

*Author's note:*

*This excerpt takes place partway through the first act.*

*Characters:*

*Brent DEADMAN, a mysterious young man*

*VERA Ogham, the secretary of Philip Codwall*

*Stanford SCRIVEN, a world-famous consulting detective*

*Harrison MURDOCK, Scriven's assistant and close friend*

*Ellery WESTON, the butler*

*LOUISA Bird, the maid*

*VERA and DEADMAN are alone onstage in the Codwall manor sitting room after the first murder. A mysterious note was found beside the corpse:*

“.... If only she could persuade Philip to marry as soon as possible, her security would finally be assured. Her brow furrowed as she recalled her dark secret. No, the boy must never know, never. The results would be disastrous.

As Eulalia pondered this, a shadow fell over her plate. Surprised, she looked over a shoulder. Her features relaxed as she recognized her companion. ‘You again,’ she began. Those were the last words she managed before the letter knife plunged into her breast.”

DEADMAN: I didn't kill Miss Hudson, Vera, if that's what you think.

VERA: It's no good your trying to frighten me.

DEADMAN: May I call you Vera?

VERA: Why on Earth do you stare out the window like that?

DEADMAN: I like thunderstorms. I like to watch the rain making patterns on the glass. You can hear the rain.

VERA: It must be coming down something awful.

DEADMAN: Then it would be strange, wouldn't you say, if there were not a drop of water on this window?

VERA: The person who sent for you was not Sir Henry. As his secretary, I ought to know.

DEADMAN: Might have come directly from him. Wherever he's at.

VERA: What did the postmark say?

DEADMAN: No postmark. Damned thing was slipped under my door.

VERA: At home?

DEADMAN: Yes – no, at a hotel. I was... on holiday at the French Riviera.

VERA: Lovely at this time of year, I suppose.

DEADMAN: Have you ever had the feeling – Vera, I know I was at the Riviera. There's nothing of which I have been more certain in my life. And yet –

VERA: Yet what?

DEADMAN: It seems as if that's all there is. The memory.

VERA: The murder has shaken your nerves, whatever you may pretend to the contrary.

DEADMAN: I remember the Riviera. I remember the texture of the sand and the taste of cocktail I drank my last night there. What I mean is... it is as if none of it was there before I thought to remember it.

VERA: You ought to have a brandy.

She rises to pour him one, but he stops her.

DEADMAN: Where were you before you came here?

VERA: Upstairs answering letters. Let go of me, or I shall scream.

DEADMAN: Before that. Before you came to this house. Think of that time.

VERA: Let go!

DEADMAN: Do you see what I mean?

VERA: Mr. Deadman –

DEADMAN: Think harder.

MURDOCK and SCRIVEN enter.

VERA: I – I can't.

MURDOCK: I do hope we are not... er, intruding?

VERA: (recovering first) Not at all. I was about to return to the study so that I might get on with my duties.

She exits stage right. DEADMAN stalks behind.

MURDOCK: That fellow is not to be trusted. Perhaps we ought to follow at a discrete distance.

SCRIVEN: Perfectly safe.

MURDOCK: Her? How can you be so confident?

SCRIVEN: I know.

MURDOCK: Well, if you believe it to be so... Nasty business, this. Anyone could have done it, there's the trouble.

SCRIVEN: The note.

MURDOCK: Even more troubling, I suppose. Why would anyone have written it?

SCRIVEN: Is it accurate?

MURDOCK: What – oh, yes, I see what you mean.

SCRIVEN: “Again”.

MURDOCK: “You again,” she says. If that's true, then the murderer had to have been someone to whom she'd spoken not long before. Deadman? Young Codwall?

SCRIVEN: Or Mary Susanne.

MURDOCK: The murderer would have had to type the note after the murder.

SCRIVEN: If, indeed, the murderer was the one who typed it at all.

MURDOCK: Who else could it have been? If our mysterious friend was not the murderer, then someone else knows the murderer's identity. Perhaps – perhaps this is a foolish way of trying to give us a clue.

SCRIVEN: Dark secret.

MURDOCK: You think she did have one, then?

SCRIVEN: Who does not?

MURDOCK: You and I, for a start. (SCRIVEN says nothing) Come now, Scriven, surely you don't think – I have no secrets from you, you know.

SCRIVEN: I know.

MURDOCK: To whom would Miss Hudson have confided?

SCRIVEN: Murdock?

MURDOCK: Perhaps the maid, despite any rebukes the old girl may have had for her. Or the butler. There's a fellow who can keep a stiff upper lip.

SCRIVEN: Perhaps...

MURDOCK: What?

SCRIVEN: Perhaps you are closer than you think about the butler. (beat)  
Murdock, do you believe in Fate?

WESTON crawls in from stage left. He  
has been mortally poisoned.

MURDOCK: What do you mean?

SCRIVEN: That every moment is meant to be. You see? Our arrival at Codwall Manor. The first time you and I chanced to meet. We two here like this.

MURDOCK: You mean, for whatever reason, Fortune has thrown us together. I mean, you think there is a reason.

SCRIVEN: I ought to have told you sooner...

WESTON: Help... me...

MURDOCK: Good heavens!

SCRIVEN: Murdock!

Together, MURDOCK and SCRIVEN  
heave WESTON onto the couch.

MURDOCK: What is it?

SCRIVEN takes WESTON's pulse and smells his breath.

SCRIVEN: Poison. Loosen his collar.

MURDOCK: Is there a doctor nearby?

SCRIVEN: Codwall.

MURDOCK: You're right, Codwall will know. I'll fetch him.

WESTON: No!

SCRIVEN: Louisa!

LOUISA enters from stage left.

MURDOCK: Run for the doctor, girl, and be quick about it!

LOUISA runs off upstage centre.

WESTON: The young master –

MURDOCK: We'll find him.

WESTON: No – the study...

SCRIVEN: Study?

MURDOCK: What study, man? Whose study?

WESTON: Murder...

MURDOCK: We'll bring you water. Brandy?

WESTON: No – Sir Henry Codwall... Sir Henry... Codwall's... study...

MURDOCK: Weston!

But WESTON has expired. Beat. As MURDOCK and SCRIVEN stare, a slip of paper flutters from above. Beat. SCRIVEN picks it up and hands it to MURDOCK.

MURDOCK: ““Codwall... Sir Henry... Codwall’s... study...’ gasped the butler. His eyelids sagged. ‘Weston!’ But it was too late. The butler’s face suffused with blood. Then he collapsed.” (beat) Scriven, no one else is in the room. No one could have seen that but you and I.

SCRIVEN: I know.

MURDOCK: No one could have known I would call his name.