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Eat Your Words

*Written by
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EAT YOUR WORDS

By

Marylou Ambrose & Tony Schwartz

CHARACTERS:

Eleanor Hightower-Gibbs: A prominent member of the community. Bossy, self-important, a bit intimidating, but also a bit ditsy. Late middle-aged.

Phoebe Fairchild: Childhood friend of Eleanor. Sensible, unassuming, keeps Eleanor in line. Late middle-aged.

Darcy Roberts: An American who's lived in the village for about a year. In charge of the archaeological dig outside of town. Outspoken, confident. Late 20s to mid-30s.

Miles Cockburn: Works in the village bookstore. An incurable romantic, slightly nerdy. Mid-30s to early 40s.

Inspector Richard Blackwell: Local boy, well-spoken, liked and trusted by the community. Widower for many years. Late middle-aged.

Mr. Briggs: The plumber. A big guy, looks scary. Any age.

SETTING:

The entire play takes place in the parlor of Eleanor's home, located in the rural English village of Lower Upton.

ACT 1

Scene 1

The setting is the parlor in an English country house, owned by Eleanor Hightower-Gibbs. The room is furnished in a formal, old-fashioned manner, with a fireplace, Victorian sofa, straight-backed and wing chairs, a coffee table with tea service, a desk, a bookcase, a small table, etc. There are two doors: One leads outside and the other leads to the bedrooms and the rest of the house.

When the curtain rises, Darcy and Miles are seated on the couch, Eleanor is in the wing chair, and Phoebe is sitting in a straight-back chair. This is the weekly meeting of an amateur writing group. They all hold manuscripts in their hands, except for Eleanor. Miles is reading while the others listen attentively.

MILES

(reading the last few lines of what is obviously a love poem)

...my love is like a red, red rose,
blooming in the garden of my heart.
And my hope is a thing with feathers,
rising like a Phoenix from the ashes
of my empty soul.

He gazes adoringly at Darcy, sitting next to him on the couch. She moves further away. The others sit in stunned silence at first.

ELEANOR

Oh, how lovely! However, it does have a familiar ring to it

PHOEBE

I'll say.
(smiling, ever the diplomat)
Miles, I agree that was lovely.
However, I believe Robert Burns,
Emily Dickinson and William
Shakespeare may have said it first.

DARCY

You think?

MILES

I'm not sure I understand.

DARCY

You took whole lines right out of their poems.

MILES

(caught in the act.)

I may have been influenced by some of the literary greats.

DARCY

You plagiarized!

PHOEBE

In his defense, he does work in a bookstore. So he could have been inadvertently influenced without even realizing it.

ELEANOR

(suddenly getting it.)

My word, this is a serious violation of Rule #2! Rule #2 clearly states: "All work must be original!"

PHOEBE

Rules? What rules?

ELEANOR

I'm glad you asked!

Eleanor produces a framed list of rules, which had been leaning against her chair. There's already a nail on the wall, and she proudly hangs the rules for display.

ELEANOR (cont'd)

Ta da! I took the liberty of having these mounted and framed.

A look of disbelief on the faces of the others.

PHOEBE

When did we write rules?

ELEANOR

We ... didn't. I did!

PHOEBE

And why do you get to write the rules?

ELEANOR

My house ... my rules!

DARCY

I thought we discussed rotating the meetings to all our houses.

ELEANOR

Yes, but I think we all agree that this particular environment is most conducive to the creative process. And, as you can see, it's spelled out right there. Rule #1: "All meetings shall be held in the home of Eleanor Hightower-Gibbs."

Major eye rolling around the room.

ELEANOR (cont'd)

Now, getting back to Rule #2: "All works must be original."

DARCY

Agreed! And while we're at it ...
(glaring at Miles)
can we add a rule stating we will not write about each other?

MILES

No need.
(rising)
I think the proper thing for me to do is simply resign from the group immediately. If you'll excuse me, I'll bid my farewell.

DARCY

(rising)
I'll get the door!

ELEANOR

(hurrying back to her chair)
Nonsense! We'll have none of that. We are all entitled to make a mistake.

PHOEBE

(to herself)
Perhaps that should be added to your rules.

ELEANOR

Now please, please take your seats. Have more tea.
(picking up a dish with cookies.)
Sweets for the sweet?

PHOEBE

(to herself)

I believe that's Shakespeare ... Rule #2.

ELEANOR

(quickly changing the subject)

Right. Yes, well ... moving on ... I would like to discuss this concept of the covered dish dinner.

PHOEBE

Obviously there's been some misconception about the meaning of a covered dish dinner.

MILES

When Darcy suggested the American custom of everyone bringing a covered dish, it sounded intriguing at first.

ELEANOR

And we're always interested in learning something new about what they do in the colonies.

Miles picks up his empty dish and turns it upside down.

MILES

But when we arrived with our covered dishes, there was no food to put in them! And now ... I'm quite hungry!

DARCY

(to herself)

And they wonder why they lost the war
....

DARCY (cont'd)

(picks up her dish) Look at my covered dish. There's food in it! You were all supposed to bring a dish to pass with food in it!

The others look at each other, bewildered.

PHOEBE

Ahhhhh ... now it makes sense!

ELEANOR

To the Americans, maybe. To me, it sounds like a lot of work.

MILES

(s bit timidly)

Perhaps we can all just take turns bringing cakes.

DARCY

Good idea, Miles.

Miles beams.

DARCY (cont'd)

All in favor of rotating dessert, say aye.

They all say aye and raise their hands, except for Eleanor. In a huff, she gets up and crosses out Rule #3 on the wall.

PHOEBE

Honestly, we talk more about food than writing. Perhaps we should get back to the business at hand: Reading our work?

DARCY

(sarcastically)

Or maybe we should combine the ideas of food and writing and call our group, "Eat Your Words." We can even have t-shirts made up!

ELEANOR

I do not wear t-shirts!

The rest look horrified at the idea.

DARCY

Geez ... I was just kidding. Can't you guys take a joke?

PHOEBE

Perhaps we do take ourselves a bit too seriously. Now, back to the writing ... Darcy, would you like to go next?

ELEANOR

I was just about to suggest that.

MILES

Rule #4: "No interrupting."

ELEANOR

That's only when one is reading.

MILES

Right!

Darcy stands and begins to pace, explaining what she's writing.

DARCY

Well, as you already know, I'm here from the states on an archaeological dig of some Roman ruins recently discovered in the countryside. We've unearthed something amazing and it's inspired me to go in a whole different direction. I've decided to write a fictional adventure based on historical facts.

MILES

Sort of like Indiana Jones?

DARCY

Yes, but with a female lead character!

PHOEBE

And just how do you get a modern day adventure out of Roman ruins?

DARCY

Good question! It just so happens, that while working at the site, we uncovered ... something unusual.

ELEANOR

Good heavens, unusual in what way?

DARCY

Right now, I'm not at liberty to say. It's in the hands of the local authorities. But I do have my own theories, and if I'm right, it could send shockwaves throughout the community of Lower Upton!

The others look uneasy.

DARCY (cont'd)

I mean to say ... well ... let's just say it gave me the idea for the plot of my book.

MILES

Ooooooh. I can't wait to hear what you've started with. Please begin.

Darcy clears her throat and prepares to read.

DARCY

Here we go. Working title ... "The Mystery of the Crumbling Ruins." Chapter 1, "It was a dark and stormy night."

The others gasp and look at the rules on the wall.

DARCY (cont'd)

Juuuuuuust kidding! Here we go ...

The others lean forward to listen, when there's a knock at the door. They're all startled.

PHOEBE

Now who could that be? Are you expecting someone, Eleanor?

ELEANOR

Actually, yes. I've been having a bit of a problem with the loo. Mr. Briggs, the plumber, is to stop by sometime today. Not the most convenient time

Eleanor gets up and answers the door. Enter Inspector Blackwell.

ELEANOR (cont'd)

Why Inspector Blackwell, this is an unexpected surprise.

DARCY

The cops are here? What rule did we break now?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

I hope I'm not intruding.

PHOEBE

My word, inspector, is something wrong?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

(amused)

No, no, no, not at all. I simply saw this advertisement for your writer's group, and I'm interested in joining. **(He holds up a flyer.)**

ELEANOR

How lovely! Did you spot that advertisement in the library?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

No, actually, it was hanging in the pub.

ELEANOR

(looking appalled)

And just how did our advertisement end up in the pub?

MILES

(looking guilty)

If you'll excuse me, I need to go to the loo. **(gets up and leaves)**

Darcy smirks. The two ladies look appalled.

ELEANOR

He was supposed to hang it in the library where a more suitable class of people would see it. Can people in the pub even read?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

(amused)

Yes, I assure you, I can read.

ELEANOR

(embarrassed)

Of course, I didn't mean you, Inspector. I'm sure you had your reasons for being there.

DARCY

Yeah ... he was thirsty.

ELEANOR

Inspector, won't you please be seated. **(She motions to a chair.)**

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Thank you.

He sits.

PHOEBE

(tentatively)

Inspector, Darcy was just telling us they've uncovered some mysterious something or other at the dig site, and now the police are involved.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

That's correct.

They others lean in to listen, but they get only silence from the inspector.

ELEANOR

Well...

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

I'm afraid I'm not at liberty to discuss the case.

They all sink back in their chairs disappointed. Except for Darcy.

DARCY

I hope I haven't spoken out of turn.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

It's okay. It's going to hit the papers in the morning anyway. Darcy and her team have uncovered human remains at the dig site. Most likely, several thousand years old.

DARCY

What about the rug?

ELEANOR

What rug?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Ah, yes ... the rug. Since you've mentioned it, the remains were discovered wrapped in a rug. However, we're keeping that under wraps, so to speak, for the time being.

Looking at Darcy, but addressing everyone.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL (cont'd)

So, for now, I must ask you all to exercise discretion

DARCY

So, what you're saying is, keep our mouths shut.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Precisely.

MILES

(returning from the loo)

Did I miss anything?

DARCY

You can catch up with the morning paper.

MILES

Speaking of paper, I'm afraid I may have used too much. The loo is plugged.

ELEANOR

Oh dear, it's not your fault, Miles. The loo has been giving me troubles. The system needs mending. Mr. Briggs, the plumber, is on his way. Until the problem is resolved, I'm afraid we'll have to use the outside facilities.

DARCY

You mean the outhouse?

ELEANOR

Yes, I believe that's what you call it across the pond.

DARCY

That's what we call it at the dig site, too.

There's a knock at the door.

ELEANOR

Perhaps that's Mr. Briggs now.

DARCY

The cavalry has arrived.

Eleanor opens the door. Enter Mr. Briggs. He's dressed in work clothes and carries a toolbox and a plunger. He's very animated when talking and uses the plunger for emphasis.

ELEANOR

Mr. Briggs! Just in the nick of time!

MR. BRIGGS

Got here as quick as I could, Ma'am. Very busy. Seems half of Lower Upton is plugged up!

ELEANOR

Yes ... well ... quite. If you'll follow me, I'll show you where the loo is.

Eleanor exits with Mr. Briggs.

PHOEBE

So, while Eleanor is busy with Mr. Briggs, why don't we tell the Inspector a bit about our works in progress? Miles, you go first.

MILES

Well, my interest is in poetry.
(looking longingly at Darcy)

And I am currently dabbling in writing a love sonnet.

DARCY

(looking at Miles)

And I am currently dabbling in writing a mystery where the writer of a love sonnet is brutally murdered.

PHOEBE

Now, now ...

DARCY

Okay, I'm actually writing an action thriller about a murder discovered at an archaeological dig.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

We haven't determined it to be murder. It's just a body at the moment.

DARCY

Of course, my story is fiction.

PHOEBE

And I'm writing a romance novel. Sort of a modern day Jane Eyre.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

And what is Eleanor writing?

The others look at each other.

DARCY

Not a damn thing, so far.

PHOEBE

Supposedly, her memoirs. But we've yet to hear anything.

DARCY

My guess is, she's yet to write anything.

Eleanor enters. The room gets very quiet.

ELEANOR

I'm back! Mr. Briggs is on the job, and we can now commence with the meeting! So, where were we?

PHOEBE

We were just telling the Inspector about each of our works. So Inspector, what exactly brings you to our little group?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Actually, I've begun work on a cozy mystery story. You know, a la Agatha Christie, with a whole slew of eccentric characters and the requisite bumbling, yet cunning inspector.

They all nod in approval. Miles gets excited.

MILES

You know, I've just had a thought! I recently received an advertisement about a national writer's competition.

DARCY

I love contests! What type of competition?

MILES

Well, groups of writers, like ourselves, gather in one place for 48 hours and collaborate on a short story. First prize is \$10,000!

They all perk up when they hear that.

MILES (cont'd)

I'm thinking, if we put our heads together, with all our varied interests, I believe we have an excellent chance of beating the competition!

They all get excited.

ELEANOR

It sounds like great fun!

DARCY

Sounds like a blast! I'm in!

PHOEBE

And when is the deadline?

MILES

All competitors must gather next Friday at midnight and be done by midnight, Sunday.

ELEANOR

And let's remember Rule #1: All meetings are held here at my house.

Mr. Briggs walks in shaking his head and holding the plunger.

DARCY

(sShaking her own head)

I sure hope Mr. Briggs fixes the loo before then.

Lights Out.

SCENE 2

The following Friday night, 11:30 p.m. Eleanor and Phoebe are sitting in the parlor, arranging the refreshments. Phoebe is folding napkins. As soon as she turns away, Eleanor refolds them. The third time, Phoebe catches her.

PHOEBE

What are you doing?

ELEANOR

(caught, but not apologetic)

A napkin is more than just a tool to wipe one's mouth. It is an integral addition to the overall beauty of the table setting. We are not Barbarians.

PHOEBE

(Takes one of Eleanor's refolded napkins, opens it up, crumples it into a ball, and throws it back on the table.)

Eleanor, take you integral piece of beauty and shove it up your

The door opens during the last line. Darcy enters with the Inspector. Eleanor storms off with the napkin to the kitchen.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

(chuckling)

At it again, you two?

(to Darcy)

It's amazing this friendship has survived since they were children. Especially since Eleanor always gets the upper hand.

PHOEBE

Not always, Inspector.

DARCY

Yes, but all this fuss over napkins?

PHOEBE

It's more than napkins. Once in a while, Eleanor needs to be put in her place. And I'd rather it be me, than someone else.

Eleanor walks back in from kitchen. She's the gracious hostess again.

ELEANOR

Why, Inspector, I didn't know you had arrived. And Darcy, too. Why don't we all sit down have some light refreshments before we dive into our work?

They all sit. Eleanor picks up the teapot and gets ready to pour for the Inspector. She stops

ELEANOR (cont'd)

Oh ... Where's Miles?

DARCY

Beats me. I could swear I saw him lurking behind a tree outside.

PHOEBE

Lurking? Lurking is a rather strong word.

DARCY

He wasn't out for a stroll. He was hiding behind a tree watching me.

ELEANOR

Well, why didn't you say something to the Inspector?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

She did. But when I looked, I didn't see anything.

ELEANOR

It's dark outside, it's late, and perhaps our nerves are a bit on edge. After all, we're getting ready to write a mystery story.

DARCY

Well, I'm telling you, Miles was there. And it's not the first time either.

Miles enters, looking rushed.

MILES

Sorry I'm late. I was detained.

DARCY

Detained? By what? A tree?

Miles looks embarrassed.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Miles, Darcy seems to think you've been stalking her.

DARCY

Well, no ... actually, I said "lurking." Stalking might be a bit strong.

ELEANOR

Stalking, lurking, what's the difference?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Be that as it may, what were you doing behind the tree outside?

MILES

(embarrassed)

Nature called.

They all look confused.

PHOEBE

I beg your pardon?

MILES

The door to the outhouse was stuck. The tree was my only option.

The two older ladies giggle. Darcy rolls her eyes. The Inspector chuckles

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Another one solved by Scotland Yard! I wish all my cases were this easy.

PHOEBE

There really was no need, Miles. You could have come in and used the loo.

ELEANOR

Funny you should mention that

PHOEBE

Oh no, don't tell me. Mr. Briggs didn't fix it?

ELEANOR

Oh he fixed it. And it was working fine ... until this afternoon.

There's a collective groan.

ELEANOR (cont'd)

However ...I've placed another call,
and Mr. Briggs is on his way.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

At midnight?

ELEANOR

He offers 24-hour plunging services!

DARCY

(looking at Miles)

Well, I'm still not satisfied. Miles,
this isn't over yet. **(to Inspector)**
By the way, Inspector, my dig site is
still shut down. We need to get back
to work. What progress have you made
regarding the remains discovered at
the site?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

We're still investigating, but we're
making progress.

DARCY

(getting angry)

Not good enough, Inspector. My crew
is now being paid to sit in their
hotel rooms and watch TV. We need to
resume our excavation.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

You don't understand how this works.
These things take time. There's
protocol to follow.

DARCY

And you don't understand. I have a
crew of archaeologists sitting on
their butts, complaining about not
being able to do their jobs. Not to
mention, my boss back in the states
is emailing me twice a day, expecting
me to solve the problem.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

(getting angry and defensive)

Now listen here, young lady, you
don't understand police procedure,
and you're in no position to be
making a list of demands!

DARCY

(getting right in his face)

Don't you "young lady" me!

ELEANOR

(jumps up and tries to defuse the situation.)

Now, now, this is not why we gathered here. This is something you two can take to the station. Right now, I think a nice cup of tea is called for, while we plan our approach to this writing project.

PHOEBE

(rising)

This is one of those rare moments when I actually agree with you, Eleanor. Please, let's all calm down and get back to the task at hand: writing a mystery in less than 48 hours.

MILES

There's enough drama here in this room. Perhaps our mystery is right here under our noses.

They all gasp and regard each other suspiciously.

MILES (cont'd)

Hey, come on, I was just kidding!

They all relax and then giggle, perhaps a bit too heartily.

DARCY

No, wait a minute. Actually, that's a pretty good idea. Fictional stories based on real events are hot sellers right now!

PHOEBE

So ...

DARCY

So ... we have a real event right here under our noses! It's a perfect plot!

ELEANOR

What on Earth are you talking about?

DARCY

The dig site! The body found at the dig site!

ELEANOR

But you're already writing a novel about that.

DARCY

Yes, but if we write a short story that I can turn into a full length novel later on, you all get credit as contributing authors!

MILES

Yes!

ELEANOR

Yes!

PHOEBE

No!

DARCY

What do you mean, no?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

What I'm sure she means -- and she's correct -- is that we can not discuss this case while it's still under investigation.

MILES

And why not? It's a super idea. It's not like we're interfering with the case. It's fiction.

PHOEBE

Somehow it doesn't seem right.

DARCY

Maybe not, if it was a more recent burial. But we don't know yet just when the body was placed there, although by the looks of it, it certainly wasn't recent.

PHOEBE

I think it's disgraceful. She's dead. We need to show some respect for this poor woman.

MILES

Who said it was woman's body?

PHOEBE

(backpedalling) Well, surely the Inspector must have mentioned it. Or perhaps Darcy. She saw it.

DARCY

All I saw was a skull protruding from a rug. I have no idea what gender the body is.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Well, I guess I must have mentioned it. But I shouldn't have. I obviously need to be more careful. Anyway, once we determine they are indeed Roman remains, no harm done.

DARCY

But ... why would Roman remains be wrapped up in an Oriental Rug?

A pregnant pause, while they all ponder this.

ELEANOR

Good heavens it's just like a page right out of Agatha Christie!

DARCY

Agatha Christie is Orient Express, not Oriental Rug.

ELEANOR

(pondering)

Ohhhhh ... right.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Darcy, I must insist that you ...

DARCY

Insist all you want, Inspector, but I'm not letting it go this time. I have a dig site to get opened again and a book to write, and you've held things up long enough.

MILES

Look, Inspector, you're making a mountain out of a molehill. Anyone writing a work of fiction could have come up with this plot.

(MORE)

MILES (cont'd)

So we make it in a different location. Maybe Egypt. Maybe we make the discovery a male instead of a female. Maybe ...

ELEANOR

Maybe a Persian rug!

MILES

Or maybe a flying carpet! Look, the point is, we're not doing anything wrong. If you want to be part of this writing group, Inspector, you need to lighten up a little.

DARCY

Yes, Inspector, you yourself want to write an Agatha Christie type novel. Being a policeman, you have tons of raw material and lots of cases to draw from. You just change some facts and locations and you've got it made. Stop worrying!

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Perhaps, but in this particular case ...

DARCY

Yes, getting back to this particular case ...

MILES

Have you gotten any closer to identifying just who this woman was at the dig site?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

No.

DARCY

Okay, you don't know who she is. How old is she?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

You mean, was she a young woman? An older woman? Roman? This century? Last year? Look, if I tell these facts ...

DARCY

... then we'll be sure of what we're NOT supposed to write.

MILES

Precisely!

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Touche. Well played. Except it's a moot point right now, until the coroner's report comes back. In the meantime, shall we start writing?

ELEANOR

Remember, we're not permitted to start writing until midnight. We do have some business to attend to first. While we still have a few minutes, shall we discuss sleeping arrangements?

PHOEBE

Sleep? We're not here to sleep. We're here to write.

ELEANOR

I guess we could write for a half hour or so, and then get a good night's rest and start again tomorrow right after breakfast!

MILES

If Mary Shelley had waited till after breakfast, Frankenstein's monster would still be on the operating table.

Darcy high fives Miles, and then realizes what she's done and withdraws. Miles looks proud.

PHOEBE

We'll manage without you, Eleanor. Go on up to bed.

ELEANOR

No, no, plenty of time to sleep when we're dead. Ahhhh ... I mean, done.

They all chuckle.

ELEANOR

Still, should someone need to rest, perhaps we should take a quick tour of the upstairs and I'll show you your rooms. Follow me!

They all begin to follow.

DARCY

I'll catch up. I need to go to the outhouse.

ELEANOR

(pointing to table near door)

I've left a torch on the table to use when going outside.

The rest follow Eleanor. But at the last minutes, Miles turns and doesn't follow the rest. He's staring at Darcy, who is trying the torch to see if it works. Her back is to him.

MILES

I'm really quite harmless, you know.

DARCY

(startled, she turns and faces Miles)

I thought you went with the others. What do you want?

MILES

I thought you might want me to ...

DARCY

(cutting him off)

I don't want you to do anything. Period! Why can't you get that through your thick skull.

MILES

(looking dejected)

I thought perhaps you wouldn't want to go out there alone.

DARCY

I'm not afraid of the dark. And I have this flashlight to use as a weapon, in case I have to defend myself.

MILES

Defend yourself from whom?

DARCY

(accusingly)

Anyone I run into, or anyone who follows me.

MILES

(not meekly)

What are you implying?

DARCY

(more aggressive)

I'm implying that you've been following me all week. Every time I turn around, you're lurking behind a bush! Why are you stalking me?

MILES

I'm trying to keep you safe.

DARCY

From what? The only thing I need to be saved from is you! I'm sick of the love poems and all you leering at me during our group meetings. Knock it off, or I'll make a formal complaint.

MILES

(looking torn)

Things aren't always as they seem. You've stumbled upon more than you realize at that dig site. All I can say right now is, it would be in your best interest to trust me.

DARCY

Trust you? Why?

MILES

If I were to to tell you

The others enter, chatting, so Miles is interrupted.

ELEANOR

Ah, Darcy, were you able to find the outside loo with the torch?

DARCY

(a bit startled)

Oh! I never got to go!

(looking at Miles)

I was detained.

Darcy exits. Miles goes to the window and watches her.

PHOEBE

Well, let's all find a comfortable seat and get ready to write when Darcy gets back!

MILES

(turning away from the window and speaking more to himself) I guess she's safe enough out there. Everyone else is in here.

They all turn and glare at Miles as the clock strikes 12.

Lights Out.

SCENE 3

A short time later. Everyone is sitting, ready to write, except Miles, who's not in the room. Everyone has a pad and pen or pencil, except Darcy, who has a laptop.

ELEANOR

As soon as Miles comes down, we can begin.

Miles enters from upstairs, with pad and pencil in hand.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

So, how do we proceed?

ELEANOR

Well, first of all ... ordinarily ... I should think ... in most cases ...

PHOEBE

You don't have a clue, do you?

ELEANOR

And why should I? This was Mile's idea. Miles, how do we proceed?

MILES

How do I know? I saw an ad. We signed up. Now what?

DARCY

Oh for God's sake, what we need first is an outline. Something to follow. Like a map.

They all perk up, pick up their pencils and pads and get ready to write. They look at Darcy, waiting for instructions.

DARCY (cont'd)

(rolling her eyes)

Why don't I do the actual writing since I have the computer.

ELEANOR

Agatha Christie didn't have a computer.

DARCY

She didn't rely on just a pad and pencil, either, she had a typewriter. And you have a computer, Eleanor. I saw it in your study.

ELEANOR

Oh, that. My nephew set that up for me. Insisted I needed it. I have no idea how to use it. Newfangled nonsense, if you ask me.

Darcy's phone rings.

DARCY

Excuse me.

She looks at the phone number.

DARCY (cont'd)

Sorry, I really need to take this.

She gets up and goes to a corner, seeking privacy. Everyone else eavesdrops.

DARCY (cont'd)

Hello? ... Yes, speaking ... Thank you for jumping on this, Dr. Stevens. I realize these things usually take a lot more time ... I see, and the results?... Really? Awesome! I knew it, but I needed proof ... Can you email me a copy of the results? ... Oh yes, I'm sure people at this end will be very interested in your findings. Thanks again, Doctor. I'll be awaiting your email. Goodbye.

She hangs up and looks at the group, excited.

ELEANOR

Well, you're obviously bursting at the seams to tell us something. Out with it!

DARCY

Okay, wait till you hear this! I didn't want to say anything until I had absolute proof, but ...

PHOEBE

Oh, for heaven's sake, spit it out!

DARCY

The body at the dig site ... I kept one femur bone..

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

(shocked and angry)

You did what?

DARCY

Now calm down, Inspector.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

No! This time you've gone too far. You've interfered with a police investigation and you stole evidence. I could have you arrested and thrown in the cells.

DARCY

Now hold on. At the time, I was sure it was ancient Roman remains, not something more recent. As far as I knew, I was simply doing my job. Then someone reported the discovery to the police, and the next thing I knew, you swooped in and took over.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

I was doing MY job.

DARCY

And I understand that now. But by then, I had already shipped the bone back to the states for analysis. I was just following protocol.

PHOEBE

(sarcasticly)

And did you find Julius Caesar?

DARCY

What? Oh, right, Romans. I get it, No, that's the big news! The bone only dates back approximately 30 years!

ELEANOR

So you're saying it's not ancient history you've uncovered ...

PHOEBE

... but a more recent burial.

ELEANOR

(relishing the idea, excited)

... or a more recent crime!

MILES

Or perhaps ... murder!

The Inspector and Phoebe exchange nervous glances.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

No one said anything about murder.

ELEANOR

(very excited)

Oooh ... murder!! Phoebe, it's just like an Agatha Christie play unfolding in my very own home!

PHOEBE

Let's not get over-dramatic, Eleanor.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Phoebe is right. And as for you, Darcy, I overheard something about test results being emailed to you.

DARCY

Yes!

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

That email and report is now police evidence. You'll need to give that over to me immediately!

DARCY

Of course. I planned to. But I must say, at least I have a report. That's more than you have. Your coroner has had the rest of those bones for over a week, and what has he come up with? Nothing!

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

You don't know that. We're very thorough here.

DARCY

Well, maybe when that email comes, I should just bypass the police and turn it over to your coroner, and then we can compare notes.

MILES

(watching Inspector for a reaction)

A splendid idea!

PHOEBE

Why? Let's just let the police do their job.

DARCY

It's a splendid idea because my team in the states is extracting DNA from that femur bone. And those results will be in the email. All the Inspector needs to do is compare that DNA with DNA from relatives who have reported someone missing approximately 30 years ago -- and we just may solve a murder!

There is a knock at the door, startling everyone.

ELEANOR

Who could that be at this hour?

MILES

I'll get it.

Miles opens the door. Mr. Briggs stands there with a smile, holding up his plunger as if it's a weapon. Miles backs off slightly.

MR. BRIGGS

Briggs, at your service, and ready to plunge right in!

ELEANOR

Ah, Mr. Briggs! With all the excitement, we forgot all about you!

MR. BRIGGS

Believe me, you would have remembered sooner or later.

DARCY

Damn it. I was fine till you said that. Now I have to go.

PHOEBE

So do I, and it's safer in numbers.
I'll go with you.

The two women grab the torch and rush out the door.

ELEANOR

(to Mr. Briggs)

I'll show you the way to the loo.

MR. BRIGGS

I've been there before, but you may
want to come along anyway.

ELEANOR

Why?

MR. BRIGGS

*(chuckling, not realizing his joke has a
double meaning)*

You may want to take down your
knickers.

ELEANOR

(shocked, almost speechless)

I beg your pardon?

MR. BRIGGS

Well, they were hanging up to dry in
there the last time. Slapped me right
in the face. If they're in there now,
you may want to take them down.

**All the men are chuckling. Eleanor is embarrassed and
annoyed that she's the brunt of a joke.**

MR. BRIGGS (cont'd)

Well, is it safe?

ELEANOR

(looking concerned)

I'll be right back!

**She rushes upstairs and Mr. Briggs follows her out,
chuckling to himself. Then other two men chuckle as well --
and then a long silence as they regard each other. Finally,
the Inspector breaks the silence.**

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL
(reaching into his pocket and producing a flask)

It's going to take more than tea to get through an all-nighter with this crew. But I've come prepared. Join me?

The Inspector pours whiskey from the flask into his tea cup.

MILES
Aaaaah ... don't mind if I do.

Miles holds his tea cup out, and the Inspector pours.

MILES (cont'd)
Thank you.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL
So, Miles, you're fairly new to Lower Upton, aren't you? What brought you to the area?

MILES
Well, born and raised in London, lived all my life there until recently. It was just me and Mother, until she died last year. And I decided I needed a change.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL
Sorry to hear about your mother. But that's quite a change, from hectic city life to out here in the countryside.

MILES
Well, I'm fond of the area. Mother and I went on holiday near here for years. She left me quite comfortable financially, and I decided to move on to a quieter life.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL
Well, working at a bookstore is about as quiet as you can get. But I should think it would get boring sometimes. I guess you have your poetry ...

MILES
Oh, I'm about more than just poetry. I also have a fascination with the history of Lower Upton.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Well, we've got plenty of that here.
What type of history?

MILES

Whodunits. Unsolved mysteries.
Missing persons. That sort of thing.

He's got the Inspector's attention.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

You don't say ...

MILES

Yes, I'm somewhat of an amateur sleuth. **(chuckling)** I've never actually cracked a case, but I'd like to some day. I go to the library and look up cold cases, go through old newspapers. There's some fascinating stories.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

You're full of surprises, aren't you? My first impression was that you joined the writer's group to compose poetry and seduce the lovely Darcy.

MILES

Yes, uh, you can see how well that's going. And you, Inspector, is there a lovely someone in your life, a Mrs. Inspector? And if so, doesn't she mind you being out all night with a group of strangers?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

There is no Mrs., I'm afraid.

MILES

No? Never married?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

I didn't say that.

MILES

Divorced?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

No...

MILES

Oh ... a widower. I'm sorry.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

It was over 30 years ago.

The Inspector immediately regrets saying this.

MILES

(pondering)

... 30 years?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

She went missing one night. Although we never did find her, we did find a shoe, at the edge of the cliff, overlooking the sea.

MILES

How tragic. I'm so sorry.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

We had a happy life. She didn't jump. We can only assume she got too close ... and slipped.

MILES

And nothing else was ever found?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

No, just the shoe. Next time you're in the library, look it up. It was in all the papers.

MILES

Hmmmm ... 30 years.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

More or less. You mentioned you've been enjoying your holidays here for a long time. You may be too young, but I'm surprised your mother didn't remember it.

Phoebe and Darcy return from the outhouse.

MILES

There you are. I was beginning to worry.

DARCY

(rolling her eyes)

I told you, I can take care of myself. Where's Eleanor?

MILES

Still upstairs with the plumber, I assume.

DARCY

And you're worried about me? You left her upstairs all alone with her knickers and that scary Mr. Briggs?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

I'm sure Mr. Briggs is harmless.

DARCY

Still, I'm going up to check on her.

MILES

I'll go with you.

Darcy glares at Miles and leaves. Miles follows. Phoebe and the Inspector are left alone. There is an uneasy silence for a few beats. They seem to be trying to get as far away from each other as possible.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

So, it's been a long time. How have you been?

PHOEBE

I've been well, thank you. And you?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

As well as can be expected, I guess. In light of recent events.

PHOEBE

The dig site.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Yes, the dig site.

Darcy reappears, returning for her phone, but she stays in the doorway and eavesdrops.

PHOEBE

A far cry from handing out parking tickets, isn't it?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Well, all good things must come to an end.

PHOEBE

Darcy has certainly made things more difficult, Richard.

There's a brief stare at each other. He moves close to her.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

It's been years since you've called me Richard.

Another brief stare, then Phoebe moves away and turns her back to the Inspector. He realizes he has said the wrong thing.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL (cont'd)

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to

PHOEBE

No, it was me. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have ...

PHOEBE (cont'd)

So what are you going to do?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

About what?

PHOEBE

About Darcy, of course.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

I haven't decided yet.

PHOEBE

Well, something has to be done. I thought we buried this years ago.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

We did. And now someone has unearthed it.

Darcy, horrified, lets out a gasp. Phoebe and the Inspector try to cover their tracks.

PHOEBE

Oh ... Darcy ... we were just working on a plot for the story.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Yes ... collaborating, so to speak.

DARCY

Really? I was just returning for my phone.

PHOEBE

(moves in close to her, and a bit threatening)

Expecting a call?

DARCY

As a matter of fact ...

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

(menacing, closing in as well)

From whom?

PHOEBE

(more menacing)

Yes, from whom?

They are interrupted by Eleanor and Miles returning from upstairs. Darcy breathes a sigh of relief.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

(changing his tone)

How are things going upstairs?

ELEANOR

My word, I have never seen a man plunge with such enthusiasm.

MILES

Yes, one needed to stand back to fully appreciate his work and avoid the splatter zone.

PHOEBE

In other words, it's now safe to use the loo?

ELEANOR

No, I'm afraid not. In spite of his plunging efforts, the blockage has held firm!

The others look a bit green around the gills.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

(to Eleanor)

Just what DID you flush down there?

MILES

Good question! You're the inspector. Why don't you go and inspect it?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Thank you, no. That's what Mr. Briggs is here for. And he seems to be doing a bang-up job!

There's a loud bang from upstairs. They all jump.

MR. BRIGGS

(yelling from upstairs)

No need to panic. I have everything under control.

Lights Out.

SCENE 4

A short time later. They're all seated in the living room, tossing out plot ideas. Darcy is writing on her laptop. The others are taking notes with pad and pencil.

DARCY

I still think female remains is a better idea. Why do we have to change it to male remains?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

I said before, it's too close to the actual case.

DARCY

I don't think even the great Sherlock Holmes could put two and two together on this one. You're making a mountain out of a mole hill.

ELEANOR

If we keep nitpicking, we're never going to get the first line written. I'd hate to think I sharpened my pencil for nothing.

PHOEBE

Oh, Eleanor, what would you know about writing the first line of anything?

ELEANOR

(indignant)

What are you implying?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Ladies, ladies, please ...

Darcy's phone rings.

DARCY

(to self)

Saved by the bell...

(takes out her phone and answers)

Hello ... why yes, Dr. Stevens.
Wow, that was fast work! ... Yes,
well, thank you for rushing this
through ... Yes, email would be fine.
The sooner the better. Right ...
right ... great. And thank you again.
Good bye, Doctor Stevens.

A concerned glance between the Inspector and Phoebe.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

We couldn't help but overhear. I
assume that's the call you've been
waiting for regarding the DNA testing
on the femur bone that you ...
borrowed?

DARCY

That's right! The report is finished
and he's emailing the results to me
as we speak. If I get chance, I'll
print you out a copy and get it to
you in a day or two.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Why a day or two? Why so long?

MILES

Obviously, because we'll be tied up
here until we're done writing. The
contest? Remember?

DARCY

(sarcastically)

Yes, the contest, remember,
Inspector?

PHOEBE

Eleanor has a computer and printer in her study. You could print it out there.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Great idea! Eleanor, if you would be so kind as to assist Darcy with your printer.

ELEANOR

(flustered)

Well, fine. If someone would be kind enough to show me the difference between the computer and the printer.

ALL

What?

PHOEBE

You have no idea how to use that equipment, do you?

ELEANOR

(indignant)

My nephew insisted on buying me those machines. I can't imagine why he thought I needed them. Pen and paper has always been sufficient. I've been meaning to take a computer course, but I've been so busy

DARCY

(to self)

Yes, writing your memoirs.

(to Eleanor)

If you wouldn't mind, I'll go in the study and print out the results.

ELEANOR

Go right ahead, dear. Are you sure you can manage? I would be of no help, I assure you.

MILES

Where is Mr. Briggs?

ELEANOR

He's about somewhere. Upstairs, outside getting tools. I'm not sure.

MILES

You know, I'll go with Darcy and see if I can help with the computer and printer.

DARCY

I can manage.

MILES

Two heads are better than one. After you.

Darcy grabs a manila folder and she and Miles exit.

ELEANOR

I better go make sure they can find the light switch. I'll be right back.

Eleanor exits. A pregnant pause.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

We rarely see each other for years, and suddenly we keep finding ourselves alone together.

PHOEBE

Is that so terrible?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

No, of course not. It's just that ...

PHOEBE

You don't have to say it. I know it's awkward.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

It's more than awkward. It's ...

PHOEBE

... unnerving.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

I thought we had put all this behind us.

PHOEBE

So did I. But it seems to have reared its ugly head again. So what do we do now?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

We need to see that report. Preferably before anyone else does.

PHOEBE

How? They're in there right now getting it.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

I don't know!

PHOEBE

(who has been moving restlessly around the room and has stopped at the desk)

Well, we need to do ... what's this?

She picks up a stack of envelopes.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

What do you have there?

PHOEBE

Bills. A stack of bills. All with "Past Due" on the envelopes.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

What kind of bills?

PHOEBE

You name it, electric, water, sewer, credit cards ... must be a dozen here.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

(goes over and looks)

And these are just the ones we see here. Who knows what else she's behind on?

PHOEBE

She lets on that she's well off and without a care, when in fact, she's obviously broke.

Eleanor returns unexpectedly and sees them holding the unpaid bills.

ELEANOR

(snapping)

Put those down!

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

We didn't mean to pry ...

PHOEBE

But now we're concerned.

ELEANOR

(Rushes over and grabs bills from Phoebe.) My finances are none of your business!

PHOEBE

You should have said something. We've been friends for years. I had no idea you were financially strapped.

Eleanor sits on couch, obviously distraught. Phoebe sits next to her.

ELEANOR (cont'd)

Yes, well, I put on good front, don't I? Truth is, my husband left me with money, properties, and a mountain of debt. By the time I paid everything, there wasn't much money left.

PHOEBE

You poor thing.

ELEANOR

I wasn't too worried. Developers offered me a tidy sum for the property outside of town. It would have left me financially secure for the rest of my life. Until

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

.... until the sale was halted indefinitely when Roman artifacts were discovered on the property.

ELEANOR

(bitterly)

And don't forget the bones.

PHOEBE

(glancing at the Inspector)

Yes, who can forget about the bones.

Miles enters from Eleanor's office. They notice his hands are empty.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

(looking nervously at Phoebe)

Well, where's the report?

MILES

We're having trouble with the Internet. Darcy is working on it now.

PHOEBE

(looking nervously at Inspector as she questions Miles)

So, you've not seen the report yet?

MILES

No, but it's just a matter of time.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

What if Darcy is downloading the report right now?

MILES

I suppose she could be. And if she is, I'm sure she'll share it with us.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

(fishing)

How can you be so sure?

MILES

She's given us no reason to think otherwise.

PHOEBE

I wish I could be as sure of that as you are.

MILES

Trust me, we'll see the report soon.
(chuckling, trying to lighten things up)
Unless of course, Darcy forgets her password. I always do.

ELEANOR

I can never remember my passwords either. I have them written down on a
....

They all stare at her. She backpedals.

ELEANOR (cont'd)

At least, that's what my nephew did for me. He wrote them down but I have no idea where they are or how to use them.

Darcy enters, carrying a manila folder, the same one she walked out with earlier.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Still no report?

DARCY

(clutches the folder tightly to her chest)

Afraid not. The Internet still isn't working. And their people aren't on call 24 hours like Mr. Briggs. I'll try them in the morning.

ELEANOR

(tiredly) We've been at this writing contest for hours.

DARCY

And haven't accomplished anything.

ELEANOR

Well, we've had a lot of unexpected interruptions. I suggest we all turn in, get a few hours' sleep, and start afresh after breakfast.

MILES

I agree. I'm turning in. Good night.

PHOEBE

But Mr. Briggs is about somewhere, still working on the loo.

MILES

So what? Just lock your doors. Good night.

Miles goes upstairs.

ELEANOR

I'm quite sure Mr. Briggs is harmless. Intimidating, but harmless. I'm going to bed, too. Darcy, don't lose that password. I'm sure we're all eager to read that report. Good night.

Eleanor exits and takes bills with her.

PHOEBE

Well, I guess we're all calling it a night.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Me, too.

DARCY

Not me. We haven't written a damn thing. I'm going to try and get something started, so that when we resume in the morning -- unless you all find some new excuse not to write -- we'll have something to work with and maybe it will begin to snowball.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Suit yourself. Good night.

PHOEBE

Yes, good night.

The two exchange one final, concerned look and then exit. Darcy sits at the writing desk. She picks up a pencil and begins to doodle and making notes.

DARCY

(talking to self)

Let's see, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times ..."

(chucking)

It certainly has been the worst of times so far.

She slaps her own hand.

DARCY (cont'd)

Remember the rules!

(chuckles again)

Screw the rules. "It was a dark and stormy night ..."

There's a thunderclap and the lights blink.

DARCY (cont'd)

(glances heavenward)

Oh, God, I was just kidding.

(looks around, then looks out into hallway to make sure she's alone)

All clear, and now, let's look at this report.

She sits back down at the desk, opens the manila folder, and begins to read the report.

DARCY

Wow!

Another thunderclap and the lights go out. Darcy jumps, then laughs at herself. She leans back in her chair and puts her hands behind her head as if thinking. A clock ticks followed by two chimes, showing that time has passed. Darcy is now sleeping with her head in her arms on the desk. Cue some sinister music, as the bookcase slowly opens and hands begin to emerge.

Lights Out.

ACT 2

Scene 1

The next morning. Darcy is slumped at the desk with her back to the audience. She appears to be sleeping. Miles enters, stretches, yawns, and spots Darcy. Goes over, about to touch her, then backs away smiling and tiptoes away so as not to wake her. Eleanor enters.

ELEANOR

(loudly)

Good morning!

MILES

(holding finger to his lips)

Shhhhhhhhhh!

He points to Darcy, indicating that she's asleep. They move away from Darcy and talk in stage whispers.

ELEANOR

Oh dear, poor thing. She must have dozed off and spent the night right there. I wonder how much she wrote?

MILES

Hopefully, a lot. We're not exactly off to great start. So, how did you sleep?

ELEANOR

Like a rock. And you?

MILES

Barely a wink. Someone in the room next to me was snoring like you wouldn't believe.

Eleanor looks guilty and changes the subject.

ELEANOR

Right! So, I guess it's a quick breakfast and we're off writing!

The Inspector enters.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

(heartily)

Well, and a good morning to you both!

ELEANOR

Shhhhhhh ... Can't you see Darcy's asleep? The poor thing didn't make it through the night.

(to Miles)

Really, no respect for the weary.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

(stage whispering)

She spent the night there at the desk writing? I wonder how much she got done?

MILES

That seems to be the question of the day. We'll find out when she wakes up. For now, let her sleep.

Phoebe enters. Before she can say anything, the other two point to Darcy and say shhhh.

PHOEBE

(whispering)

Good morning! Quite the storm last night. And that thunder!

MILES

(looking at Eleanor)

Not sure that was thunder.

ELEANOR

Of course it was.

PHOEBE

At least the power came back on.

ELEANOR

Yes, splendid! Now we can get that email report!

MILES

Yes! That report!

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

(glancing at Phoebe)

Yes, that report.

PHOEBE

How do we know Darcy didn't print it out before we all woke up?

ELEANOR

Well, why don't we wake her and ask her? I can't believe she's slept through all this noise anyway.

MILES

I'll wake her.

Miles goes over to Darcy. She's slumped over with her head on the desk. He nudges her shoulder.

MILES (cont'd)

Wake up, Sleepy Head ...

No response from Darcy.

ELEANOR

Quite the sound sleeper, she is.

Miles nudges a bit harder. Still nothing.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Something's wrong. Don't touch her!

He goes over to Darcy, grabs her shoulders and sits her up. She's obviously dead, with a scarf tied around her neck and paper stuffed in her mouth.

Eleanor screams; Miles and Phoebe gasp. The Inspector checks Darcy's pulse, then removes the scarf and inspects her neck.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL (cont'd)

She's dead.

Another gasp from all.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL (cont'd)

She's been strangled with this scarf.

The Inspector holds up the scarf. Eleanor gasps again.

ELEANOR

That's my scarf!

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

(going over to Eleanor)

How did your scarf end up around Darcy's neck?

ELEANOR

I'm sure I don't know.

MILES

If I were you, Eleanor, I wouldn't say another word. Not without a solicitor.

Miles goes over to Darcy's body and removes the paper from her mouth.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Wait! Don't touch

MILES

(examining the paper)

It's the cover letter to the DNA report.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

So she DID receive the email while we were all asleep.

ELEANOR

Wait! What's written on the back?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

(takes the paper from Miles and looks at the back)

It says, "Eat Your Words."

They let that sink in.

ELEANOR

Oh good heavens! How utterly ghastly! Thank God we didn't get those t-shirt made.

PHOEBE

(appalled) Eleanor, how COULD you?

ELEANOR

Sorry ...

MILES

So, Darcy knew the DNA results. And now, so does her killer.

He glances at the others.

PHOEBE

What are you implying? That one of us did it?

(MORE)

PHOEBE (cont'd)
If so, take a look in the mirror. You
were the one stalking her.

MILES
I wasn't stalking her. I was

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL
Let's not turn against each other.

PHOEBE
Yes, in fact, while we're accusing
each other, where is Mr. Briggs?

ELEANOR
We've forgotten all about him.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL
All right, don't anyone touch
anything else. We've already
contaminated much of the crime scene.

ELEANOR
What do we do now?

MILES
Normally, one would call the police.
However, the police are already here.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL
We need to call in forensics and get
a team in here at once.

**He picks up the phone, walks to the corner of the room,
glances at everyone, and then dials. one last time.**

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL:
Hello, this is Inspector Blackwell. I
need to report a murder

Lights Out.

SCENE 2

**About an hour later. A screen now blocks the view of the
dead body. Everyone is seated, except the Inspector, who is
pacing back and forth, looking at his watch.**

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL
I can't imagine what is keeping my
forensics team.

ELEANOR

I can't imagine that WE'RE all sitting here as if nothing happened while a dead body is sitting over THERE at my desk.

PHOEBE

I know. Shouldn't we have moved her to one of the bedrooms?

ELEANOR

I'm not touching her.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

No one is touching her. We've already disturbed the crime scene enough. From now on, no one touches anything.

MILES

I agree.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

(a bit sarcastic)

Glad we're on the same page.

ELEANOR

(laughing inappropriately)

The same page ... we never got to page 1.

PHOEBE

Eleanor, this is no time for jokes.

ELEANOR

Right.

The doorbell rings.

MILES

Inspector, your team is here.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

(looking startled)

Really? Oh ... yes, of course. I'll get it.

The Inspector cautiously opens the door to find Mr. Briggs there, plunger in hand. The Inspector looks relieved, then surprised.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL (cont'd)

Briggs, we thought you were upstairs tending to the the stopped up loo.

MR. BRIGGS

Yes, sir, I was. Worked late. You all were in your rooms asleep. Someone really snores

ELEANOR

Get to the point, Mr. Briggs.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

The loo is at the end of the hall, just before the staircase. Did you see anyone leave their room last night and come downstairs?

MR. BRIGGS

No sir, I had the door open the whole time. I would've seen anyone walk by.

MILES

So, you're saying no one left their room.

MR. BRIGGS

Nope, everyone was dead to the world.

ELEANOR

(glancing to where the body is)

Well, at least one of us was.

PHOEBE

Eleanor, really!

ELEANOR

Sorry

MILES

So, what time did you leave?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Miles, if you don't mind, I'll ask the questions here.

(to Mr. Briggs)

So, what time did you leave.

They all roll their eyes.

MR. BRIGGS

Don't know exactly, but it was late. You were all asleep in your rooms, and I didn't want to disturb anyone.

(MORE)

MR. BRIGGS (cont'd)
Figured I'd sneak out, come back in
the morning, and let you know the loo
is working fine.

MILES

So you're saying, everyone was in
their rooms when you left.

MR. BRIGGS

That's right. Well, except for the
young lady who fell asleep at the
desk.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

And you walked right past her without
saying a word?

MR. BRIGGS

She looked so peaceful.

They all glance at each other again.

MR. BRIGGS (cont'd)

Didn't want to wake her.

ELEANOR

No danger of that.

PHOEBE

Shut up!

ELEANOR

Sorry

MILES

So you're saying, on your way out
through that door, you saw her
sitting there at the desk.

MR. BRIGGS

How many times do I have to tell you?
She was asleep, slumped over at the
desk -- except this screen wasn't
here.

**He walks over, kind of curious, and points to the body
behind the screen. He does a double take, then stares wide-
eyed at audience.**

MR. BRIGGS (cont'd)

Holy shit!

Lights out.

SCENE 3

A few minutes later. Mr. Briggs has been placed in a chair, center stage, plunger on his lap. He looks confused. They all circle him asking questions, except the inspector, who is absent from the room. Eleanor is holding the torch.

ELEANOR

(turning on torch and shining it in Briggs's face)

All right, Briggs! What time did you say you left?

MR. BRIGGS

I told you, I don't remember exactly. It was very late, that's all.

ELEANOR

Not good enough!

MILES

So you walked right past the body and didn't notice anything unusual?

MR. BRIGGS

No! I thought she was sleeping.

PHOEBE

(in his face)

So ... where did you get the scarf?

MR. BRIGGS

What scarf?

ELEANOR

My scarf. The one you strangled Darcy with!

MR. BRIGGS

What? Are you mad! I didn't strangle nobody. I came here to unplug a loo, that's all!

MILES

So, what was your relationship with Darcy?

MR. BRIGGS

Who's Darcy?

PHOEBE

The dead girl.

MR. BRIGGS

I never met her. I never seen her before coming here.

MILES

So, why did you come back this morning?

ELEANOR

(dramatically) Because the murderer always returns to the scene of the crime!

MR. BRIGGS

No, I forgot my bloody plunger!

Inspector Blackwell enters from upstairs.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

(looks around, realizes what's going on and gets really mad)

What in bloody hell is going on here? Can't I even leave you alone for five minutes to go to the loo?

MR. BRIGGS

How's it working?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

It's plugged up again!

They all groan and look dismayed.

Mr. Briggs has had enough. He stands and takes stage, gesturing with his plunger and looking threatening.

MR. BRIGGS

You're all crazy! You keep plugging up the loo, you got a dead body sitting at the desk, and you're accusing me of murder! I'm getting out of here. I'll mail the bill!

He heads for the door. The Inspector blocks his way.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

No one is leaving until I say so.
Now, sit!

MR. BRIGGS

I'll sit when I want to sit.
*(looking around the room at everyone
glaring at him)*

I think I'll sit.

He sits back down in the chair.

MR. BRIGGS (cont'd)

So, why me? I'm just the plumber. I don't even know you people. I know your toilet better than I know any of you. And it's a mess -- but that's no reason to kill you! What evidence do you got?

ELEANOR

Right! Go ahead, Inspector, tell him what evidence you got. Go on.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Actually, none.

Mr. Briggs smiles.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL (cont'd)

(leaning in to him)
Yet.

Mr. Briggs frowns. Then the light bulb goes on.

MR. BRIGGS

Ooooooh, I see what's going on here.
I'm what you call the red herring.

They all look confused. Briggs stands up and takes stage.

MR. BRIGGS (cont'd)

I assumed you would know this, being writers. Allow me to explain. A red herring is a literary device, often used in detective novels or plays, to mislead the other characters, the readers, or the audience, inducing them to make false conclusions.

A stunned silence.

MR. BRIGGS (cont'd)

In other words, to throw them off the trail.

The others pause, then look at each other, nodding in understanding.

ELEANOR

So, what you're saying is

MR. BRIGGS

It ain't me, it's one of you!

Now they all look at each other suspiciously.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Enough! Unfortunately, Briggs is right. Everyone is a suspect. Now, I'll need to interrogate each of you, one at a time.

MILES

That's all well and good, Inspector, but who will interrogate you?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

I beg your pardon. Me?

ELEANOR

Yes, you. You were right here with the rest of us. Who's to say you didn't do it?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Now just a minute ...

PHOEBE

Eleanor's right. Who's to say you didn't do it?

He looks shocked, then composes himself.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

(to Phoebe)

And who's to say you didn't do it?

MILES

(butting in)

All right, all right, we're all suspects. However, has anyone entertained the notion that someone from outside could have come in and killed Darcy?

They all look relieved.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

No, that can't be.

PHOEBE

And why not?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Because she was strangled with Eleanor's scarf. Where was the scarf before it was around Darcy's neck?

ELEANOR

Hanging in my closet.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

So, you're saying someone broke into the house, went up to Eleanor's room, rummaged through her closet looking for a scarf while she was asleep, and then came back downstairs to strangle Darcy with it?

MR. BRIGGS

(getting up)

Well, there you have it. Can I go home now?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Sit down, Briggs. *(to others)* Nobody broke in. It's obviously an inside job.

PHOEBE

That would mean

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

One of us is a killer.

PHOEBE

What about Miles? He was stalking Darcy.

MILES

I was not. I was trying to keep her safe.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Safe from what?

MILES

I was afraid she had gotten in over her head without realizing it.

ELEANOR

In what way?

MILES

I have a feeling there's a lot more to the discovery of these remains than Darcy ever realized.

PHOEBE

Suddenly, you're a forensics expert?

MILES

No, just an amateur sleuth. One with an interest in local history ...
(looking right at Inspector)
... that dates back 30 years ago.

Inspector and Phoebe exchange panicky glances.

MILES (cont'd)

My interest was in solving a 30-year-old cold case, all but forgotten. Darcy discovers remains that date back approximately 30 years. Maybe a coincidence. Maybe not. I'm afraid she innocently stumbled onto something and ended up getting killed for it.

ELEANOR

And the DNA results in that email may have solved the case?

MILES

Exactly. Darcy knew the results of those tests, and now her killer does, too.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

That's all well and good, but we're forgetting one thing.

MILES

Which is?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

If Briggs is telling the truth, then no one got past him to strangle Darcy with a scarf. And apparently, she was already dead on his way out. So, how did the murderer get past Briggs without detection?

PHOEBE

There's no way!

ELEANOR

(an ah ha moment)

Well ... except for the secret staircase.

A stunned silence.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

What secret staircase?

ELEANOR

Why, the one right here.

She goes over to the bookcase and opens it.

ELEANOR (cont'd)

Viola! One secret staircase. I keep forgetting it's even here.

Phoebe looks very nervous.

MILES

And where does that staircase lead to?

ELEANOR

(another ah ha moment)

Oh, why it leads right up to the bedroom where ... Phoebe ... is ... staying

They all look at Phoebe.

PHOEBE

A secret staircase? I had no idea!

ELEANOR

Of course you did. Don't you remember? We used to play in the secret staircase when we were little.

(MORE)

ELEANOR (cont'd)
We'd make noises like ghosts and
drive my mother batty. Those were the
daysPhoebe.

ELEANOR (cont'd)
Wait ... that means ... Phoebe, it
was you? But why?

**The following happens quickly: Phoebe steps back, pulls a
gun out of her pocket, and points it at everyone.**

PHOEBE
Don't anyone move.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL
(moving toward her)
Phoebe, give me the gun.

PHOEBE
Stay where you are.

He backs off.

PHOEBE (cont'd)
(getting a crazy look in her eye)
Who would have guessed that a simple
thing like a writing contest among
friends would turn out to be such a
pain in the ass?

MILES
What are you talking about?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL
Phoebe, perhaps it's best you keep
quiet.

PHOEBE
Oh, shut up. This is all your fault
anyway.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL
Phoebe

PHOEBE
If you would've done it right the
first time, we wouldn't be where we
are right now.

ELEANOR
You mean Darcy wouldn't be dead?

PHOEBE

Darcy OR Richard's wife ...

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Phoebe, I really think you've said enough.

PHOEBE

I'm just getting started. If you'd only listened to me 30 years ago, none of this would've happened. We should've just run away together, but no, you had to confront her. I said, "Richard, don't, you might lose your temper. Someone could get hurt. Or even killed."

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Someone did.

ELEANOR

Are you confessing you killed your wife?

MILES

I knew it. I knew it all along.

PHOEBE

(waving the gun)

Shut up. You stay out of this.

(to Inspector)

You thought you killed her, didn't you?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

What? I did! I didn't mean to, but I did!

PHOEBE

We went to your house. I waited outside while you told her about us. We were going to leave together that night.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Yes, that's all true. I did tell her. And we argued. I pushed her, and she fell and hit her head. I killed her. I'm sure of it.

PHOEBE

You came out and told me what happened.

(MORE)

PHOEBE (cont'd)

Then you went to get the rug from the garage. I went inside. What you don't know is, she came to.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

What?

PHOEBE

So, I finished the job you screwed up. I strangled her with her own scarf, the same way I killed Darcy.

ELEANOR

Actually, it was MY scarf this time.

PHOEBE

Oh shut up!

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

So I could have saved her?

PHOEBE

Well you could have. But I didn't think you'd want to. I thought now we could be together.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

You mean all these years you've let me believe I murdered my wife? Why didn't you ever tell me the truth?

PHOEBE

Because at first, I thought it was the best way for us to be together. Wasn't that the plan? But then, you turned your back on me.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

I was in shock. I couldn't think of anything else except what I had done -- murdered my wife. I've been carrying that guilt around for 30 years. Why didn't you tell me the truth?

PHOEBE

I thought about it. But you wouldn't talk to me. I got nervous, then I got mad. I figured, you believed you did it.

(MORE)

PHOEBE (cont'd)
And if anyone truly investigated,
you'd confess, and I'd be off the
hook. You abandoned me, and you
deserved it, you bastard.

MILES

Phoebe, give it up. The forensics
team will be here any minute.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Actually, no, they won't.

ELEANOR

Why not?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

I never called them.

ELEANOR

Why?

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

No one was really going anywhere. And
I didn't want anyone else here until
I got my hands on that DNA test.

MILES

So now what?

PHOEBE

Well, obviously I can't let you all
go. You'd go blabbing to the police.

ELEANOR

What do you mean?

PHOEBE

Oh, Eleanor, such a lovely home. It's
a shame to see it go up in flames.
With you all in it, of course.

INSPECTOR BLACKWELL

Phoebe, we can't.

PHOEBE

We're not. I am. You're going up in
flames with the rest of them.

She points the gun at Mr. Briggs.

PHOEBE (cont'd)

Briggs, you'll find behind the couch pillow the rest of Eleanor's scarves. Tie everyone up with them.

MR. BRIGGS

I will not!

PHOEBE

Fine. Then I'll shoot you and ask someone else to do it.

She points the gun closer to Briggs.

MR. BRIGGS

Okay, okay. Take it easy.

Briggs gets up to get the scarves, but instead he knocks the gun out of Phoebe's hand with the plunger. Miles scrambles and picks up the gun. He points it at Phoebe and the Inspector.

MILES

Okay, both of you over there by the fireplace.

They move there.

MILES

Mr. Briggs, I don't think you'll object to tying them up with the scarves, will you?

MR. BRIGGS

No sir! My pleasure!

Briggs starts tying them up.

MILES

(pointing to phone and talking to Eleanor)

Would you like to do the honors?

ELEANOR

(picking up the receiver, she dials)

Hello, Police Department? I'd like to report a murder ... or two.

Lights out.

SCENE 4

A few days later. The small table is now at center stage with two chairs. Eleanor and Miles sit with a laptop.

ELEANOR

I suspected for years those two were up to something. It was just too convenient the way the Inspector's wife went missing and was never found. But I never thought Phoebe did the actual killing. I guess I underestimated the old girl.

MILES

Truth is stranger than fiction.

ELEANOR

Coming up with that phony writing contest was brilliant! I figured if we could get Phoebe and the Inspector together for a weekend, we could somehow trip them up and get to the bottom of the case.

MILES

It's a shame about poor Darcy though. I feel rather responsible. I did try to warn her. But we never should have put Phoebe in the bedroom with the hidden staircase.

ELEANOR

No one could have predicted what happened.

MILES

But I was really quite fond of Darcy.

ELEANOR

You mean those silly love poems weren't just a ruse?

MILES

Maybe at first

ELEANOR

Well, there's no time for sentimentality. Look on the bright side: Darcy's death does advance our plot.

MILES

You can be pretty cold-hearted,
Auntie Eleanor.

ELEANOR

I find a clinical perspective helps
keeps one focused on ones' writing.
You'll see.

MILES

Well, I'm new at this. You're the
expert.

ELEANOR

I've written a dozen mystery books in
the last 20 years, but never a best
seller.

MILES

Why didn't you write under your real
name?

ELEANOR

What if they were flops? I wouldn't
want the whole town of Lower Upton to
know about it! And lately, I was
afraid my ideas were getting
outdated.

MILES

Enter the nephew, an amateur sleuth
and a bookworm, with lots a fresh
ideas.

ELEANOR

Yes, I believe the events of last
weekend will give us the best seller
we're looking for. The one I
desperately need to finally get out
of debt.

MILES

I'm counting on it! Maybe I can even
buy the bookstore. Shall we begin?
(he starts typing)

ELEANOR

It was a dark and stormy night. Ha
ha.

MILES

(laughs and points to the rules still hanging on the wall. Wags his finger at her.)

Uh, uh, uh. Remember Rule #4: "No plagiarizing."

ELEANOR

Why don't we start with the title?

MILES

(beginning to type)

How about ... "Eat ... Your ... Words?"

Lights out.

The End

Property List

Parlor decorations typical of an English country house.
Bookcase on one wall opens to reveal secret staircase.

Other props:

Paper & pens & pencils for writing group members

Laptop (Darcy & last scene)

Silver tea service on coffee table, with cups & saucers

Linen napkins

Plate with cookies

Framed rules (Eleanor) NOTE: Do not put glass over list,
because Eleanor needs to cross things out.

Black marker (Eleanor)

Flyer advertising writing group (Inspector)

Empty casserole dish (Miles)

Casserole dish containing food (Darcy)

Large "torch" (flashlight) on table near door

Flask with whiskey (Inspector)

Bills on Eleanor's desk

Scarves behind couch pillow

Scarf around Darcy's neck

Manila folder (Darcy)

Cellphone (Darcy)

Small gun (Phoebe)

Plunger (Mr. Briggs)

Toolbox (Mr. Briggs)

Paper with "Eat Your Words" on one side

Sound Effects

Loud banging sound, like wrench hitting a pipe

Thunderclap

Doorbell

Costumes

Eleanor: Skirt and feminine blouses or sweaters. Sensible shoes. She can be a slightly flamboyant dresser.

Phoebe: Skirt and more tailored blouse or sweaters. Sensible shoes. She's a conservative dresser.

Darcy: Jeans and sweaters or other cute tops.

Miles: Cardigan sweaters or vests with neckties. Dress pants. He's rather nerdy.

Inspector: Dark pants, suit jacket, no tie. Slightly ruffled appearance.

Mr. Briggs: Work clothes.