

There are general introductions. They all get confused as to who is who. A 'who's on first?' type routine. SHANE guides them through it. There is some handshaking business.

BLACK: Lady Smythe, this is Madame Esmeralda.

ESMERELDA: Hello.

LADY SMYTHE: Hello.

BLACK: And I am Detective Black.

The COLONEL enters with another suitcase.

Ah Colonel Munster, this is Lady Smythe and Madame Esmeralda.

ESMERELDA: Hello.

LADY SMYTHE: Hello.

COLONEL: Hello. Hello. And you are?

BLACK: Detective Black! ... And this is Taffy Hemingway.

COLONEL: Excuse me.

He ducks out to become TAFFY.

BLACK: · Well don't be long...

LADY SMYTHE: Pleasure, Detective Black. Madame Esmeralda.

ESMERELDA: Lady Smythe. Detective.

BARNEY *re-enters as TAFFY.*

TAFFY: Taffy Hemingway, how do you do?

BLACK: Taffy, this is Lady Smythe, Madame Esmerelda.

They shake hands.

ESMERELDA: Taffy.

LADY SMYTHE: Taffy.

TAFFY: And you are?

BLACK/ SMYTHE / ESMERELDA: Detective Black

TAFFY: Got it.

BLACK: Take a seat, Lady Smythe.

She sits—very slowly.

LADY SMYTHE: That's better. We're lucky to have made it before the... No doubt the causeway will overflow as usual.

BLACK: You've been inconvenienced by it before, Lady Smythe?

LADY SMYTHE: I own the estate next door.

BLACK: So you knew him well?

LADY SMYTHE: As well as one can know their eccentric neighbour who was not only the local parson but an avid astronomer, amateur novelist and host of the most marvellous murder-mystery festivals this side of Pemberton-on-Stoke.

TAFFY: That's quite the description.

KAREN, as ESMERELDA, does a wonderful Eastern European accent, and proves to be a very good actor.

ESMERELDA: He was quite the man. I too dined with Charles—as I knew him—on a regular basis. Our robust discussions on the subjects of religion and the paranormal were my greatest delight.

TAFFY: Paranormal you say?

ESMERELDA: I'm a spiritualist, and a follower of the Wicca faith you see.

BLACK: Wicca? You mean witchcraft?

ESMERELDA: No, sir, I mean Wicca. It's a very misunderstood-

TAFFY: Wicca, witchcraft, it's all baloney and not really relevant to why we're here.

LADY SMYTHE: Prrrrrrrecisely.

BLACK: May I ask what your connection to Hamlington was, Colonel?

TAFFY: Excuse me, did I see him behind the ...

BARNEY sneaks behind the bookcase and changes into the COLONEL. TAFFY and the COLONEL talk while BARNEY changes.

COLONEL: Thank you. Hamlington and I served in the war together. He was Charlie Chaplain in my squadron—what? No hang on he was called Charlie and he was a chaplain, that's it. I saved his bacon after he was shot down over Marseille in '41. He was a good man.

KAREN has thought ahead and gone just offstage to do the MAID.

MAID: *[off]* It's me the maid. I've laid out some food in the dining room.

Everyone looks in different directions.

COLONEL: Ah spiffing, worked up quite a hunger listening to you lot.

BLACK: *[pointedly]* Why don't we ALL make way for the new guests so they don't feel overwhelmed.

LADY SMYTHE: Excellent idea.

They all start to leave.

COLONEL: I could do with a little something.

TAFFY: The war eh? Must have been damned exciting, old toast.

They leave.

The SOLICITOR (played by RICHARD) enters, obviously pushed on from the wings, talking to no-one.

SOLICITOR: No I'm in the dark as much as anyone about the will, despite the fact I'm the man's solicitor. I'll be getting my instructions the same time as you lot-who I take it are the beneficiaries. Are you two family?

GILES and INGRID (BARNEY and PHILLIPA) hurriedly enter having hastily changed.

GILES has a limp.

He wears big pants with braces over his other costume, and a flat cap.

His limp also causes him to kick every item of furniture and perhaps some audience members as he walks.

GILES: No, sir, I run the Hamlington farm here. Me and the missus. Been 'ere all my life.

SOLICITOR: Uh-huh.

PHILLIPA is now more confident, acting in her rehearsed role.

She struggles to nail down her cockney accent-it veers over to Irish mostly. Perhaps she has plaits.

INGRID: I've never met the man. I work on a Dutch trader that plies its trade between Northern Africa and the Scandinavian territories.

SOLICITOR: How exotic. And you've never had any contact with Parson Hamlington-last remaining heir to the Hamlington fortune?

INGRID: No, sir.

INGRID exits and runs the long way round backstage.

SOLICITOR: What the deuce is he up to? Inviting a ragtag bunch of strangers to attend the reading of his will.

BENSON *enters*. SHANE *has put on the oversized butler jacket and stepped in to play* BENSON *Does his best to copy BARNEY's version. He rings the broken bell.*

BENSON: Ting a ling, ting a ling.

GILES: I guess we're about to find out.

GILES *exits and runs the long way around.*

BENSON: Ladies and gentlemen, please make your way to the drawing room. The reading of the Will will now take place. as per the instructions of Parson Charles Hamlington the Third.

TAFFY *and GLORIA enter, out of breath.*

TAFFY: Well this is cozy eh what.

TAFFY *exits.*

GLORIA: Don't think I've seen a crowd like this since the parson's last big do.

GLORIA *exits.*

SOLICITOR: Never mind all that. Can we crack on please, everyone?

BENSON: [*buying some time*] We'll just wait for all the other guests shall we?

LADY SMYTHE *enters, out of breath.*

Ah, Lady Smythe ...

LADY SMYTHE: Yes— The harder this rain is, the more likely we'll be totally isolated.

Sound effect of rain starts, really loudly.

GILES *enters, out of breath. He has to shout over the rain sound.*

GILES: She's coming down now!

BENSON: Perhaps it's not quite as heavy as we thought!!

The rain sound effect lowers.

ESMERELDA: May I remind you that a man has died! Can we show some respect for the departed?

BENSON: Ladies and gentlemen thank you for attending the reading of the last will and testament of Parson Hamlington. I have been instructed to play this short cinescope film.