

## Characters

<b>Spencer Goddard</b>	-	The new widower
<b>Hannah</b>	-	His cook
<b>Milly</b>	-	His housemaid
<b>Mr Bateman</b>	-	A neighbour
<b>Mrs Bateman</b>	-	A neighbour
<b>Rev Leening</b>	-	Who has conducted the funeral service
<b>Ghostly Voices</b>	-	Cast members.
<b>Voice of Maria</b>	-	Cast member. Tiny role. Use empty tin to produce hollow echo of voice.
<b>Announcer</b>	-	Who introduces the play.

## Scene 1

**(SFX person already in position behind desk with BBC sign 'Sound Effects'. Suitable intro music is playing. Announcer goes to front of stage. Cast are standing behind their chairs. 'On Air' sign goes up. Announcer reads whole of intro in old style clipped BBC voice, and indicates each actor.)**

**Announcer:** After the funeral of his wife, the new widower thinks he has got away with murder. But his plans for a quiet life are upset by his cook! Now he has to cook up plans for her! The setting is a comfortably set up house, around the 1920's. The scene opens after a funeral tea for Spencer Goddard's recently deceased wife, Maria. Spencer Goddard, the new widower (**indicate actor, who then sits**). Hannah, his cook (**indicate actor, who then sits**). Milly his housemaid (**indicate actor, who then sits**). Mr and Mrs Bateman his neighbours (**indicate actors, who then sit**.) The Rev Leening who has conducted funeral service, (**indicate actor, who then sits**.) The Voice of Maria, (**Indicate**.) And Sound Effects (**Indicate SFX person**) are played by members of the cast. The guests are departing after the funeral tea.

**(Announcer exits, unless taking a role.)**

**(Relevant cast forward. No need to speak into mike as it is just Mise-en-scène. Actors enter and exit to and from their seats. SFX. make relevant footsteps/shutting of door /creaking/storm etc sounds. Interaction very important; do not stare down at scripts; look at each other. When not involved, sit down. Cast glances at Maria's armchair throughout performance.)**

**Rev Leening:** The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, too soon alas; but your five precious years together, the memories, the happy memories will remain, and bring you joy and comfort in your hours of need. The Lord be with you Spencer. I will come and see you again. You will be at church on Sunday as usual no doubt?

**Spencer:** No doubt.

**Rev:** I'll see myself out. **(\*If doubling, pass behind Spencer to double as Mr Bateman.)**

**(SFX. Retreating footsteps of Rev Leening. Door clicks shut.)**

**Mrs Bateman:** **(Sotto voce to Mr Bateman)** We'd better be off.

**Mr Bateman:** **(To Spencer)** We'd better be off. Leave you to rest.

**Mrs Bateman:** If we can do anything Spencer, you know we're only next door. **(Sighs)** Friday nights; oh, I can still see Maria sitting there **(indicates empty armchair.)** Gin Rummy; she used to love it when - but we can still - though... **(breaks off awkwardly.)**

**Mr Bateman:** Yes, we can still; but I expect - but you'll need ... **(breaks off awkwardly.)**

**Mrs Bateman:** Time.

**Mr Bateman:** Time.

**Spencer:** Time.

**Mrs Bateman:** We'll close the door after ourselves.

**(SFX. Retreating footsteps of Mr and Mrs Bateman. Door clicks shut. Spencer relaxes and laughs softly to self. Throws his black hat triumphantly onto Maria's chair. Suddenly aware that Hannah the Cook is looking at him, he stops laughing and seamlessly grabs Maria's shawl, buries his face in it, and speaks to it in a sobbing voice.)**

**Spencer:** Oh, my darling, losing you is driving me mad; I can't bear it. If I don't release this tension inside me, I shall surely die of madness! **(In surprised voice)** Ah Hannah, I didn't hear you come in! You can clear away the tea things now.

**Hannah:** **(Takes photo from apron pocket.)** I thought you might like to have this photo of the mistress sir, to remind you. It's a very good likeness, till she was taken ill.

**Spencer:** **(Receives photo, looks at it, and props it reverently on Maria's chair)** Thank you Hannah. Yes, it is a good likeness of my wife **(a sob in voice)** – my late wife.

**Hannah:** **(Shakes head)** I never saw anybody change so sudden. Full of life she was, and then ... **(Stands snivelling.)**

**Spencer:** The change was part of her condition.... Is there something you want Hannah?

**Hannah:** I just can't believe she's gone. Every now and then I have a queer feeling that she's still here.

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**Spencer:** Well, she's not, I can assure you.

**Hannah:** And wanting to tell me something.

**Spencer:** Perhaps how much she misses me?

**Hannah:** No, not that.

**Spencer:** Perhaps you ought to take a little holiday Hannah? Maria's illness has been a great strain upon you. A lengthy business.

**Hannah:** You too sir; waiting on her hand and foot as you did. I can't think how you stood it. If only you'd had the nurse in to help, as Doctor Roberts advised.

**Spencer:** I preferred to look after her myself Hannah. If we had employed a nurse, she would have known how ill she was. It would have alarmed her.

**Hannah:** Yes, and I suppose nurses are always peeking and prying into what doesn't concern them aren't they? Always thinking they know more than the doctors do.

**Spencer:** She couldn't have had a better doctor than Doctor Roberts. Nobody could have done more.

**Hannah:** Yes sir. And nobody *could have done more for her* than you did. There are few husbands that would have *done what you did*.

**Spencer:** ... I did my duty I believe.

**Hannah:** **(Meaningfully)** As I said, few husbands would have *done what you did*, - or *done it so well*.

**Spencer:** Thank you, Hannah. But now I need to be alone, with my memories, my happy memories as the vicar said, to help me through the dark days.

**Hannah:** I'll leave you then - for now.

**(SFX. Hannah's footsteps retreating. Spencer unnerved by conversation SFX. Ticking of clock. Birdsong.)**

## **Scene 2 – Next morning**

**(SFX. Rattling of cup and saucer. Rustling of newspaper.)**

**Milly:** **(Cheerfully)** Good morning, sir. Here's a nice cup of tea; let me know if you'd like another cup.

**Spencer:** Thank you, Milly; oh, and an excellent breakfast! Hannah certainly knows how to rustle up bacon and eggs.

**Milly:** I'll tell her sir. She was a bit worried about the eggs, threw the first ones out; said she wasn't going to use that vendor again. Not good enough for the man of the house she said. He needs to keep his strength up! As long as the bacon wasn't tough with waiting.

**Spencer:** No everything was hunky dory. You know Milly, I've been thinking of having the garden landscaped; change it round a bit. Need to keep myself busy you see. He might call this afternoon

**Milly:** I'll keep an eye open for him sir. You do need to keep yourself busy. You don't want to dwell. And there's no need to scrimp now that, oh – I, I mean, no need to, to not do it properly.

**Spencer:** The garden is something that's been on the cards some time. Maria was in full agreement; fountains, water, she liked fountains. It would be like, a memorial.

**Milly:** That's a lovely idea sir; little spouting cherubim and such; oh how she'd have liked that!

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**Spencer:** Yes, I'm sure she would.

**Milly:** **(Tearfully)** If only she could have seen it!

**Spencer:** Thank you, Milly, that will be all.

**(SFX. Milly's footsteps retreating. Ticking/chiming to indicate time shift.)**

### Scene 3 – Afternoon

**(SFX. Scrabbling around, as if searching in box. could use a few trinkets in a musical box. Each time the box opens it plays a jangling tune, annoying Spencer.)**

**Spencer:** **(Shouts)** Hannah!

**(SFX. More scrabbling sounds.)**

**Hannah:** Yes sir?

**Spencer:** Do you know if your mistress locked any of her things up in a safe for some reason?

**Hannah:** What sort of things might that be sir?

**Spencer:** Well, her jewelry mostly; she had some nice pieces. Her box is almost empty.

**Hannah:** Oh, that's alright sir. She gave it all to me - when she knew....

**Spencer:** When she knew what?

**Hannah:** That she was dying sir. It was just before she died - of *gastro-enteritis*. Terrible thing - *gastro-enteritis*.

**Spencer:** **(Taken aback)** Oh. Well, if she gave them to you, that's all right then. **(Puzzled)** Maria said no word to me. I only wanted to know what had become of them. You've been with us for a long time Hannah; I thought perhaps Milly?

**Hannah:** Milly didn't take them sir. *She's as honest as we are.* - Is there anything more you want, sir?

**Spencer:** No, no, you may go.

**(SFX. Hannah's footsteps retreating. Door clicks shut. Spencer sharp intake of breath and slow exhalation. SFX. Ticking/chiming. Birdsong.)**

## Scene 4 – Morning

(SFX. Rustling of newspaper. Brisk footsteps. Creak of door opening.)

**Hannah:** I'm sorry breakfast is a bit late this morning sir; I've had an upset in the kitchen.

**Spencer:** That's quite alright. Is it cleaned up now?

**Hannah:** Not that kind of upset; I've given Milly notice.

**Spencer:** You've? **(Beat)** Isn't she satisfactory?

**Hannah:** Not to my way of thinking sir. She says she's coming to see you about it. I told her that would be no good.

**Spencer:** I'd better see Milly and hear what she has to say on the matter.

**Hannah:** Of course, if you wish to; only, after giving her notice, if she doesn't go, I shall. I should be sorry to go after all these years. I've been very comfortable here; but it's either her or me.

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**Spencer:** I should be sorry to lose you Hannah, but if you... **(interrupted)**

**Hannah:** **(Interrupts)** Thank you sir. I'm sure I've tried to do my best. As I say, I've been with you and the mistress for some time now, and I've done all I can to make you comfortable. I expect I understand you better than anybody else would and, if you get my meaning, *I know all your little ways.*

**Spencer:** Very well, I leave it to you. You have my permission to dismiss Milly.

**Hannah:** You don't mind if I rest my legs for a minute, do you sir? **(Sits comfortably)** Ah, that's better. There's something else I wanted to see you about sir; my wages. Seeing that I'm really housekeeper here now, I was going to ask for a rise.

**Spencer:** Well, that only seems fair Hannah, if you've more work. Let me see, what are you getting?

**Hannah:** Thirty-six shillings.

**Spencer:** Thirty-six shillings. Well then, I'm feeling generous, I'll make it forty-two.

**Hannah:** I was thinking more like a hundred.

**Spencer:** Don't you consider that a rather a big jump! I really don't think that I -

**Hannah:** **(Interrupts)** It doesn't matter then. I just thought I was worth it, *to you*, that's all. You know best, I'm sure. Some people might think I was worth two hundred, *to you*. That's an even bigger jump. But after all – a big jump is better than **(leaves sentence unfinished.)**

**Spencer:** Better than – a what?

**Hannah:** Better than a big – drop.

**Spencer:** You are jocular!

**Hannah:** Short life and a merry one!

**Spencer:** Mine or yours?

**Hannah:** Both, perhaps!

**Spencer:** If – if I give you a hundred, that ought to make your life merrier, at any rate.

**Hannah:** Yes. Merry and long, perhaps. **(Craftily)** – I’m careful you know sir; very careful.

**Spencer:** I am sure that you are.

**Hannah:** I’m careful of what I eat and drink I mean.

**Spencer:** That is wise. I am careful myself; which is why I am paying a good cook a large salary. But don’t overdo things Hannah; don’t kill the goose that lays the golden eggs.

**Hannah:** I’m not likely to do that. Live and let live; that’s my motto. Some people have different ones. But I’m careful; nobody won’t catch me napping. I’ve left a letter with my sister – just in case.

**Spencer:** Oh? Just in case what?

**Hannah:** To be opened after my death! I don’t believe in doctors; not after what I’ve seen lately. I don’t think they know enough. So, if I should die unexpectedly, I shall be examined. There’ll be a postmortem. I’ve given my reasons.

**Spencer:** And suppose; suppose your sister is curious and opens it before you die?

**Hannah:** We must chance that mustn’t we! But I don’t think she will. I sealed it up with sealing-wax, with a mark on it.

**Spencer:** She might open it and say nothing about it.

**Hannah:** I should know it soon enough; and so, would other people, for she’s a terrible gossip. Lord - there would be an upset! Chidham village would have something to talk about! We should be in the newspapers!

**Spencer:** Dear me! Your pen seems to be a dangerous weapon in your hands Hannah. But I hope the need for your sister to open it will not happen for another fifty years. You look well and strong.

**Hannah:** I don’t take up my troubles before they come; but there’s no harm in trying to prevent them coming is there? Prevention is better than cure, they do say.

**Spencer:** Exactly. The reason of course, I’m giving you this sum is because I think you are worth it. There’s no necessity for our little financial arrangement to be known by anybody else. If it gets out, I may become unpopular with my neighbours, for setting a bad example.

**Hannah:** Mm, I'm thinking now, that I'm not sure I ain't worth more, but this'll do to go on with! I shall get another girl for less than we're paying Milly, and that'll be another little bit extra for me.

**Spencer:** It appears you have it all thought out.

**(SFX. Hannah's footsteps to door. Then stop as if hesitating.)**

**Hannah:** **(As if exiting room)** Come to think of it, I ain't sure I shall get anybody else; then there'll be more than ever for me. If I do the work, I might as well have the money.

**Spencer:** As you say.

**(SFX. Door clicks shut.)**

**Spencer:** **(A shuddering breath, then angrily to self)** I shall kill you, Hannah. I shall kill you. My fingers round your scrawny neck, squeezing, squeezing. No, no, I'll be hanged. Well, I might as well be hanged for a lamb as a, for a sheep, as a - **(more calmly)** no, no. Think Spencer, think, use your head! What's good for one goose, is good enough for - another goose! Not fingers, not fingers - a rope! Remove the shadow of the noose from my neck, and place it around Hannah's! Oh yes, yes! The hangman's rope for you, my girl; and it will be done with the full force of the law. **(Laughs softly to self.)**

**(SFX. Ticking/chiming.)**

## Scene 5 – An evening soon after

- Spencer:** (To Mr & Mrs Bateman) Goodnight; yes, it was a good idea. Nothing like a game of cards to help one forget one's troubles for a while. Ah, you've er noticed the whisky bottles. Yes, I admit I've been having a tippie or two. Things have been getting on top of me lately.
- Mrs Bateman:** (Urging) You should get away Spencer; have a clean break.
- Spencer:** (Slowly) Yes, a clean break (absently strokes his neck slowly.)
- Mr Bateman:** (Concerned) You know, you are looking a bit seedy old chap. Ask the Travel Agent to send you some brochures; Torquay, now that would set you up.
- Spencer:** I'll think about it. Goodnight.
- Mrs Bateman:** Goodnight Spencer; we'll see ourselves out.

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(SFX. Mr & Mrs Bateman's retreating footsteps. Clicking of door shut.)

- Spencer:** (To self angrily) Look at the state of this place; dust, empty bottles! Hannah's taking liberties! More money, and less work!
- Hannah:** (Her speech is a little slurred) I thought I heard voices. I'm glad you're socialising again. Can't let life stop because ... (interrupted.)
- Spencer:** (Snaps) What do you want!
- Hannah:** I came to see if you wanted coffee!
- (SFX. Clinking of bottles being dropped into waste bin.)
- Spencer:** Perhaps *you* need some coffee!
- Hannah:** What's a tippie! I'm not afraid of you!
- Spencer:** I hope not.
- Hannah:** Some people might be, but I'm not! If anything happened to me - (leaves sentence unfinished.)
- Spencer:** (Mimics) I know, you've left a letter with your sister! Nothing could happen to such a careful woman as you are. You ought to live to ninety, *with luck*. Well goodnight, Hannah; *sleep tight*.
- (Hannah sniffs disdainfully. SFX. Hannah's footsteps retreating.)
- Spencer:** (Says softly to self) Nothing will happen to you Hannah, yet, until they discover that you've been poisoning me! Then they will dig up Maria, and discover traces of arsenic!

They'll put two and two together, and make five! That will cook your goose my girl! I'll just take a little arsenic powder; not enough to do me any real harm. I'll ask her to make me some beef tea, yes, that's where I'll put the powder. Then I'll go and see Dr Roberts, and ask him for something for an upset stomach. After a few days, I'll go again and say I'm not getting better; drop hints about my food tasting funny. Just vague suspicions I'll say, but Hannah's been acting strangely. I'll save some liquid from the bottom of the cup, and get him to analyse it. I'll say it's ridiculous, but just to be on the safe side! Oh, ho, ho - you can be as careful as you like Hannah, but you're being careful about the wrong person!  
**(Laughs softly to self.)**

**(SFX. Spencer's retreating footsteps. SFX. Ticking of clock; birdsong.)**

## Scene 6 – Next day

- Hannah:** **(Surprised)** It's not like you to leave dinner on the plate.
- Spencer:** Not feeling quite right; probably caught a chill at the funeral. I should be feeling alright by tomorrow.
- Hannah:** Do you want me to do you some toast?
- Spencer:** No, no. Thank you Hannah; there's nothing I need right now. – But maybe I could drink a little beef tea.
- Hannah:** I'm not sure we have any, but I'll look.
- (SFX. Hannah's footsteps receding.)**
- Spencer:** **(To self.)** Yes, you look Hannah. It will be there. It will be there from when my dear wife needed some.
- (SFX. Hannah's footsteps returning.)**
- Hannah:** It was in the cupboard. It must have been from when your wife - **(sentence unfinished.)**
- Spencer:** Yes, yes, that will be just the ticket, thank you Hannah.
- Hannah:** Well, I'll leave you; if there's anything else -
- (SFX. Hannah's footsteps retreating. Door clicks shut)**
- Spencer:** **(to self)** No nothing else, just leave me to play. A few grains of arsenic into this cup --- softly, softly, catchee monkey Hannah! **(Makes noise like he is drinking.)** Hmm, a sweet metallic taste. Not too bad. Maria never noticed it. No, there's nothing else I need Hannah, except to see you dangling at the end of a rope!
- (SFX. Ticking/chiming. Birdsong.)**

## Scene 7 – Following day

**(SFX. Tinkling of spoon.)**

**Spencer:** Breakfast looks appetizing Hannah, but I'm sorry, I just can't eat it. If you'll bring me another of those cups of beef tea, I'll try to get it down. I think I'll go and see Dr Roberts this afternoon; perhaps I need a bit of a tonic

**Hannah:** You don't think it's her, do you?

**Spencer:** Her?

**Hannah:** Your wife

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**Spencer:** My wife's dead!

**Hannah:** Sometimes, I get this queer feeling that she's still here. I mean you can't just be here one minute, and then gone the next. You have to leave something behind, don't you? She might be thinking things, mightn't she? I've opened the window in her bedroom; air the room; perhaps her soul will fly out in the night.

**Spencer:** That sort of talk is no good for my nerves or yours! Maria's dead, and she can flap around all she damn well wishes! She has no reason to think ill of me.

**Hannah:** I'm not too sure about that, not think ill! When people die, they can look down and know all.

**Spencer:** Only God knows all, and I don't think either of us have any plans to meet him yet.

**Hannah:** It's ghosts I'm talking about; I believe in ghosts; hauntings and such!

**Spencer:** We'll have no more of that sort of talk! I have a chill that's all. Dr Roberts will fix me, and Maria can go to - to - can - rest in peace.

**Hannah:** As I say, I'm not too sure about that.

**(SFX. Hannah's footsteps. Door clicking shut.)**

**Spencer:** **(Softly)** Damn your eyes, Hannah. Now - a little arsenic powder into the cup, steady.

**(SFX. Rustle of paper as if from wrap of arsenic.)**

**Spencer:** Drink **(drinking sound)** that's it. Now, hide the cup with the dregs in the bureau. The evidence is mounting against you Hannah, and your fingerprints are all over the cups!

**(SFX. Chiming/ticking. Birdsong.)**

**Scene 8 – Next day**

**Hannah:** He said what?

**Spencer:** A slight digestive derangement.

**Hannah:** Like her, just like her!

**Spencer:** Not like her! I don't have gastro enteritis. I have a tonic. I shall be right as ninepence, leave me now. Leave me now.

**Hannah:** You don't want any food?

**Spencer:** No **(Pause)** yes, just some more of that beef tea; it might help me get up a bit of strength.

**Hannah:** Yes, you need to get your strength up. I'll put the kettle on. **(Mutters softly to herself)** Just like her! Perhaps it is the drains after all. Prince Albert – they say he died of the drains.

**(SFX. Hannah's footsteps retreating; clicking of door.)**

**Spencer:** **(To self)** And when you've brought me the cup, I'll put some more arsenic powder in, and then I'll put the cup with the dregs in the bureau. I'll get Dr Roberts to take the liquid away with him when he comes next, or perhaps the next time – it might need a bit of time to show up.

**(SFX. Ticking/chiming. Birdsong.)**

## **Scene 9 – Following Day**

**Hannah:** **(Calls as if on doorstep)** Thank you Doctor Roberts. Yes, I'll keep giving him the beef tea; it seems to be the only thing he asks for. Yes, the salts will be good for him. You don't think – **(to self)** oh he's gone. I'll bet it's something bad in the drains. Perhaps he didn't poison her? I could swear on my life that he poisoned her. That's the puzzle!

**(SFX. Creaking of floorboards. Footsteps.)**

**Hannah:** **(Taken by surprise)** What are you doing downstairs! Creeping around, out of bed! What are you doing with that cup? You don't want those old dregs. Here give it me! I'll make you a fresh **(interrupted.)**

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**Spencer:** **(Interrupts)** No! – No, I want to finish it. I want to sit out of bed a bit, down here and finish it.

**Hannah:** Very well. Shall I fetch a blanket?

**Spencer:** **(Sarcastic)** Your concern is touching, but I'm alright.

**Hannah:** Well, you don't look alright! You should try and eat. You don't want to fade away. What would I do for a job then? **(Cheerily)** How about a bit of nice tripe for your tea? Or my spotted dick and custard –

**Spencer:** **(Shouts)** Oh just leave me!

**Hannah:** **(Shouts)** Well, you don't need to shout!

**(SFX. Slam of door. SFX. Ticking. Hooting of owl – ocarina. Howling wind - vocalize while blowing through straw into hollow tin. Rain – rain stick.)**

## Scene 10 – That Night

**Spencer:** **(Talking to self. Determined)** Time to act; time to act! I'll get Hannah to call Doctor Roberts out; say I'm feeling worse. In truth I don't feel good. I'll show him the cups I've stored in the bureau with the dregs, and ask him to send them to the lab. Ask him to test my water too, there must be traces of arsenic by now. Ha - Hannah can't get out of the web I'm spinning! Fifty letters at her sister's won't save her from the doom I'm preparing for her! I'll ring for her. It's time; my nerves can't stand it any longer!

**(SFX. Bell is rung and rung. SFX. Footsteps.)**

**Hannah:** What do you want at this time of night?

**Spencer:** **(Gasping)** You took your time. I'm very ill. Run for the doctor. Quick!

**Hannah:** What now! Not likely! I'll get my death of cold – listen to the weather! It's blowing a storm!

**(SFX. Storm. Marbles in a tin, shake and roll.)**

**Spencer:** **(In a broken voice)** I'm dying Hannah. Go – for – the – doctor!

**Hannah:** **(Roughly)** Dying? Not you! You'll be better in the morning.

**Spencer:** Go – unless you want to be accused of murdering me!

**Hannah:** And what about you murdering me! Sending me out like a dog into the black night! **(Sighs and grumbles)** Alright I'll go; you do look bad. I'll get my coat. Ain't any use taking my umbrella; it'll blow its insides out as soon as I step out the door!

**(SFX. Hannah's retreating footsteps. Slamming of door.)**

**Spencer:** **(To self)** Now, now; get out of bed; steady Spencer. The last touch of artistry to deal with her. I'll put some arsenic into my tonic - and place the bottle in her room. I'll tell Roberts I think she's tampering with it. He'll take it away. Then the police – what a scene she'll make, but it will be in vain. My nerves; I'm shaking; I need a cigarette. No, I can't have a cigarette. I'm ill, aren't I? I'm very ill. **(Breathless)** Going to her room along the corridor has left me breathless. I'm getting back into bed. Sleep; sleep.

**(SFX. Clock ticking. Owl hooting. Thunder – marbles in round tin – shake and roll.)**

## Scene 11 – Later that night

**Spencer:** **(Alarmed to self)** What time is it! I've been asleep. Where is the woman? It's nigh on midnight! Calm down Spencer; they'll be here soon, here soon – and I'll tell Roberts all about how Hannah's been giving me beef tea that's making me weak, and about the tonic in her room. I mustn't forget the tonic. My nerves are shot to pieces – I need a cigarette. Where are they? The doctor must be out; she's waiting for him. Maria will have to be dug up of course. I don't like that. Let the dead sleep! She won't want to be disturbed. She's quiet for once in her life! What am I talking about, she's dead! Maria never liked being disturbed **(imitates Maria)** What's the money for this time Spencer? What's it for this time?

**(SFX. Muffled sounds.)**

**Spencer:** **(To self)** That's them! **(Sigh of relief)**. It will all be over soon; over soon. The hangman's noose for you Hannah **(laughs nervously)**.

**(SFX. Rustling, creaking sounds.)**

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**Spencer:** **(To self)** No key in the lock? I didn't hear the key? **(Calls)** Who's there? Who's there? Footsteps in the house! **(Calls)** Who is it?

**(Ghostly Voices whispering (whispers overlapping each other) “You've failed Spencer, and you must pay the penalty. you must pay the penalty. the penalty. the penalty. the penalty!”)**

**Spencer:** Who's there! Maria? Is it you Maria? **(Shouts)** Leave me alone, leave me alone! **(Trying to calm himself)** Maria's dead; Maria's dead! I don't believe in ghosts. What was that click? Watch the door knob! Is it moving? Is it turning? I can't see it's so dark! All your money Maria; if you hadn't kept your purse strings so tight, you wouldn't have driven me, driven me to – **(breaks off)**.

**(Ghostly Voices whispering : “Spencer, Spencer, you've gambled with death and lost; you've gambled with death and lost; lost; death; death; death.”)**

**Spencer:** **(To self. Thoroughly alarmed)** Sounds coming from Maria's room across the landing!

**(SFX. Rustling, shuffling, blowing, scratching, ghostly sounds. Ghostly Voices In unison : “Death!” SFX. A terrific crash. Optional: an actor can appear as ghostly apparition in white gauzy material, for benefit of studio audience if wished.)**

**Spencer:** **(Wails)** It's her, it's her! Run! I need to get out of the house!

**(SFX. As if Spencer's footsteps, stumbling along corridor, down downstairs of front door, big slam as it shuts behind him. SFX. Time passing. Hooting of owls, storm overhead, rustling.)**

## Scene 12 – Outside in garden

**Spencer:** **(Heavy rapid breathing)** Dark, so dark in the garden! What's that in the bushes? Shapes, shapes – I don't care, I'm cold, so cold! I've got to get back inside! I'll perish of cold out here. I'll stay downstairs till they come, that's what I'll do. Stay away from Maria's room!

**(SFX. Door handle being rattled and rattled.)**

**Spencer:** **(Breathing heavily and alarmed)** The door's slammed shut!

**(SFX. As if making way through garden, brushing past bushes, Spencer's footsteps on path – storm ongoing. SFX. Doorknob being rattled and rattled. Door thumped with diminishing strength.)**

**Spencer:** **(Breathing heavily. Exhausted.)** The back door's locked too. The back door's locked! No windows open; the porch, I'll lie in the cold porch and wait **(pause)** wait. **(Chattering with cold)** It's cold, cold as the tomb, and I'm as cold as marble.

**(SFX. Ticking, time passing. Birdsong.)**

### Scene 13 – Next morning

**Hannah:** **(Brusquely, anxiously)** You must have taken leave of your senses! I thought you were dead! Lying in the porch like a drowned pigeon! I had to wake the neighbours up to help carry you inside. A proper palaver! **(Mutters)** – You're burning up. I shouldn't be surprised if you've given yourself pneumonia!

**Spencer:** **(Weakly)** Doctor, doctor –

**Hannah:** Out on another bad case. I waited till I was tired of waiting, and then came back. Good thing for you I did! He'll be round first thing. In fact, he ought to be here now. I'd better tidy up a bit.

**(SFX. As if bustling around, pumping up cushions, tidying.)**

**Hannah:** Nice thing I did yesterday, I left the mistress's bedroom window ajar in all that storm. When I opened the door this morning, that beautiful Waterford vase of hers had blown off the table, smashed to smithereens! Did you hear it while I was out? I bet it gave you a jolt!

**(Spencer groans)**

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**Hannah:** Ain't no use crying over spilt milk. I've cleared it all away now. You can buy another one if you've a mind to. **(Grumbling)** Another thing, you and your cups! I wondered where they'd all got to. I found a good half a dozen in your bureau, all with odds and drips in 'em; proper stained. **(Kinder)** I've put them to soak in some soda bicarb. **(Cheerily)** They'll come up bright as buttons. And your tonic, in my room of all places. You'd better have some before the doctor gets here. Oh –

**(SFX. A crash as if of tonic bottle.)**

**Hannah:** **(Peeved)** Oh, now look what you've done! What did you do that for? All over the floor –

**(SFX. Knocking at door.)**

**Hannah:** That'll be the Doctor. I'll let him in.

**(SFX. Hannah's retreating footsteps. Creaking of door opening in background. Short murmured conversation in background.)**

**Spencer:** **(Rambling to self)** A puzzle, life; I'm ill, my head hurts; the cold porch – a fever; my chest hurts. Puzzle, all bits and pieces – the Waterford vase in bits and pieces. I have to tell the doctor about Hannah!

**(SFX. Footsteps of Hannah and Bateman's entering.)**

**Mrs. Bateman:** **(Concerned)** Hello Spencer, it's us. Yes, thank goodness Hannah came back and found you, when she did.

**Spencer:** (**Protests weakly**) That's not... where did I put the packet of puzzle? The Waterford – Maria – in bits and pieces all over the place.

**Mr Bateman:** (**Worriedly sotto voce**) He's rambling.

**Voice of Maria:** (**Offstage. Irritated**) Spencer!

**Spencer:** It's you! (**Responding to voice of Maria, dead wife**)

**Mr Bateman:** Yes, it's us old chap. Just dropped by to see how you are this morning.

**Mrs. Bateman:** Doctor Roberts won't be long. Don't speak Spencer – save your strength.

**Voice of Maria:** (**Irritated**) Spencer!

**Spencer:** (**As if to Maria**) I knew it was you! I knew it was you!

**Hannah:** Yes, your friends are here. The doctor won't be long.  
**(SFX. Knocking at door.)**

**Hannah:** That'll be him now.  
**(SFX. Footsteps. Subdued short conversation in background.)**

**Spencer:** (**Rambling as if to Maria**) Are you here?

**Voice of Maria:** (**Angry**) Spencer!

**Spencer:** Yes?

**Hannah:** Yes, here's Doctor Roberts. Here we all are.

**Spencer:** Is Maria with you?

**Hannah:** (**Shocked**) He thinks she's still alive Doctor! (**Only Spencer can hear Maria.**)

**Spencer:** (**Dying, puzzled**) You're alive! Are you alive Maria? Why are you alive?

**Voice of Maria:** (**A long laugh, then loud whisper ending in a long dying sigh**) I'm as alive as you are Spencer.  
**(Spencer at end of Maria's sigh, he carries on into a loud death rattling sigh – then stops. SFX. Time passing: bell tolling.)**

## **Scene 14 – Guests are departing after funeral tea**

**(Mrs Bateman places a few flowers on the armchair next to Maria's things. Mr Bateman places Spencer's black hat on the armchair next to Maria's things.)**

**Rev Leening:** The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Too soon alas; only weeks after his dear wife. But the memories – the happy memories will remain, and bring you joy and comfort in your hours of need. The Lord be with you. I will come and see you again Hannah. It's so kind of your old mistress to add the codicil to her will that if anything happened to Spencer within a year, you would inherit. You will be at church on Sunday as usual no doubt?

**Hannah:** No doubt.

**Rev:** I'll see myself out **(\*If doubling pass behind Spencer to double as Mr Bateman.)**

**(SFX. Footsteps of Rev retreating. Door clicks shut.)**

**Mrs Bateman:** **(Sotto voce to Mr Bateman)** We'd better be off.

**Mr Bateman:** We'd better be off

**Mrs Bateman:** If we can do anything Hannah, you know we're only next door.

**Mr Bateman:** You've been with them for a while, a dreadful shock, you'll need –

**Mrs Bateman:** Time.

**Mr Bateman:** Time.

**Hannah:** Time.

**Mrs Bateman:** We'll close the door after ourselves.

**Hannah:** No need for that, Milly will show you out, won't you Milly?

**(All freeze for few seconds; Hannah looking jauntily to side as if calling Milly; the Bateman's staring at Hannah. Cast line up and bow twice to audience. Acknowledge Director, SFX and other crew by indicating. Curtain.)**