thing.

Trippetta: Anything.

Hopfrog: You must remove the chandelier from the centre of the room. I shall tell the king it is to stop the wax dripping on the fine clothes of the guests, but leave the chain on which it hangs.

Trippetta: Of course.

Hopfrog: You remember what we spoke of? All those nights, how we planned?

Trippetta: Every word.

Hopfrog: Then tonight is the night.

Trippetta: Tonight?

(Hopfrog nods. He exits stage left. Trippetta exits through the tabs. She then exits stage left behind tabs. Tabs open to reveal the Great Hall once more. It is adorned with guests (as many as the production can allow) dressed in fine clothing, drinking and laughing. Medieval-style music plays. After the scene is set, Hopfrog rushes onstage.)

Hopfrog: Look out! Look out!

(The king and his courtiers tumble on stage, chained together, dressed as Orang-utans. A few fall over as they enter. They all make noises which are more comical than primate-like. Some of the guests faint, others shriek and try to run. There is general confusion amongst the guests with most of them unsure where to run or what to do as the ‘Orang-utans’ move centre stage.)

Hopfrog: The doors have been locked so that we might capture these beasts and return them to their keepers.

(If possible, a chain is lowered from above the stage. If not, it is implied that one has been lowered. Hopfrog jumps into the centre of the circle of Orang-utans)

Hopfrog: Fear not. I have trapped the beasts for they may not harm you.

(Hopfrog ties the chain from the roof to the chain tying the Orang-utans together. If possible, the chain should be pulled so it tightens and holds the king and his courtiers close together in one place)

Hopfrog: Fancy you all know by now that these are no beasts but people in costume. Leave them to me, I fancy I know them and if I can get a good look at them I will soon tell who they are!

(Hopfrog leaves the circle of Orang-utans, grabs a burning torch from the wall (a wooden prop with painted fire) and returns to the circle. Hopfrog grabs the chain in the centre and lowers the torch towards the king. The gathered company are by now caught up in fits of laughter at the predicament of the king and his courtiers)

Hopfrog: I can see who they are.

(As Hopfrog lowers the torch nearer to the king, he removes a ‘fire’ prop from inside his costume. It is a wooden (or similar) fire cut-out, painted to look like flames which the king holds in front of his chest to represent having been set on fire. Hopfrog lowers the torch to each of the courtiers who also remove their ‘fire’ prop and hold them to their chests. The crowd have stopped laughing and are now frightened by the events. The Orang-utans cry out in pain.)

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Hopfrog: **(Manically)** Ha ha! It is the king and his courtiers. The tyrannical king and his sycophantic hangers-on. A king who does not scruple to strike a

defenceless girl and his four councillors who abet him in the outrage! As for me – I am Hopfrog, the jester and this is my final jest!

Narrator: Owing to the high combustibility of both the flax and the tar to which it adhered, it wasn't long until Hopfrog's vengeance was complete.

(The five Orang-utans stop moving their fire props and hang limp in their chains. Hopfrog motions to climb up the rope as the tabs close and the lights fade off.)

Narrator: And with maniacal laughter, Hopfrog climbed the chain, out of the sky-light and onto the roof where Trippetta was waiting. It is supposed that they effected their escape to their own country and neither was seen again.

(In conclusion to the play if it has been performed in full, a low drone or eerie music should play over the P.A. with the theatre in darkness as the Narrator continues with the prologue)

Narrator: Thy soul shall find itself alone, 'Mid dark thoughts of the grey tomb-stone

Not one, of all the crowd, to pry,
Into thine hour of secrecy
Be silent in that solitude, which is not loneliness, for then
The spirits of the dead who stood, in life before thee are again
In death around thee and their will
Shall then overshadow thee: be still.

(SFX. Prolonged thunder sound. Lights flash as lightening. Fade to silence.)

THE END