

A NASTY CASE OF BURNS

The set requires an entrance to the outside world and another to the interior of the house.

[Enter ANNE and JOCK from interior.]

ANNE Is everyone gathered, Jock?

JOCK They are, Mrs McAllister. All the villagers are settled at their tables and when Mr and Mrs Cholmondley-Bo-champ arrive they'll be sure of a warm reception.

ANNE It's pronounced 'Chumly Beecham', Jock. I keep telling you that.

JOCK So you do, Mrs McAllister; but a man's a man for a' that. They'll get a warm welcome whatever they call themselves.

ANNE Not from everyone, I'm afraid. [1]

JOCK No – not everyone. [2]

[Enter BAINES from exterior.]

ANNE Deliveries around the back, please.

BAINES I beg your pardon, Madam?

ANNE If you're delivering supplies, then you should be at the back door. Now, be off with you.

BAINES Madam, I am quite unaccustomed to being addressed in such a manner.

JOCK Well, you'll just have to get used to it. Go on – clear off.

BAINES Perhaps I have failed to make you cognisant of my identity.

JOCK Eh?

BAINES I am Baines.

ANNE Baines? Did you say Baines?

BAINES Indeed I did, Madam.

ANNE Why do I know that name?

JOCK Search me. I don't know no Baines, and I don't think I want to, either.

ANNE Baines! Aren't you Mr Cholmondley-Beauchamp's servant?

BAINES Indeed I am not, Madam! I am Mr Cholmondley-Beauchamp's butler.

JOCK Same thing, isn't it? You're still his lackey.

BAINES And to whom do I have the pleasure of conversing?

ANNE I'm Mrs McAllister the housekeeper – is Mr Cholmondley-Beauchamp here already?

BAINES He will not be arriving for a further few minutes, madam. I have been sent ahead to ensure that all is in readiness for him.

JOCK We're ready all right. He's late.

BAINES Mr Cholmondley-Beauchamp is never – late, as you so crudely put it. He is fashionably casual in his time keeping.

JOCK *(Mocking)* Fashionably casual! That's a new one.

BAINES Just who are you, my good man?

JOCK Me? Jock McPherson. I'm the gilley round here.

BAINES Gilley?

ANNE He'd probably be known as a gamekeeper where you come from.

BAINES Indeed. Well, Mr McPherson, I don't think that Mr Cholmondley-Beauchamp will appreciate being greeted in his own home by the gardener.

JOCK Gardener? Why you...

ANNE Now, now, Jock, go and see that they're ready in the kitchen and I'll see to Mr Baines.

[Exit JOCK, to interior – muttering under his breath.

O wad some Power the giftie gie us

To see ourselfs as ithers see us!]

ANNE Now Mr Baines...

BAINES Just Baines, madam.

ANNE Now, Baines, I don't think you appreciate the position that Jock holds around here.

BAINES I understand perfectly, madam. Now, if you will excuse me I will prepare Mr Cholmondley-Beauchamp's room for his comfort.

ANNE First floor, third on the right. I've put them in the Queen's Suite.

BAINES I'm sure it will be most suitable.

[Exit BAINES to interior.]

[Enter PAT from exterior.]

PAT Mrs McAllister, I must say that you've got the place looking absolutely wonderful.

ANNE Thank you, Mrs McPatrick. That's very kind of you to say so.

PAT Nearly the big moment. Isn't it exciting?

ANNE Exciting? That's what worries me.

PAT Worries you?

ANNE You're the solicitor, Mrs McPatrick. You of all people should appreciate that new brooms usually sweep clean, and some things are often best left hidden by the dirt. [3]

PAT Pha! If I've ever bent a few rules it's only been for the good of the Estate and, in the long run, that can only be for the benefit of Mr Cholmondley-Beauchamp. [4]

ANNE I wouldn't be so sure if I were you.

[Enter DOUGAL from exterior and BAINES from interior.]

ANNE AH, Dougal, you made it.

DOUGAL What? Would I miss out on one of Jock's magnificent Burn's Night Suppers? Not likely.

PAT You're right there, Dougal. One of the highlights of the year is Jock's Burn's Night Supper.

BAINES I am not accustomed to eavesdropping, but did I understand you correctly? Were you intimating that a supper dedicated to the memory of one Mr Burns – a reputedly well-lauded Scottish poet - is to be held here tonight?

DOUGAL We did indeed, sir. It's going to be a grand night. It will be a wonderful welcome for Nigel and Nigella. And you are...?

ANNE This is Baines, Dougal. Mr Cholmondley-Beauchamp's butler.

DOUGAL *[Offering his hand]* Good to meet you Baines old man.

[BAINES declines to shake DOUGAL'S hand.]

BAINES I am most apologetic, sir, but it is not seemly for the staff to become over-familiar with their betters.

DOUGAL Suit yourself.

BAINES I am afraid that this evening's celebration will have to be terminated forthwith.

ANNE I beg your pardon?

BAINES The festivities must be cancelled – this instant.

ANNE I fail to see why...

BAINES Mr Cholmondley-Beauchamp has a strong aversion to traditions of any persuasion, and in particular to those dedicated to people that he would describe as second-rate artists. [5]

PAT Mrs McAllister! You cannot allow this. Jock will be absolutely furious if his supper is cancelled.

ANNE If this is the wish of Mr Cholmondley-Beauchamp, then who are we to argue. I must go to the kitchens straight away and see if I can retrieve the situation.

[Exit ANNE to interior.]

BAINES And if you will also excuse me I feel that it would be appropriate for me to also supervise the arrangements for this evening.

[Exit BAINES to interior.]

PAT Well, there's a turn up for the books.

DOUGAL You're telling me. Poor old Jock. He won't take it lying down, you know, our Jock's no wee sleekit, cow'rin, timrous breastie. [6]

PAT Never mind Jock; what about you? [7]

DOUGAL Me?

PAT Come on, Dougal; you're talking to me now.

DOUGAL I'm fine. No problems – really.

PAT We all hoped that you would inherit this place. You had as much right to it as your cousin – probably more right seeing that you live around here.

DOUGAL You said it, Pat. I only had as much right to it as my cousin – maybe the best man won.

PAT Piffle. You don't believe that any more than I do. Will you still be able to marry Anne?

DOUGAL I hope so.

[The doorbell rings.]

PAT That'll be them now. Do you think I should open it?

DOUGAL Not a good introduction to the family solicitor – opening the door like a servant.

PAT You're as bad as Baines.

[Enter BAINES from interior who crosses the stage and exits to exterior.]

PAT Look - the trembling earth resounds his tread.

DOUGAL Hope he didn't hear you – I wouldn't like to be on the wrong side of that one.

[Enter BAINES followed by NIGEL and NIGELLA CHOLMONDLEY-BEAUCHAMP, all from exterior.]

NIGELLA My God! Is it always so damn cold in this part of the world?

NIGEL Just put up with it, dear, it won't be for long. Ah – *[he approaches PAT]* you must be Mrs McAllister. Arrange for our bags to be brought in, will you? Dougal, you old dog, how are you?

DOUGAL I'm fine, thank you, Nigel, but I think you owe an apology to Mrs McPatrick here.

NIGEL Really?

DOUGAL Mrs McPatrick is the Estate's Solicitor.

NIGEL Is that so? I think I am the one who decides who acts for me in all matters legal, don't you?

PAT What? After all I've done...

NIGEL Come my dear – if there is no one with the manners to greet us, we had better look around this pile for ourselves.

BAINES Allow me to direct you to your rooms, sir.

[Exit BAINES followed by NIGEL and NIGELLA to interior.]

PAT Well, that was quite an entrance.

[Enter JOCK from interior. He is polishing his dirk.]

JOCK Did I hear the doorbell? Are they here?

DOUGAL Oh yes, Jock. They're here all right.

PAT I think they're going to bring about some changes around here.

JOCK Nothing wrong with changes – as long as they're not changes just for change's sake.

[Enter ANNE from interior.]

PAT Anne! We were just telling Jock here that it looks as if there are going to be some changes around here.

ANNE Yes. Jock? Could I have a word with you?

JOCK If it's a quick one – I need to see the piper and make the final arrangements with him.

ANNE It's about all that, Jock. I'm afraid the Burn's Supper has had to be cancelled.

JOCK What?!!!!

PAT It's true, Jock. We were here when Baines told us to cancel it.

JOCK But what on Earth for? Everything's ready.

DOUGAL It would seem that our new Laird doesn't like such things.

JOCK Doesn't like...

ANNE There's nothing we can do about it. The decision has been made.

JOCK Well, we'll see about that. [7]

[Exit JOCK to interior.]

PAT I'd better go and try to calm him down.

[Exit PAT to interior.]

ANNE This is awful. He's only been here five minutes and he's upset everyone.

[DOUGAL puts his arms around ANNE.]

DOUGAL Come on, now, it's not that bad. Give him a bit of time.

ANNE I may love you, Dougal, but you can really infuriate me at times. You're so passive. Don't you ever get angry?

DOUGAL It has been known, my love. [8]

ANNE I can't imagine you ever fighting for me – whereas I would happily commit murder to protect you.

DOUGAL I know you would – and I love you for it.

ANNE Hold still, you've got a thread hanging.

[ANNE takes a pair of scissors from her pocket and struggles with them in her LEFT hand (and this is vital) to cut the thread from DOUGAL's collar.]

DOUGAL What's happened to your left handed pair?

ANNE Lost them again, I'm afraid.

[Enter NIGEL, NIGELLA and BAINES.]

NIGEL Dougal! Please do not fraternise with the staff.

DOUGAL I can hardly be accused of fraternising with my own fiancé.

NIGELLA That's your problem, Dougal; you never did have any ambition.

DOUGAL Excuse me, but...

NIGEL Don't excite yourself, Dougal, you know you can't handle it. [8]

ANNE With respect, Mr Cholmondley-Beauchamp...

NIGEL With respect, Mrs McAllister, I think you should be supervising in the kitchen – where you belong.

[ANNE pulls herself erect, with dignity, and exits to interior.]

DOUGAL Nigel, I think that was totally uncalled for.

NIGEL Don't think, Dougal – it doesn't suit you. Is that solicitor woman around? I need to speak to her.

DOUGAL I was leaving anyway.

[Exit DOUGAL to interior.]

NIGELLA I'm so relieved you're not going to keep this place. It's cold, it's draughty, it's halfway up the back end of nowhere and there's not a Harvey Nicks for a few hundred miles.

NIGEL That's all that matters to you, isn't it. Bloody shopping.

NIGELLA I like to be surrounded by nice things.

NIGEL Your 'nice things' have nearly bankrupted me more than once.

NIGELLA But you've always managed to pull through, haven't you – my clever little bunny.

NIGEL Only by a lot of hard work and a great deal of expense greasing the necessary palms. [9]

NIGELLA See? You can do it.

NIGEL But no longer, my little financial plug hole. I've closed all your accounts and cancelled your credit cards. From now on, if you want anything you'll have to come to me and ask for the money.

NIGELLA What? Everything?

NIGEL I'll give you a small allowance for necessities.

NIGELLA Why you...

[Enter BAINES from interior.]

NIGEL Why Baines. Is my bath ready?

BAINES Your ablutions are prepared, sir.

NIGEL Thank you, Baines.

[Exit NIGEL to interior.]

BAINES Is there anything Madam will be requiring?

NIGELLA Only a new husband.

[Exit NIGELLA to interior. Enter PAT from interior.]

PAT Baines. I believe Mr Cholmondley-Beauchamp wanted to see me.

BAINES Mr Cholmondley-Beauchamp has just retired to his toilet, Madam.

PAT To his...? Ah, I see what you mean. Do you know what he wanted me for?

BAINES I'm afraid that I am not privy to the inner workings of Mr Cholmondley-Beauchamp's cranium, Madam, but I believe that it may have some relevance to papers that he has been studying pertaining to previous legal transactions concerning the Estate. If I recall correctly, his exact words while reading the aforementioned papers were, 'My God, this woman is a crook.'

[Enter NIGELLA from interior, followed by ANNE.]

NIGELLA Is everyone here yet? I specifically stated that I wanted to see everyone before supper.

ANNE Jock is on his way and Dougal was not sure if you required him as well.

NIGELLA Of course.

ANNE I'll fetch him.

[Exit ANNE and enter JOCK, both interior.]

JOCK And what is all this about?

NIGELLA I think we'll wait for everyone to be together.

[Enter ANNE and DOUGAL from interior.]

NIGELLA Thank you. Now, I wanted to speak to you all to fill you in on what my beloved husband has planned for the Estate.

DOUGAL I say, Nigella, don't you think your husband should be telling us?

NIGELLA We are a partnership, Dougal. I am perfectly entitled to speak to you if I so wish.

[BAINES is seen to creep out, to interior, unnoticed by the rest.]

ANNE Will this take very long, Mrs Cholmondley-Beauchamp? I have a totally altered menu to supervise.

NIGELLA I realise that cancelling the Burn's Supper may have caused you some inconvenience, Mrs McAllister, but it would have been wise of you to check with us before starting such elaborate preparations.

JOCK It's a disgrace. The great man has been celebrated here for nearly 200 years.

NIGELLA Mr Cholmondley-Beauchamp has his own reasons for that, Mr McPherson. You will have to discuss your dissatisfaction with him.

DOUGAL Get on with it, Nigella. I could do with a drink.

NIGELLA I'm sure you could, Dougal. Now - I'm sure it's only fair to tell you all that you should start looking for alternative employment.

ALL What? *[etc.]*

NIGELLA Mr Cholmondley-Beauchamp has no desire to lock himself away in this Godforsaken hole - and I can only say that I am more than grateful for that - so he will be selling the Estate.

ANNE Sell? He can't sell.

DOUGAL The Estate has been in the family for generations.

PAT All the deeds will have to be scrutinised.

JOCK They'll always need a gilley.

NIGELLA No gilleys will be needed, my good man. He intends to sell to a consortium of Japanese businessmen who will convert the whole place into a theme park.

ALL *[General mayhem. During which NIGEL enters from interior followed by BAINES.]*

NIGELLA Bleat all you like, but the decision has been made and contracts will be exchanged as soon as we get back to London. That will be all.

NIGEL Nigella? A word if you don't mind.

[NIGEL and NIGELLA separate themselves from the others.]

NIGEL What do you think you are doing?

NIGELLA Just telling the staff what is in store from them.

NIGEL How dare you.

NIGELLA If you're going to cut my allowance, then I thought I had better start taking a more active interest in the business and earn some money.

NIGEL Do you realise what you have done?

NIGELLA I think the expression in business circles is that I have been 'interfacing with the workforce'.

NIGEL You've probably ruined me - that's all.

NIGELLA Really? Then we've both been cut off from our money supply, haven't we.

[Exit NIGELLA to interior.]

[DOUGAL and ANNE approach NIGEL.]

DOUGAL Ruined? Why ruined.

NIGEL Those Japanese businessmen like to play things very close to their chests. Any leakage of their plans and it will all be off.

DOUGAL Oh dear, what a shame.

ANNE I think it's only fair that we should be told what the future plans for the Estate are.

NIGEL You'll all be told in good time - but it would do no harm for you to start your packing. I'm returning for my bath. Baines! I will need you. I am grateful for you telling me what was going on down here, but we still need to discuss your future, don't we.

BAINES Of course, sir.

[Exit NIGEL and BAINES to interior.]

ANNE A theme park! A theme park!

DOUGAL I'm sure we could fight this idea through the courts.

PAT 'Fraid not, Dougal.

JOCK Is there nothing we can do?

PAT He owns the place - he can do what he likes with it. I wonder if I can speak to him before he gets in the bath?

[Exit PAT.]

ANNE Dougal - we'll be homeless.

DOUGAL Nothing has been signed, sealed or delivered yet, my love.

JOCK And if I have my way it never will be. [9]

[Exit JOCK to interior.]

ANNE We should clean up for dinner.

DOUGAL Hah! Some hae meat and cannae eat! I'm not feeling very hungry, somehow.

ANNE Chin up, We'll work something out.

[Exit ANNE and DOUGAL to interior.]

[Enter PAT from interior. She paces backwards and forwards a few times, waiting for any one else to appear. Finally JOCK enters from interior.]

PAT Jock! Where is everyone?

JOCK Don't worry yourself, Mrs McPatrick, Dinner *[he spits at the word]* will be ready very soon. They'll all be here for that all right. If you can call it a dinner.

PAT You must be pretty fed up about it all, Jock.

JOCK Fed up? I'm bloody furious. I could swing for that man for doing this to us.

PAT We've all got our reasons to hate the man - you're not on your own.

[Enter DOUGAL.]

DOUGAL Nose bags at the ready, folks?

JOCK Ha!

PAT Jock's still seething about the cancelled Burns' Supper.

DOUGAL And so he should be. It just won't be the same, will it?

[Enter ANNE from interior.]

ANNE Supper is ready when everyone is down.

[Enter BAINES from interior.]

BAINES Mrs McAllister? I wish to discuss the wine list for the evening meal.

JOCK Wine? Wine. What's wrong with a dram or two?

BAINES I'm afraid that Mr Cholmondley-Beauchamp has an aversion to spirits, sir. He is a conoseur of fine wines.

JOCK Fine wines! Camel piss!

BAINES I think you will discover that the study of vintage wine is...

JOCK Well, even if Mr Cholmondley-Beauchamp won't allow a Burns' Supper, I'm not going to let him stop me from celebrating the memory of the great man.

ANNE You're playing with fire, Jock.

DOUGAL Leave the man alone, Anne. I'm with you, Jock. Go ahead.

PAT Bigger the man - let's do it.

[JOCK places the haggis on a table and stands proudly by it.]

BAINES *[Looks horrified at what is about to happen and dashes out to the interior shouting.]* Mr Colmondley-Beauchamp! Mr Colmondley-Beauchamp!

JOCK *[Reads the 'Ode to a Haggis' until he gets to the part that requires the slicing of it.]*

My dirk - where is my dirk?

[Enter a distressed NIGELLA from interior.]

NIGELLA Help! Help! It's Nigel!

JOCK *[Trying to hide the haggis.]* Where?

NIGELLA It's awful! It's terrible!

ANNE What is? Mrs Cholmondley-Beauchamp - calm down. Tell us what is the matter.

NIGELLA It's Nigel.

PAT *[Slaps NIGELLA across the face.]* Calm down, woman.

NIGELLA It's Nigel. He's dead.

ALL What?

NIGELLA Stabbed.

DOUGAL Where?

NIGELLA In the chest.

DOUGAL No, no. Where is he?

NIGELLA In the bath.

JOCK A good clean death, then.

ANNE Jock! How could you?

DOUGAL Come on, Jock. We'd better check this out.

[Enter Inspector FOOT from exterior.]

FOOT Stay where you are, please.

ANNE And who do you think you are?

FOOT I, Madam, am Inspector Foot of the Yard.

JOCK Bloody sasenache!

FOOT That's Inspector Foot of Scotland Yard, sir.

JOCK In that case, welcome, Inspector.

FOOT I just happened to be passing and I heard the screams. Is there anything afoot?

DOUGAL Only you, Inspector.

FOOT What? Oh, yes. Very droll, sir. Is everyone here?

PAT That man Baines. Where is he?

FOOT Baines?

JOCK Mr Chol-mond-ley-Beau-champ's lackey.

NIGELLA My husband's butler, Inspector.

FOOT Someone find him while I go and see the bod... *[NIGELLA becomes distressed again.]* ...the scene of the crime.

ANNE Happy now, Mrs McPatrick?

PAT Why should I be happy?

ANNE No one is going to be going through your papers, are they.

PAT What are you insinuating?

NIGELLA I think Dougal will be the happy man now. He is next in line to inherit, isn't he?

ANNE Unless Mrs McPatrick knows differently.

PAT I'm getting very tired of your insinuations, Mrs McAllister. You will do all right by yourself if Dougal inherits, won't you.

ANNE I would never dream of presuming...

PAT Of course you would.

JOCK Please! Please! Let us not start squabbling between ourselves. What about the outsiders? Mrs Chol-mond-ley-Beau-champ here, for instance, or that creep Baines.

[Enter BAINES from interior.]

NIGELLA Ah, Baines. These yokels are trying to suggest that either you or I had something to do with the Master's death.

BAINES Really, Madam? I'm afraid that I fail to see any evidence that could lead them to such assumptions.

NIGELLA That's just what I was going to say.

JOCK You two knew him much better than we did. I learned to hate his guts within minutes of meeting him - you two must have had years of practice.

NIGELLA Why you...

[NIGELLA lunges at JOCK. ANNE throws herself at NIGELLA and DOUGAL tries to pull ANNE away. BAINES stands solemnly to one side and PAT studies him closely. FOOT enters]

FOOT Ladies and Gentleman - please!

[The hubbub settles.]

FOOT Thank you very much. Let us try to maintain a certain air of solemnity here.

PAT Baines here is very good at that.

FOOT What was that, madam?

PAT Oh, nothing.

FOOT I have been to the scene of the crime and can confirm, I'm afraid, that Mr Cholmondley-Beauchamp is, indeed, dead.

ALL Gasp.

FOOT And has most certainly been murdered.

ALL Gasp, again.

ANNE But who could it be, Inspector, we have a room full of people here.

FOOT Oh, I think we can rule out that lot. Just look at them - wouldn't have the wit to commit a murder. No - I'm afraid the only suspects are you six.

ALL What? *[Etc.]*

BAINES I fear that you must have made some mistake, Inspector. You could not possibly have intended to include myself in your wide ranging accusations.

FOOT I include everyone. Now if you would walk this way...

[Exit ALL.]