

NOTE: The following is a transcription of an excerpt performance of *The Play That Goes Wrong* for the 2015 Royal Variety Performance. Watch the performance at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DOWO4gq-whg>. No copyright infringement intended. *The Play That Goes Wrong* is written and conceived by Henry Lewis, Jonathan Sayer, and Henry Shields.

ROYAL VARIETY PERFORMANCE EXCERPT

The setting is the private rooms of Charles Haversham, a young, wealthy man of the period. There is a carpeted lounge area. There is one door SR. A large heraldic shield hangs above the door. There is a large window in the center of the stage with red velvet curtains closed over it. A chaise lounge stands downstage center, a small table stage right with a telephone and a vase on it. There is a fireplace SL with a portrait of a dog hanging above it.

In the dark, the stage manager (ANNIE) is on a step ladder attempting to fix the portrait above the fireplace. CHRIS enters around the back of the flats in the darkness.

CHRIS: Leave it. Just leave it.

ANNIE: We need it...

CHRIS: We haven't got time.

ANNIE hurries off behind the flat, taking the step ladder with her. Spotlight comes up and cuts off CHRIS's head.

CHRIS: Good evening, ladies...

He steps into it.

... and gentlemen. Allow me to introduce myself. I am Chris Bean, director of the Cornley Polytechnic Drama Society, and I am delighted to be presenting to you this evening an extract from *The Murder at Haversham Manor*, my directorial debut.

(CHRIS:)

We are thrilled to be presenting this piece because, as you can see, we have managed to secure a much larger budget than usual. So, we will certainly be able to outshine our rather underfunded 2014 production of Roald Dahl's classic, *James and the Peach*, or last Christmas's *The Lion and the Wardrobe*, or indeed our summer musical *Cat*.

With finality:

Anyway, on to the main event. So without any further ado, ladies and gentlemen, please put your hands together—

The audience begins to applaud.

Not yet... For *The Murder at Haversham Manor!*

CHRIS exits into the wings and the stage lights fade to black.

JONATHAN (playing Charles Haversham) enters through the darkness. He trips and falls over. The lights suddenly come up on JONATHAN on the floor. He freezes. The lights go out again as he takes up his position, dead, on the chaise lounge, arm outstretched on to the floor. The lights come up again just before he's fully in position.

SANDRA (playing Florence Colley Moore), ROBERT (playing Thomas Colley Moore), and DENNIS (playing Perkins the Butler) enter.

SANDRA: Charles!

ROBERT: Florence, I'm sorry you have to see him like this.

SANDRA: My fiancé! Are you sure he's dead, Thomas?

DENNIS: I'll take his pulse.

He takes JONATHAN's pulse on the side of his face.

ROBERT: Charles gone, what a horror.

DENNIS: There's no question! He's passed away!

ROBERT: I'm dumbfounded. He was as right as rain an hour ago.

He crosses in front of the chaise lounge, treading on JONATHAN's outstretched hand.

DENNIS: But who on Earth would want to murder him? He was so kind, so generous... a true... *(Reads the word from his hand and mispronounces it.)* philanthropist.

SANDRA: We must telephone the police, Perkins.

ROBERT: Inspector Carter is already on his way. Although, I imagine it must be difficult to get here in this snowstorm.

He opens the curtains to reveal falling paper snowflakes. Closes the curtains again.

MAX (playing Cecil Haversham) enters.

MAX: Where is he? My brother, dead? It can't be. He always tried to hide it, but his depression must have finally overcome him. I believe it was suicide.

PERKINS: It's true. His smile was often merely *(Reads word from his hand and mispronounces it.)* a façade. But Mr. Haversham, do you think there might have been someone with the means and motivation to kill Charles?

MAX: Nonsense! That's nonsense! It was suicide!

ROBERT: There's no need to squabble. We are sure to get to the bottom of this now that the inspector has arrived.

He opens the door to reveal CHRIS being undressed. ROBERT closes the door and tries again.

We are sure to get to the bottom of this now that the inspector has arrived.

He opens the door. CHRIS (playing Inspector Carter) enters covered in “snow”.

CHRIS: What a terrible snowstorm. Good evening, I am Inspector Carter.

To JONATHAN:
This must be Charles Haversham.

To DENNIS:
Take the body upstairs so I can examine it.

DENNIS: Yes, Inspector.

Over the next few lines DENNIS brings in a stretcher, ROBERT and DENNIS lay the stretcher on the floor in front of the chaise lounge and they then try to lift JONATHAN but can't. They roll him off the chaise lounge on to the floor.

MAX: Are there any ideas as to the cause of death, Inspector?

CHRIS: Could be a number of things. Strangulation, suffocation, poison. Before fully examining the body I wouldn't like to say.

SANDRA: How could someone do it?

CHRIS: Try not to think about it, Miss Colleymoore. Once I've finished upstairs I'll speak to everyone individually and then you can get some space to calm your nerves.

ROBERT and DENNIS lift the stretcher up, the canvas tears off the stretcher and ROBERT and DENNIS are left holding just the poles. They carry just the poles off through the door.

SANDRA: Thank you, Inspector, this is all more than I can bear.

CHRIS: I shall return presently, as soon as I've finished examining the body.

He exits, shutting the door behind him. JONATHAN realizes that he is meant to have been carried off and slowly starts to get up trying not to be seen and exits towards the door, dragging the stretcher canvas with him. SANDRA and MAX stare at JONATHAN as he slowly leaves through the door. He reaches for the door knob, but the shield falls down, hitting him in the face. He tears it off the wall and shuts the door.

MAX: Thank God they've gone!

SANDRA: Oh, Cecil. I can't bear this. I can't take it a moment longer! If they find out about our affair, we'll be suspects.

ROBERT bursts in followed by CHRIS. The door hits SANDRA sharply on the head and she collapses, unconscious. All register that SANDRA is on the floor.

MAX: What's the matter, Florence? Calm down, stop shouting!

SANDRA remains unconscious.

ROBERT: She's having one of her episodes. Snap out of it, you're hysterical.

SANDRA remains unconscious.

CHRIS: Miss Colleymoore, where are you going?

SANDRA remains unconscious.

ROBERT: Come back here this instant!

SANDRA remains unconscious.

She's run off. I'll fetch her back. You stay here Cecil, I daresay the Inspector has some questions for you; you were Charles' brother after all.

He exits.

MAX: Well, do you have any questions for me Inspector?

CHRIS: Yes. You and your brother, did you get along well?

MAX: Up and down. Since father died there was rather more strain on our relationship. It was no secret our father cared more for Charles than myself.

CHRIS: I see. This is your father in the portrait, is it not?

It's the painting of a dog.

MAX: It is.

CHRIS: He looks the spit of Charles, doesn't he?

MAX: He did ever since he was quite young.

CHRIS: You were the junior by four years?

MAX: Almost four, yes...

ROBERT, JONATHAN, and ANNIE peer through the curtain to see if SANDRA is alright.

MAX: And didn't I know it, Charles patronized me and embarrassed me throughout our entire childhood. He always thought he knew best, and Father always took his side. If he ever didn't get his way, he was unbearable.

Now, ANNIE, ROBERT, and JONATHAN all reach through the window and start to lift SANDRA out under the curtains.

CHRIS: He sounds far from the ideal brother. In fact it sounds like you hated one another.

MAX: I won't lie, Inspector, Charles and I never truly saw eye to eye, but if you're suggesting I had something to do with his murder, you're mistaken.

CHRIS: I see. It's a dark night, Cecil.

He pulls the curtains open, revealing ROBERT, ANNIE, TREVOR, and JONATHAN. They all freeze and try not to be seen. SANDRA is held unconscious, in an awkward position.

MAX: Inspector?

CHRIS: You can barely even make out the trees.

MAX: What are you saying, Inspector?

CHRIS: I'm saying, Cecil, that tonight would be the perfect night for you to murder your brother.

CHRIS and MAX turn back downstage. ROBERT, ANNIE, JONATHAN, and TREVOR continue to remove SANDRA.

MAX: Inspector, please, me and my brother had our differences, but deep down we cared for one another...

CHRIS: *Offhand:*
And yet you had an affair with his fiancée?

ROBERT, ANNIE, JONATHAN, and TREVOR drop SANDRA and start again.

MAX: What on Earth gave you that idea?

CHRIS: The letter I found in Charles' pocket from Miss Colleymoore to yourself.

MAX: *Shaken.*
You know about that?

CHRIS: As, it seems, did Charles.

ROBERT, ANNIE, TREVOR, and JONATHAN have managed to get SANDRA out of the window. ANNIE pulls the curtains shut.

MAX: Well... Bravo, Inspector!

The barometer, curtains, and portrait fall. MAX and CHRIS begin picking them up.

Well... Bravo, Inspector! You've found out about Florence and I, but it proves nothing. We didn't have a thing to do with Charles's murder. But do you really think that we killed him?

MAX and CHRIS meet in the window.

CHRIS: Perhaps, but at least for now we are one step closer to solving the murder at Haversham Manor!

The flats fall around them, revealing members of the company behind them.

Bows.

END OF EXCERPT