

Characters

- Miss Amy (F)** - Owner of Cliff House (**offstage voice**)
- Clarice Hanger (F)** - Housekeeper and carer. Doubled with Amy
- Di Denouement (F)** - Reviewer for 'Di's Denouncements'.
- Cherry Cutting (F)** - Reviewer for 'Cutting Edge Reviews'.
- Beverley Binding (F)** - Reviewer for 'Bev's Book Blogs'.
- Venice Angenie (F)** - Writer, deluded about her ability
- Sid Sinister (M)** - Local taxi driver
- Detective (M/F)** - Summariser

Act 1
Scene 1

(SFX. Pre-show music to set scene. 'Paperback Writer' by The Beatles. SFX. Seagulls crying. Waves crashing against cliff rocks. A rockfall.)

Clarice: **(Voice offstage, but loud and clear)** Calm yourself. It will be alright. Everything's in place. It's all arranged.

Miss Amy: **(doubled by Clarice. Offstage in an old creaky voice, but loud and clear)** Nothing can go wrong?

Clarice: **(Offstage)** No, nothing can go wrong.

Miss Amy: **(Offstage)** They'll all pay. You'll make them all pay!

Clarice: **(Offstage)** Lie back down. Don't upset yourself. They'll pay dearly.

Miss Amy: **(Offstage)** You'll –

Clarice: **(Offstage)** Leave it all to me. I'll take care of them Miss Amy.

Miss Amy: **(Offstage)** You promise Clarice.

Clarice: **(Offstage)** I promise.

(SFX. Seagulls crying. Waves crashing against cliff rocks. SFX. Car drawing up on gravel drive. SFX. Crunching of footsteps. Ringing of doorbell (creepy doorbell!); door handle turns; door creaks open slowly. Cherry Cutting: (Enters stage left & looks around. Sid, the taxi driver follows with her case. Puts down out of way.)

Cherry: Are you *sure* this is the right place, Cliff House?

Sid: Ain't no others round here.

Cherry: It's rather dilapidated. I was expecting something grander, -

Sid: T'was once. Long ago. Long long long ago.

Cherry: Actually, could you wait while I check it out.

Sid: No, I got another job waitin'.

Cherry: Surely you can wait a couple of minutes while I find someone.

Sid: It's the right place. Erosion has taken all the others that were round abouts. Straight down the cliff face they've tumbled, one by one, as the sea's licked away the cliffs. Garden first, then the house. Garden's half gone already. Only Miss Amy and her companion live here now.

Cherry: This doesn't sound like the place on my invitation at all. Just wait a minute.

Sid: Nope.

Cherry: Why not?

Sid: You deaf or something?

Cherry: I beg your pardon?

Sid: I've told yer – it's the right place. Only one house up here, and this is it, Cliff House.

Cherry: Well you don't have to be rude. I hope you realize I'm a regular contributor on Trip Advisor!

Sid: I 'ope you know I'm the only driver round these parts if you *ever* wants to leave. That'll be ten pounds, fifty.

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Cherry: **(Pays.)** I don't think much of the service round here. I'll have the change.

Sid: **(Slowly fiddles around for change. Gives her change. Says sinisterly)** May it bring you luck. **(Exits)**

(SFX. Crunching of footsteps on gravel. Car driving away.)

Cherry: Horrible man! Hello, anyone in? Hello - It's Cherry Cutting, Reviewer from 'Cutting Edge Reviews'. Hello **(Takes invitation from her handbag and reads silently. Rings bell on table left.)**

(Clarice enters quietly stage right, and walks right up to her, almost touching.)

Clarice: Welcome to Cliff House.

(Cherry jumps)

Clarice: **(Extends arm to shake hands).** I'm Clarice Hanger.

Cherry: Oh, hello. **(Places her coat onto Clarice's extended arm.)** Are you something to do with the publisher?

Clarice: Thrope Publishing.

Cherry: Yes. The publisher who invited me for the weekend.

Clarice: No, I'm the housekeeper. We spoke briefly on the phone, when you confirmed you could come. Thrope Publishing haven't arrived yet.

Cherry: I didn't really think you looked like you were in publishing.

Clarice: No?

Cherry: No, they have an air of -- you look like a housekeeper. The apron's a dead giveaway of course.

Clarice: That's what, I've become.

Cherry: Good for you. I'm Cherry Cutting, reviewer from 'Cutting Edge Reviews'. I expect you've read my book blogs?

(Clarice opens mouth to speak, but is interrupted.)

Cherry: There's not a writer living who doesn't shake in their shoes when they hear my name. I can make and break reputations with a few taps on my keyboard, depending on what I think of their book. The power makes me quite giddy sometimes. As you probably know, a *select* group of us *top_bloggers* have been invited to meet the publisher's new murder mystery writer and review their books. Am I the first?

Clarice: The others will be here soon.

Cherry: I can't wait to see who the new writer is. We don't get the offer of a luxury weekend - every weekend. I could *murder* a cup of tea.

Clarice: I'll get one for you.

Cherry: Two sugars.

(SFX. Car drawing up on gravel drive.)

Cherry: **(Looks out over audience to where car might be)** Oh that might be the publisher arriving for our champagne reception. Quick, where's my room, so I can tidy up?

Clarice: If you follow me.

Cherry: Bring my case.

(Clarice turns back, picks up Cherry's case and follows her. Cherry and Clarice exit stage right.)

Scene 2

(SFX. Crunching of footsteps. Ringing of doorbell (creepy doorbell); door handle turns; door creaks open slowly. Di Denouement enters stage left & looks around.)

Sid: **(Enters carrying case. Puts down out of way.)**

Di: Are you sure this is the right place – Cliff House?

Sid: Ain't no others round here.

Di: It's a bit run down. I was expecting something smarter -

Sid: T'was once. Long ago. Long long long ago.

Di: Actually, could you wait for a –

Sid: This is the place. They've started arrivin'

Di: Oh, I'm not the first?

Sid: Are you deaf too? It must be the altitude.

Di: **(Coughs)** I beg your pardon?

Sid: I said are you deaf too?

Di: You don't have to be rude.

Sid: You don't have to be a numbskull.

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Di: I hope you know I'm a regular contributor to –

Sid: Trip Advisor

Di: How do you know?

Sid: I'm psychic. That'll be twelve quid.

Di: I'll keep the change. I don't tip for bad service. **(Pays.)**

Sid: **(Slowly gives change. Says sinisterly)** May it bring you luck.

(SFX car driving away)

Di: Ghastly man. **(Coughs)**

Di: Hello. (**Looks round**) Hello – anyone in? (**Takes invitation from her handbag and reads it silently. Looks around. Calls again.**) Hello – it's Di Denouement, Reviewer from 'Di's Denouncements.'**(Rings bell).**

Clarice: (**Enters stage right quietly**) Hello Di.

Scene 3

- Di:** (Slow shocked recognition) It's not Clarice? Abloid? Clarice Abloid?
- Clarice:** I go by the name of Clarice Hanger now.
- Di:** Clarice Hanger?
- Clarice:** I changed back to my maiden name after -
- Di:** Oh. - What are you doing here? You're not something to do with the Thrope Publishing?
- Clarice:** I'm the housekeeper. I manage Cliff House. We spoke briefly on the phone, when you accepted the invitation.
- Di:** I thought I recognized your voice. I didn't think you'd be anything to do with publishing. You were never very er, um, even when you and Terry--- um – you're looking well.
- Clarice:** After my nervous breakdown?
- Di:** Whatever you call it.
- Clarice:** I call it a nervous breakdown.
- Di:** Whatever. Anyway, you've found your feet again, that's the main thing. This looks like a very er (**looks round room**) – keeps you busy I expect. Big, rambling place in the middle of nowhere. - - Fancy ending up here after high life in the city. I half wondered what happened to you.
- Clarice:** How kind.
- Di:** (**Bursts out**) He left me as well you know, Terry, Terry Abloid, the swine, several years ago now. I expect you heard the gossip. It was all over Facebook. Ran off with Cherry Cutting. The bitch. She's a lousy blogger.- You were well rid. May he rot in hell. (**Gasps**) I shouldn't say that now he's dead should I? --- You and he were a long time ago now. It can't cut as deep.
- Clarice:** Ten years, five months, and twelve days.
- Di:** How many hours? (**nervous laugh, that turns into a cough**) Well, if you're the housekeeper, you can get me a cup of tea. I've got an awful cold. It's freezing out there and there's a horrible damp mist everywhere. No sugar.
- Clarice:** Naturally. I'll put the kettle on. Your room's first along the upper corridor if you want to make yourself look human. (**Exits stage left.**)
- (Di surprised. Pats hair. Gets mirror from handbag. Looks in mirror. Licks around lips as if dry. Puts lip balm on lips from stick. Replaces in**

handbag. SFX. Car drawing up on gravel outside. Di looks out over audience, to where car might be. Exits stage right with her case.)

Scene 4

(SFX. Crunching of footsteps. Ringing of doorbell (creepy doorbell); door handle turns; door creaks open slowly. Sid enters stage left carrying Venice's 2 cases. Sets them down gently. Venice Angenie enters)

Venice: Thank you Sid. More of the cliff seems to have come away than when I was here last.

Sid: Time and tide. Time and tide. You want to watch when you're walking hereabouts Miss Angenie. It's easier to plop off the side of the cliff, than to walk in the park. You'll have noticed changes yourself all the years you've been coming. There's a sea mist rolling in; you won't be able to see the nose in front of your face soon.

Venice: I can't see my nose in front of my face anyway. Unless I cross my eyes. But I'll be careful. **(Pays)** Keep the change now.

Sid: Thank you. You're a lady. Now you call me anytime you wants to go anywhere. Unless the mists come in. Then nobody's goin' anywhere. Dangerous if you can't see the road for the er mist. And don't stray into the front garden.

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Venice: Why not?

Sid: Ain't there; nothing to speak of anyhow.

Venice: Oh goodness, thank you. Bye.

(Sid exits stage left. SFX. Crunching of footsteps on gravel outside. Car drives away.)

Venice: **(Looks around. Picks up photo and looks at it, puts down.)** Hello? **(Rings bell)**

(Clarice enters stage left with two cups of tea).

Venice: Ah Clarice. How nice to see you. How are you dear?

Clarice: Venice; we haven't had the pleasure of your company for a while.

Venice: Oh busy, busy, busy. The life of a paperback writer never lets up.

Clarice: In fact, we haven't seen hide nor hair of you since you started writing your Inspector Brain mysteries.

Venice: Ah, dear Inspector Brain! You've read about my success in Hong Kong? They made a TV series out there. Very big out there. The Chinese can't get enough of him.

Clarice: The reviewers didn't like them here I understand.

Venice: Didn't they? I don't take any notice of reviewers, Beastly people. They're all frustrated writers themselves. They're jealous of me. Anyway, they'll write anything if someone sends them a freebee. I expect that's why the new publisher has set up this weekend, to get a few brownie points in with them. I wouldn't normally mix with their like. I must say the invitation came quite out of the blue, but my success in Hong Kong has made me red hot property.

Clarice: The stories you wrote were very like dear Miss Amy's own Inspector Crane murder mysteries. She was hurt that you'd copied them, and made them into spoofs. She said it put a tarnish over her own work. **(Pushes crossly past her to place teas on table left.)**

Venice: Oh Clarice, how can you say that? It was only like the Agatha Raisin kind of thing

Clarice: Miss Amy didn't see it that way.

Venice: Didn't she? She wrote them a long time ago and they were very old fashioned. Even the horrible bloggers said so. When did she die by the way? I didn't notice an obituary. I would have come to the funeral.

Clarice: *Die? She's not dead!* I still look after her. She's an invalid.

Venice: Good Lord, she must be at least 100! I thought she was very ill when I was last here. On her last legs!

Clarice: That upset gave her a motive to hang on!

Venice: Oh dear, the astrologer in the newspaper predicted I'd have a difficult week. I thought Miss Amy would be pleased about my books. I mean, it's started people talking about *her* again.

Clarice: Not in a nice way. She wasn't pleased.

Venice: Oh. I'll see it right with her Clarice. Does she still like chocolates?

Clarice: By my reckoning you owe her a lot more than a box of chocolates.

Venice: I've hardly made any money Clarice. I had to publish the books myself in the first place, and so many people took a cut for the Chinese series. I'll see what

advance Thrope Publishing has to offer. I wish I knew something about them; but I have an inkling. Oh isn't that a lovely word, an inkling! Have I just invented it? It's the sort of creative thing I do. It's strange you know, choosing Cliff House for our rendezvous. It's almost as if Thrope Publishing knew this is an old holiday haunt of mine! Sweet.

Clarice: A co-incidence indeed.

Venice: I expect this weekend is going to be all about bonding with the bloggers. A bit like a new puppy. They're going to love me to bits! **(Looks at 2 cups of tea on table)** Is one of those for me? It's brass monkey weather out there. Actually, I'll just take my case up and powder my nose – my regular room?

(Venice exits right with cases.)

Clarice: I'll put the kettle on again.

(Clarice exits stage right.)

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Scene 5

(SFX. Crunching of footsteps on gravel outside. Ringing of doorbell; door handle turns; door creaks open slowly. Beverley Binding Enters stage left with case. Her hair is either dank or frizzy from mist.)

Beverley: Hello. - Hello. **(Looks around. Puts case down. Gets invitation from handbag, reads it silently. Rings bell.)**

Cherry: **(Enters stage right)** Oh hello.

(Cherry Spots teas on tea table stage left. Picks up a cup of tea and sips, pulls face, puts down. Picks up second cup of tea and sips, pulls face, puts down.)

Beverley: I'm sorry I'm late. I had to walk up from the station. It was ghastly. The mist's coming thick and fast and I'm wet through. I had a taxi waiting, but some awful woman just jumped in, and told the driver 'Cliff House'. I knocked on the window but she ignored me. I'm furious. You are the publisher I take it?

Cherry: No I'm Cherry Cutting, reviewer of 'Cutting Edge Reviews'. You've no doubt read my reviews? Silly question. You'd have to live on the moon not to.

Beverley: Ah, sadly I don't live on the moon. Beverley Binding - 'Bev's Book Blogs'.

Cherry: Ah, ditto.

(Beverley and Cherry look at each other with distaste.)

Cherry: Have a cup of tea **(indicates)**. They're both sour.

Beverley: I don't fancy either now you've spat in them.

Cherry: I didn't spit in them, I sipped them. I know how to sip.

Beverley: It looked like you spat in them to me.

Cherry: Well I didn't.

Beverley: Well it looked like you did.

Cherry: Well I didn't.

Beverley: I must say I'm surprised they invited you.

Cherry: Oh, why? They need someone influential on side.

Beverley: All they needed to do was send you a pair of tights, or a box of teabags, or a shiny new handbag.

Cherry: I hope you're not implying I can be bribed.

(Beverley smiles annoyingly.)

Cherry: At least I don't put spoilers in my blogs. Writers respect me, but they hate you.

Beverley: I tell the truth, and readers love me. And I've got more likes than you.

Cherry: Oh anyone can get their friends and relations to tick 'like'. You must have more great aunts than a family of rabbits!

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Beverley: I'm going to freshen up. I feel very stale all of a sudden!

Cherry: It's probably your sell by date!

Beverley: I should watch your own! I think it just got shorter.

Cherry: Are you threatening me?

(Beverley ignores her and exits stage right with her case. Cherry gets out iPad or mobile and starts fiddling with it.)

Scene 6

(Di enters stage right, fiddling with her mobile. Sees Cherry, stops in her tracks, turns away, but Cherry looks up and spots her.)

Cherry: O M G! It looks like being one of those very long weekends!

Di: **(Turns to Cherry)** I don't have to speak to you. I don't intend to speak to you. You stole my husband.

Cherry: If we're going straight for the jugular, Terry was stolen property anyway wasn't he? What was her name, Chrissy, Clare, who you stole him from in the first place? She had a nervous breakdown after the divorce; ended up in a psychiatric hospital. I wonder what happened to her? You only wanted Terry because you thought he could help you with your literary ambitions. He told me you had as much chance of becoming a successful writer as a, a turkey flying! Your themes were absurd.

Di: Well, how about this for a theme - woman lures happily married *wealthy* man away from wife. Two years later he dies in mysterious circumstances.

Cherry: Mysterious circumstances? He died of a heart attack! What's the mystery in that?

Di: The mystery is what he was doing at the time! Belly dancing! Terry wasn't the belly dancing type.

Cherry: Terry was *exactly* the belly dancing type. That's what you could never understand; the *fun* side of Terry.

Di: You knew he had a dicky heart. Murder. Someone should write a book.
(Coughs)

Cherry: Not you I hope.

(Clarice enters with a cup of tea and a few custard cream biscuits on a plate. Makes her way to stand between Di and Cherry to offer them a biscuit. When they have a slanging match she moves her head from side to side, as if at a tennis match.)

Di: I'm his widow. Just bear that in mind. When I inherit I shall do what I will with the money. You're nothing but a common –

Di: Trollop.

Cherry: Strumpet.

Di: Tart.

(Cherry looks outraged)

Di: (Looks at biscuits Clarice is carrying.) Custard tarts? (Takes a biscuit.)

Clarice: (Looking at biscuits) Custard Creams.

Cherry: (Takes cup of tea Clarice is carrying) That'll be for me. (Sips tea.) It's not sugared!

Clarice: Oh I forgot. No-one seems to take it these days. I think we've got some somewhere.

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Cherry: I can't possibly drink tea without sugar! (Puts cup down on table, where the other 2 cups are.)

Di: Most people have grown out of sugar by adolescence! (Coughs)

(Clarice puts biscuits down on the other table, stage right.)

Cherry: (Picks one of the cups from table that she tried earlier and hands to Di). Have some bitter tea. It should suit you.

(Di takes with bad grace and sits at table stage right, where biscuits are. Cherry looks smug as she watches Di drink her old tea. Di blows nose. Gets lip balm from handbag and applies. Puts brightly coloured lip balm case on table and leaves it there. Make sure the table cloth is a colour that lip balm can be seen clearly on. Gets out her mobile. Dials. Frowns at phone).

Cherry: (To Clarice. Speak while Di is putting on lip balm.) I should have thought Thrope Publishing would be here by now to meet and greet.

Clarice: I've no details beyond the guest list they sent.

Cherry: I Googled them when I got the invitation, but there's nothing on the web. I suppose they're still building their website. Do you know who the famous author is who's coming?

Clarice: I can't reveal who's on the guest list, but I will say that they don't match up to Miss Amy Gdalin.

Cherry: Amy Gdalin! You are joking! That old chestnut! Her work went out of date with bum bags! She's probably dead now. Haven't heard of her for yonks. Some dreadful writer, what's her name Venice de Milo or something, pinched some of her characters, oh and her plots come to think of it, and the Chinese

embraced them like fire crackers. I wrote a marvelously stinking review. I got loads of 'likes'.

(Di exits stage right looking at mobile.)

Clarice: Venice Angenie.

Cherry: Venice Angenie! That's the one. What a silly made up name. If an author can't think up a good pen name, what hope is there of them writing a half decent novel? I always judge a book by the author's name

Clarice: Excuse me. I must attend to lunch.

Cherry: **(Sits at table stage right where Di has left her lip balm. Gets her iPad or laptop from handbag and places on the table.)** I must update my site. My readers will be waiting with bated breath.

Clarice: They may expire for want of air. **(Exits stage right.)**

Cherry: What do you mean? **(But Clarice has gone.)**

(Cherry removes mirror, comb and lipstick from her handbag, and places on table. Checks reflection in mirror. Applies lipstick. Combs hair. Replaces items in handbag, along with Di's lip balm. Stares at laptop. Frowns. Walks to different parts of room trying for reception. Exits stage right, still looking at screen.)

Scene 7

(SFX. Sea gulls screeching. Waves crashing against cliffs.)

Miss Amy: **(Offstage. Old creaky voice but loud)** Have the guests arrived?

Clarice: **(Offstage but loud)** Yes, they're all here; the whole dreadful lot of them.

Miss Amy: **(Offstage)** They'll pay a heavy price for what they've done to you Clarice.

Clarice: **(Offstage)** And for what they've done to you Miss Amy.

Miss Amy: **(Offstage)** Are you sure you're strong enough?

Clarice: **(Offstage)** I'm strong enough.

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Miss Amy: **(Offstage)** Then I can't wait for the fun to begin.

Clarice: **(Offstage)** We deserve a little fun don't we dear?

Miss Amy: **(Offstage)** Oh yes, we deserve a little fun. But be careful; we don't want –

Clarice: **(Offstage)** I'll be careful.

(SFX. Sea gulls screeching. Waves crashing against cliffs.)

Venice: **(Enter stage right, speaking to Beverley)** How was I to know you were going to Cliff House? There was a taxi waiting, and I took it.

Beverley: **(Enter following Venice closely. She has either dank or wildly frizzy hair from weather.)** It was my taxi. I ordered it.

Venice: I didn't know.

Beverley: I banged on the window.

Venice: I don't like people banging on the window. It's an aggressive gesture.

Beverley: Not as aggressive as the sign I gave as you drove away.

Venice: Then I was quite right not to let you in! **(Sits at tea table stage left. Starts sipping tea.)**

Beverley: I had to walk all the way up from the station in the mist. I hope you're pleased with yourself.

Venice: You're here now. There's a cloakroom in the corridor if you want to tidy up.

Beverley: I've tidied up.

Venice: Really? It must be the mist; it makes my hair go all wild too. You're er not the publisher by the way are you?

Beverley: I'm a book blogger.

Venice: Publishers often look a bit scruffy I've noticed. Creased clothes, bags under their eyes; I expect it comes from sitting up all night reading manuscripts.

Beverley: I sit up many nights reading manuscripts. But that's because I'm a very well known, and I emphasise, a very well-known blogger. **(Boasts)** You may be interested to learn that my 'likes' number the inhabitants of a small town.

Venice: Obviously one without a hairdresser dear.

Beverley: Are you trying to be obnoxious or does it come naturally?

Venice: I'm just being honest dear. Why don't you go and comb your hair before Thrope Publishing arrive?

Di: **(Enters stage right.)** Hello **(addressing both women)** I don't think we've met. I'm Di, Di Denouement – 'Di's Denouncements'.

Beverley: Oh. I'm Beverley Binding – 'Bev's Book Revues'. Whoever put this guest list together obviously wanted to make sure we all got along like a house on fire.

Di: A house on fire is such a tired cliché. I try to avoid clichés like the plague in my reviews.

(Cherry enters stage right still looking at laptop or mobile.)

Venice: **(Stands and moves to centre)** Do you think we're all here now? Well, anyway, I'll introduce myself, although I'm amazed no-one's recognized me. **(Grandly)** I'm Venice Angenie!

(Cherry and Di stare unmoved. Beverley sits at table vacated by Venice, stage left. Stares.)

Venice: Excited? You'll have heard of my phenomenal success in the Far East? I'm presuming you're the influential bloggers the publisher has invited to meet me. I've always thought if I wasn't such a good writer I'd be a blogger. But if nature grants one a gift, one has to use it.

Beverley: You're not a writer! You just stole what's her names, that old mystery writer, what's her name, characters, and plots, and –

Venice: **(Interrupts)** Oh my dear! Call yourself a blogger, you're so out of fashion! When you take someone else's characters, it's called furthering their adventures. I gave them new life. Freed them from their corsets.

Di: I didn't think Inspector whatshisname wore a corset.

Cherry: That's his further adventure.

Beverley: Let's stop this. We need to try and rub along for this weekend or none of us are going to get anywhere. Who is this Thrope Publisher? I Googled them before I came away, but there's no trace.

Venice: Well I suspect, but keep this under your hats, that it's the tabloid journalist, well editor actually; a bigwig in the publishing world, I met a couple of months ago. Unless it's another publisher, and they're going to have a price war over me; how exciting! Anyway he –

Beverley: **(Interrupts)** Ah, so it's a man?

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Venice: Oh I rather gave that away didn't I! Anyway, *mentioning no names*, he was very interested in setting up a book publishing business. He wanted to sponsor my next books. He was absolutely over the moon about Inspector Brain.

Beverley: Was he on drugs?

(Clarice enters stage right, with tea tray and cleaning cloth)

Cherry: **(Looking at her laptop or mobile. To Clarice)** What's the Wi-Fi password?

Clarice: I beg your pardon?

Cherry: Wi-Fi.

Clarice: I believe there's one in the library.

Beverley: **(Looks around)** Where's that?

Clarice: **(Points in general direction)** In Lyme Bogis.

Di: Great!

Clarice: If you want entertainment there's a hi-fi and some records in the front lounge.

Di: **(Checking mobile.)** For everyone's interest, there's no mobile coverage here either.

Cherry: No mobile coverage! O M G!

Beverley: No decent publisher would invite us to a place without Wi-Fi or mobile reception! How are we expected to communicate with our readers?

Venice: Cheer up! He obviously wants to encourage a rich bubble of creativity, and team bonding!

Clarice: Would you like to bond in the lounge while I tidy up. **(Tidies up and clears tea cups and biscuits onto her tray.)**

(Bloggers exit stage right. SFX. Suitable filler music. Clarice exits stage right after clearing away.)

Scene 8

(SFX. Fade filler music as bloggers enter stage right. Venice sits at table stage right and is jotting things in her notebook. Beverley sits at table stage left, fiddling with iPad or mobile.)

Clarice: **(Enters stage left)** I'm afraid Thrope Publishing have just rung up and cancelled. Something's come up.

Venice: What do you mean 'something's come up'? What could come up more important than me?

Clarice: Death!

Cherry: What!

Clarice: They died.

Di: They phoned to say they'd died?

Clarice: Their representative did.

Bev: I didn't hear the phone ring.

Venice: This is terrible.

Clarice: It is tragic.

Venice: No, I mean I hope they left money to sponsor my next work.

Di: When did they die?

Clarice: This is a beautiful spot. Why not make the best of it? I've read in a magazine it's called mindfulness.

Beverley: **(Goes to imaginary window over audience)** I can't see a thing for the mist.

Clarice: It should clear by the morning.

Cherry: Morning! I'm not hanging about here without a signal until the morning.

Beverley: You're not saying you're giving up a free weekend!

Clarice: The weekend isn't free!

Di: What do you mean it's not free? It says so in my letter (**gets invitation from handbag and reads aloud. Other bloggers check theirs.**) 'We hope you'll join the small group of select bloggers chosen to meet our new writer'. (**Coughs**), blah blah blah..... yes, here we are... 'The luxury weekend laid on with champagne reception will I'm sure meet with your approval. Looking forward to meeting you, Ann Thrope secretary, brackets Thrope Publishing'.

Clarice: It doesn't say it's free. No deposit was paid. You're responsible for your own bills. And the champagne I've already opened for lunch I'm afraid. I can't afford to give you all a free weekend!

Cherry: That's disgraceful! Whoever this Ann Thrope person is can sort this out. They can't invite us here, and back out just like that. Dying isn't the end of the world! What's their phone number?

Clarice: They didn't give one.

Di: You took a booking without a phone number?

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Clarice: They booked by post. We don't get many visitors. I've got the address.

Di: This is crazy.

Cherry: Press the re-dial button. If they've just phoned, press the re-dial and get them back.

Clarice: I don't think we've got one of those up here.

Cherry: Everyone has a re-dial button!

Clarice: Miss Amy and I live very simply.

Beverley: Oh for goodness sakes dial 1471 then. That will give you the number. Everyone's got 1471. (**Clarice goes to old fashioned telephone and dials. Puts phone down**).

Clarice: We don't.

Venice: (**Stands**) When I get back home I shall visit Miss Ann Thrope and give her a piece of my mind.

Beverley: Are you sure you can spare it?

Di: What did you say?

Beverley: I asked her if she could spare a piece of her mind.

Venice: I'm so happy I didn't let you into my taxi!

Di: Not that, *she* said Miss Ann Thrope – misanthrope – misanthrope!

Venice: **(Tartly. Sits back at table.)** Who's this '*she*'? The cat's mother!

Cherry: What's the cat got to do with it?

Clarice: We do have a cat. Timmy. A bit of a tunneling rat problem. We've put cyanide down. Don't touch the white dust around the skirting boards.

Beverley: Oh charming.

Di: Did you hear what I said. Miss Ann Thrope spells misanthrope!

Cherry: What's a misanthrope?

Beverley: **(Sarcastically)** Someone who collects stamps.

Cherry: I wouldn't mind reviewing for Stamp World.

Beverley: You'd review for Baboon Biannual if they gave you a free banana!

Clarice: We may not have the latest technology up here, but we read, and we have dictionaries. A misanthrope is someone who hates mankind and avoids human society. **(Sinisterly)** It sounds to me as if someone has a grudge against you all! And by the way lunch is ready. **(Exits)**

Venice: **(Stands)** Why should anyone have a grudge against us all? I certainly don't know anyone with a grudge – **(looks at Beverley)** apart from you possibly.

Beverley: And I don't know anyone with a grudge **(looks at Cherry)** – apart from you.

Cherry: **(Sarcastically)** Oh ditto.

Di: **(To Cherry)** And as Terry's legal wife, don't say you don't have a grudge against me. **(Coughs)**

Cherry: **(Dismissively)** Why should I have a grudge against you? You're fish and chip wrappers; yesterday's news.

Venice: Well, all I can say is that it's a good job whoever he or she is, didn't come! There's enough grudges going on here without Miss Ann Thrope.
(SFX. Car pulling up on gravel drive. Bloggers and Venice all look out over audience through 'window')

Cherry: How do we know they didn't come?

(Bloggers freeze. Unsettled. SFX. Sea gulls screeching. Waves crashing against cliffs. Bloggers exit stage right, in character as interval is announced or lights come on.)

INTERVAL OPPORTUNITY

Act 2
Scene 1

(SFX. Sea crashing against cliffs.)

Miss Amy: **(Creaky old voice offstage but loud)** What are they doing now?

Clarice: **(Offstage but loud)** Arguing, backbiting.

Miss Amy: **(Offstage)** How delicious! I haven't had as much fun since I wrote Inspector Crane.

Clarice: **(Offstage)** He was a wonderful character.

Miss Amy: **(Offstage)** Thank you my dear. What he'd really like is a new murder to solve.

Clarice: **(Offstage)** Perhaps he'll get one before too long.

Miss Amy: **(Offstage. Giggles.)** Oh Clarice, you are naughty!

(SFX. Sea crashing against cliffs/spray. Di enters stage right. Walks to stage front and gazes out.)

Beverley: **(Enters stage right and stands beside her.)** We're trapped.

Di: Like rats.

Beverley: I don't think of myself as a rat personally.

(Venice enters stage right, and goes to stand beside them, staring out. Cherry emits a piercing scream offstage. All characters on stage jump. Cherry enters stage right, hurrying)

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Cherry: There's an old woman dead in one of the bedrooms! It's horrible, horrible. She's all twisted. **(Sits down shocked at table stage right.)**

Clarice: **(Enters stage right.)** What on earth's all the racket? It's enough to wake the dead!

Cherry: There's an old woman upstairs! It's not going to wake her! She is dead!

Clarice: **(Crossly)** Nonsense! It's Miss Amy. She's having her afternoon nap. She looks like that when she's asleep.

Cherry: Dead?

Clarice: **(Sharply)** She's very old. What were you doing in her room anyway? You're not allowed to go poking around. I hope you haven't woken her!

Cherry: The door was open and I saw her in bed. Are you sure she's not dead? Her eyes were open and staring.

Clarice: An affliction she has.

Beverley: What did you say her name was?

Clarice: **(Picks up photo from telephone table and shows it to Bev, Di and Cherry. Says proudly)** She is Miss Amy Gdalin; the famous detective writer.

Cherry: **(Looking at photo)** You're joking. You are joking! Is this a nightmare?

Clarice: I'm not joking; this is Miss Amy's house. She was once as well-known as Agatha Christie. We take guests these days to help pay the bills.

Di: **(Coughs and licks around lips. Sits at table stage left.)** Is there any tea Clarice?

Clarice: I'll brew a pot. My advice to you all is to enjoy the weekend. No-one can leave while the mist is around. The taxi driver has just come back because he can't get through. **(Exits stage right.)**

Cherry: **(Jumps up)** She was dead! I've read enough detective novels to know a dead body when I see one!

Venice: I thought she'd died a few years ago myself.

Cherry: And there's a funny smell.

Venice: That might be the damp.

Beverley: Do you know that her name means cyanide? Amy Gdalin, if you say it uh-mig-duh-lin, it's the chemical name for cyanide!

Cherry: O M G!

Venice: That's common knowledge. Us murder mystery writers use these little ploys. Have you worked mine out yet; Ms Venice Angenie?

Di: No?

Venice: I borrowed the idea from Miss Amy. Mine's cleverer though.

Di: You seem to have borrowed a lot of things from Miss Amy!

Beverley: That's what this is all about isn't it! She sent out the invitations! Why else put the Cliff House phone number for our replies. We've been lured here so she can get revenge on Venice. **(To Venice)** This is what comes of plagiarism!

Cherry: **(Sits at table stage right)** Miss Amy didn't look capable of swatting a fly to me.

Beverley: Not her, the housekeeper. You've heard how she worships Miss Amy.

Cherry: Clare?

Venice: Plagiarism rubbish! All the very best writing has reference to other works! And I've known Clarice for years. We're best buddies.

Cherry: Clarice? Clarice: why does her name ring a bell. What's her surname?

Di: Hanger

Cherry: No, that doesn't mean anything.

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Venice: Hanger's her maiden name. She changed back to it after her husband ran out on her. I don't know what her married name was.

Cherry: Abloid! O M G! It's Clarice Abloid! She's the one who went mad after she was dumped. It's not Venice she's after, *it's you* **(points to Di)** because you stole her husband!

Di: Me! **(To Cherry)** What about you? Killing him with belly dancing! You'll be first on her hit list.

Venice: **(Ecstatic)** Murder by belly dancing! Marvelous! I must put that in one of my novels. What a title! **(Gets out her writer's notepad).**

Beverley: It sounds to me as if Clarice has got something against you all.

Cherry: Don't leave yourself out Beverley! You blogged rude things about Miss Amy's books!

Venice: **(Bursts out suddenly)** Abloid! That's the surname of the tabloid journalist, bigwig, editor, I was telling you about! Terry Abloid. Please please don't tell me he's dead!

Di: The doctor thought so.

Venice: But what about my books?

Beverley: The public had a narrow escape.

Venice: **(Burst into tears. Weeps into handkerchief)** Oh Terry. Poor Terry! I only met him once but I'm heartbroken!

Cherry: You weren't heartbroken five minutes ago.

Venice: **(Sniffing into hankie)** I didn't know it was him five minutes ago! How could I grieve for a complete stranger? **(Stops sniffing)** But, wait a minute; we did have a verbal understanding. His representatives will honour that won't they? My books will come out?

Cherry: Over my dead body!

Venice: What have you got to do with it?

Cherry: Terry and I were a number.

Venice: He had a lot of numbers.

Di: Ignore her, I'm his legal wife. **(Coughs and wipes nose.)**

Cherry: You're not mentioned in the will.

Di: I don't need to be. I'm his wife, widow.

Venice: **(Takes Di's hands in hers. Pleads.)** If you do win Di, you'll think of what Terry wanted won't you? My Inspector Brain books were probably his last wish on earth. He was probably reading one when he died.

Beverley: Who can blame him?

Di: Ignore her. I'll consider it. **(Coughs)** I'm more concerned that Clarice has lost the plot. I've heard her muttering and laughing to herself upstairs.

Cherry: I'm sure Miss Amy is a corpse. Perhaps Clarice killed her?

Beverley: **(Authoritatively)** We're all in danger. We should dial 999 and get help.

Venice: I'll do it. I'll phone the police. **(Goes to phone, picks it up, presses receiver several times.)** It's dead, the phone's dead. The line's been cut!

Clarice: **(Enters stage right.)** Who on earth's dead this time?

Beverley: The phone's dead!

Clarice: **(Sharply)** Why are you phoning out? You need my permission to use the phone. It's for business purposes only. There's nothing wrong with the phone, or the hi-fi for that matter! It's tea time. I'll be in with a tray of tea shortly, and I've got some fairy cakes just cooling. I suggest you all go and freshen up. **(Exits stage right).**

Di: **(Stands)** I'll go and help her. Keep an eye on her **(Coughs.)**

(Di exits stage right. Cherry, Beverley and Venice exit stage right.)

Scene 2

(SFX. Sea gulls screeching. Waves crashing against cliffs. Di enters stage right, with small plate of fairy cakes. Puts down on cake table stage right. Sits. Beverley enters. Sits at opposite tea table, stage left.)

Sid: **(Enters with tea tray and 4 cups. Puts down on tea-table, stage left. He stands parallel and in middle of tables)** You didn't know I was house-trained did you? May as well make myself useful until the mist clears. **(Trying to scare them)** Hm nasty out there, very very nasty. **(Sinisterly)** They do say, when there's a mist around like this, it's the souls of the dead and departed swirling about testing the cracks of the windows and doors, trying to creep in. And they do also say that...

Di: **(Stands and interrupts Sid with a blunt)** Who's for tea? **(Moves to stand at Bev's table, stage left.)**

(Sid exits grumpily with a fairy cake in fist. Venice enters stage right. Goes to stand with Di at tea table stage left.)

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Beverley: What if Clarice has poisoned the tea?

Di: I don't think she has, I was watching her.

Beverley: What about him, the driver?

Venice: Why should Sid want to poison you?

Cherry: **(Enters stage right)** I can't take this being without a signal any longer. I've never been disconnected from my mobile or laptop, not even for a single night. And there's not even a landline! My whole body's trembling. I need to go on to Twitter, or Facebook. My fingers have started twitching. Where's my mobile?

(Cherry sits on chair next to telephone table. In a panic fishes around in her handbag. A few of the contents fall out including her mobile and Di's lip balm. She shrieks and goes down on her hands and knees to scabble for them. In the process she pushes them under the telephone table, including the lip balm. She retrieves them shakily, and goes to sit at cake table, stage right, where she places them on table. Fiddles with her mobile.)

Cherry: Just a tiny Instagram on my iPad would do. My muscles are going into spasm. Oh no, I'm getting a panic attack. **(Starts hyperventilating. Puts handbag items back into her bag, leaving lip balm on table.)**

(Bloggers and Venice are inspecting the tea cups on tea table, away from where Cherry is.)

Venice: **(Irritated)** Look, I think you're all over-reacting. We're losing a valuable opportunity for networking here. We should be talking about my book. That's what Terry, bless him, would have wanted. When it's published I'll send you all a copy to review. Remember Terry when you write it.

Cherry: **(Hyperventilating)** Crap.

Venice: Look if Clarice wanted to poison us, wouldn't she have done it at dinner?

Cherry: Perhaps she did. I'm feeling sick now, and dizzy, and faint.

Venice: **(Looks out over audience)** Why don't you take a walk in the garden. The view from the end is rather special. There's a little path I remember -

Di: **(Goes to look out of the 'window')** I can't see a thing for the mist. **(Coughs.)**

Cherry: Come with me Di. I feel shaky. **(Stands)**

Di: I could do with some fresh air.

Venice: **(Authoritative. Takes Cherry's arm. Speaks to Di.)** No I'll walk with her. You've got an awful cold.

(Venice exits steering Cherry towards the 'outside' stage left. Di spots her lip balm on table where Cherry has left it stage right, and applies it generously. Sits at table stage right.)

Venice: **(Enters stage left shortly afterwards. Irrked)** She wants a drink. **(Picks up cup of tea from tea table stage left.)**

Beverley: Take her a cake as well **(indicates plate of cakes where Di is seated)**, she may as well be the guinea pig.

(Di puts cake onto saucer of tea cup Venice is holding.)

Venice: It's cold out there. I'll just pop upstairs and get a scarf. **(Puts cup down on cake table, stage right. Exits stage right.)**

Beverley: Who else wants a drink?

Di: I'll have one. I'm not feeling too good. **(Licks lips.)**

(Beverley takes Di a cup of tea. SFX. Sudden very loud blaring of Hi-Fi in front room, playing canon fire in Tchaikovsky's 1812. A short dramatic burst Beverley jumps with tea in hand. Di jumps up Bev and Di both look around, unnerved.)

Beverley: Good grief! What was that?

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Venice: **(Returns enters with scarf, stage right. Cheerily.)** Sorry! Just testing the Hi-Fi as we haven't got wifi! **(Picks up tea and cake from table where she left it. Exits stage left.)**

(SFX. Shrieking of seagulls; a rumbling; then terrific crashing of rocks in a landslide. Loud scream. Beverley and Di stand looking out over audience in horror.)

Di: That sounded like a landslide!

Venice: **(Enters stage left)** The end of the garden has fallen into the sea! Cherry must have gone over with it. What a tragedy!

(Bev, Di and Venice stare out of 'window'. Freeze while conversation between Clarice and Miss Amy takes place. SFX. Screaming of seagulls.)

Miss Amy: **(Offstage)** Was that canon fire I heard dear?

Clarice: **(Offstage)** Yes, it's coming to a climax Miss Amy. The end of a long movement.

Miss Amy: **(Offstage)** Oh how exciting Clarice. I do love a grand finale.

Cherry: **(Enters suddenly, stage left. Angrily to Venice.)** Take a walk in the front garden you say! Did you forget to mention it hardly existed!

Venice: **(Jumps with tea in hand)** Oh, you're alive! Oh - good. Clarice should have warned us! -- I brought you some tea and a cake. It's probably cold now.

Cherry: **(Takes tea and cake and sits at table left)** Who put that music on? It caused the landslide! It's lucky I went in the side garden instead. **(Sips tea and drinks the un-sugared tea.)**

(Di sits with her cup of tea at cake table, stage right. Coughs. Applies lip balm.)

Beverley: Venice put the music on to test the hi-fi. Look, I hate to say this, but I agree with Venice. We're getting paranoid. If Clarice wanted to kill us all, she could have poisoned us at lunch.

Venice: **(Inspired)** And she and Miss Amy would heave our bodies down the cliff to be gobbled by the gulls. Oh I'm getting all kinds of wonderful ideas for my next Inspector Brain book! **(Gets out her writer's notebook.)**

Beverley: Don't you mean vultures?

Venice: **(Further inspired)** I'll set it in India!

Di: It sounds like a sure-fire hit. **(Coughs)**

Venice: **(Picks up plate of cakes and passes them round.)** It will be dear, it will be. Have a cake. Clarice bakes a mean fairy cake. If I drop dead stop nibbling. **(Di, Venice and Bev take a cake. Cherry already has one in her saucer. They nibble tentatively.)**

(Di nibbles cake. Sips tea. Licks lips. Holds hand to head. Struggles to breathe. Makes frightful noises. Slumps in chair.)

Beverley: **(Addressing Di)** I don't this is very funny, though I must say I'm not surprised. Anything to attract attention.

Venice: She's awfully pale.

Cherry: **(Persuasively)** Give her another sip of tea. She's probably dehydrated. She keeps saying she's dry. **(She is drinking her own un-sugared tea.)**

Beverley: **(Holds Di's cup of tea to her lips.)** She's not drinking it. She seems to have fainted! Di! --- Di! **(big scream.)**

Clarice: **(Hurries in crossly)** Whatever's the matter now?

Sid: **(Following Clarice)** What the Dickens -

Beverley: I think she's dead!!

Clarice: **(Quickly takes Di's pulse)** I'm afraid you're right. It's a new case for Inspector Crane!

Venice: **(Pipes up)** Inspector Brain!

(Whole Cast freeze for a few seconds.)

Detective: **(Stands up from the audience)** Non, Non. C'est un case for Monsieur Parrot! **(Tells audience he is here having taken shelter from the sea mist.)** He will line up the cast **(apart from the corpse!),** ask them their names, and what they think about the crime. In character they will then go around the audience to be

interrogated. Monsieur must remind the audience that only the murderer can lie. After an allocated time and answer sheets are in, he will line them up again, and give a brief resume of each character, and their possible motive for murder. At the end he will ask the murderer, to step forward. After much wavering in the line, the murderer will step forward, and say why they did the devilish deed. A prize (**provided by organizers**) will then be presented to the person/persons who got their correct answers *in first*. It's therefore necessary to number entries as they come in. Sometimes a second prize is also awarded.)