

MASS GRAVE

A Thriller for Stage

1 Act, 9 Characters

by

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MASS GRAVE

Dr. Savaard is dead. He was executed following a trial for murder. So why is he hosting a dinner party for the very people who condemned him? Dr. Savaard uses the power of science to create a house of hidden terrors in this twisting tale of justice from the beyond.

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Author's Note: Portions based on the 1939 film "The Man They Could Not Hang," starring Boris Karloff, story by George Wallace Sayre and Leslie T. White, screenplay by Karl Brown, directed by Nick Grinde.

THE CHARACTERS

DR. HENRY SAVAARD, *an older man*

JUDGE BOWMAN, *an older man*

GEOFF WILCOX, *a man*

BERT LUNT, *a younger man*

LAURA SAVAARD, *a young woman*

MS. BETTY ROSE, *a woman*

DOUG TRUMBLE, *a man*

MRS. JUDITH KOZLOV, *a woman*

TOM "TINY" NEWTON, *a man of smaller stature*

THE SCENE

The dining room and the antechamber of a country home.

THE ERA

The 20th century.

THE STAGE

The greatest portion of the stage is a dining room with table set for seven. There is a covered main dish in the center and soup bowls. Doors crafted from elegant iron bars are stage right. There are large windows covered by drawn curtains. A corner table has a telephone placed upon it. There is a grandfather clock. An upper railing leads to a barely seen library. There is also a functional wood fireplace with poker.

The stage also accommodates a bi-level, walled antechamber, poorly lit, that occupies a sliver of stage left. There is a single slit high above arm's reach that looks down upon the dining room. In the chamber are various apparatuses and an address system. There is one crate, set on the floor, big enough for a person. There is one door to the chamber, inaccessible from the dining room.

Lights rise on BERT LUNT as he prepares the table for dinner. BERT squares the silver, pours wine, and straightens his dinner jacket and pats his hair.

A doorbell rings.

He exits through the iron doors to an off-stage foyer.

Voices are heard in the just outside the iron double doors.

WILCOX

(Off-stage)

Yes, I'm looking for Judge Bowman.

BERT

(Off-stage)

He's not arrived yet.

WILCOX

(Off-stage)

Then I'm at the right place?

BERT

(Off-stage)

You are, Mr. Wilcox.

WILCOX

(Off-stage)

That's me. How did you know my name?

BERT

(Off-stage)

Hang your coat and then please follow me.

The two enter the dining room.

WILCOX

Who are you?

BERT

My name is Bert Lunt.

WILCOX

Pleased to meet you. May I call you Bert? I like to be friendly when I'm in places unfamiliar. You can call me Geoff.

BERT

Yes, that's fine.

WILCOX

Are you a friend of the judge?

BERT

I've never met him. I'm looking forward to it.

WILCOX

So what's with all the mystery? I got this --

A doorbell rings.

BERT

Pardon me.

BERT exits.

WILCOX paces, looks at the grandfather clock: 6:45. He taps his watch, winds it.

BERT returns with MS. BETTY ROSE, whom WILCOX seems to recognize.

BERT

This is Ms. Rose.

An exchange of smiles and handshakes.

WILCOX

Ms. Rose. Are you a friend of the judge, too?

BETTY

You're that reporter.

WILCOX

Recognize me, huh?

BETTY

Of course.

WILCOX

I'm always surprised. Still not used it.

BERT

May I get either of you a drink?

WILCOX

Sure, what have you got?

BERT

Just wine, I'm afraid.

WILCOX

I'll skip for now. I'm more of a hard stuff type.

BETTY

I'll have wine. For my nerves.

WILCOX

Are you nervous?

BETTY

That's a silly question. But I have more a reason, I suppose, than you would, Mr. Wilcox.

WILCOX

I don't understand.

BETTY

Because of what's happened. Or don't you read the papers your write for?

WILCOX

I try not to.

BETTY

Did you receive a letter?

WILCOX
A letter?

BETTY
From the judge?

WILCOX
Oh, that letter.

A doorbell rings.

WILCOX (Continued)
Everyone's very prompt, aren't they, Bert?

BERT exits.

WILCOX (Continued)
(To BETTY)
What did yours say?

BETTY
6:30 at this address.
(Scanning foyer)
Is that the judge?

BERT speaks with another man in the
foyer, their conversation blurred.

BETTY (Continued)
What are they saying?
(Calling)
What are you saying?

BERT returns with TOM "TINY" NEWTON.

WILCOX
Say -- it's Tiny Newton.

NEWTON throws down his hat on a chair.

NEWTON

I prefer "Tom."

WILCOX

Apologies. Never thought I'd see you again. I don't get to the circus much. Though I saw a picture on a poster. Brought me back to that last time I saw you. No high-wire act that day, huh, Tiny. I mean Tom.

NEWTON

I see you haven't changed, Mr. Wilcox.

WILCOX

Foot in my mouth again? I'm sorry. Let's start again. At least maybe that coverage I gave you helped sell a few tickets, right, Tom?

NEWTON

Those were two pretty different markets. Don't you think?

WILCOX

Sure, sure. What's the plot here, Bert? These are two of the Savaard jurors. And the judge? Is this about the murders? Are they reopening the case?

BETTY

(Gesturing to WILCOX)

We received letters.

NEWTON

Mine was a telegram. Yesterday, I was in Des Moines. I've got a two-day window. It was stupid of me to come back, when you think about it. I haven't seen this town since the trial. And that seems to be workin' in my favor.

BETTY

This isn't really "the town."

NEWTON

Yeah. Hard road to find, wasn't it?

WILCOX

Dark plays tricks.

BETTY

It took me forty minutes. How long has the judge lived out this far?

A doorbell rings.

No one moves.

BERT, transfixed, snaps out of it, then nods and exits.

Soon, multiple voices can be heard from the foyer.

TRUMBLE

(Off-stage)

Freezing! To call me out here. I've got work to do.

JUDITH

(Off-stage)

I almost didn't come. My husband begged me to stay.

TRUMBLE

(Off-stage)

We'll get to the bottom of this. Don't worry. Madness. Madness to step foot out tonight. My windshield was ice. You know, it's cold more than it's hot in this city?

TRUMBLE and JUDITH, then BERT enter the dining room where the others stand dumb.

WILCOX

Say, how many people you expecting, Bert?

NEWTON

Table's set for seven.

BETTY

(Counting the room)

One, two, three, four, five, six. And I suppose Judge Bowman is the seventh.

TRUMBLE

I've been to Judge Bowman's house. Twice. On continuance. The judge lives on the north side. He never mentioned a country home. Are you his butler?

BERT

I'm just a student.

TRUMBLE

Law student? Abandon it. Abandon it now. Being on the side of the law is nothing but a pain in the ass. Night like tonight. You know it's freezing out there. And I had plans, until, until--

TRUMBLE digs in his pockets.

JUDITH

You have a letter as well.

TRUMBLE

Yes. By messenger just as I was leaving the office.

BERT

Everyone here has been invited.

WILCOX

Where's Judge Bowman? He's late for his own damn dinner party.

BERT

I'm afraid this won't be much of a party.

A doorbell rings.

BERT (Continued)

That must be him now.

The six are silent as BERT exits.

Slowly, methodically...

Footsteps are heard.

BOWMAN enters, with all the severity of an undertaker.

Still in his heavy coat, BOWMAN looks around the room at the faces of the others. From his pocket, he retrieves a folded letter.

BOWMAN

(Reading)

"Honorable Judge Bowman. I have discovered some startling facts regarding the murders of the seven Savaard jurors in the past five weeks. I have located the surviving jurors and have them under police protection at the below address. You must come at once in order to secure their safety and a conviction. Secrecy is urgent to our case. Please come alone at the time listed in the bottom of this letter. Urgently yours, District Attorney Doug Trumble." And your signature. Mr. Trumble.

BOWMAN hands the letter to TRUMBLE.

TRUMBLE

It's a forgery.

TRUMBLE passes his own letter to BOWMAN. BOWMAN reads.

BOWMAN

Also a fake.

BOWMAN crumples the letter.

BETTY shakes out her letter.

BETTY

I came here for protection.

JUDITH

I came for an answer. Is it a curse?

BETTY

We are cursed.

JUDITH

This is someone's idea of a cruel joke.

TRUMBLE

We should leave. It isn't safe.

WILCOX

Let's go. Bert, you're on your own.

The group moves toward the iron doors.
Just as they reach it --

A tall figure appears in the doorway.

His face pale. His fingers are black.
His eyes hollow. His hair white. He
wears a rumpled suit.

BETTY gasps. WILCOX makes a stand.

SAVAARD

Thank you all for coming.

(Pause)

No. My friends. I'm not a ghost.

SAVAARD steps forward and holds out his
hand to BOWMAN.

SAVAARD (Continued)

Judge Bowman. It's such a great pleasure to see you again.
I've thought about this moment for some time.

BOWMAN

Dr. Savaard. I...can't believe it.

SAVAARD

Do.

TRUMBLE

Is it a ghost? I examined his body myself.

BOWMAN

How did you do it? You were electrocuted in front of two-dozen witnesses.

SAVAARD

(With charm)

Perhaps I'll tell you at dinner.

WILCOX

We were just leaving.

SAVAARD

Oh, please. Join me for a drink. You know, I'm very sorry for the ruse. I knew I wanted to speak with all of you. I hope you'll understand that if I had used my own name, you would have thought it a tasteless joke. But. Yes, yes, yes...now you are all here. I very much appreciate the effort. I realize it's cold outside and I can only offer you some trivial comforts. But I felt it was important that we connect. Here: has Bert provided you all with a libation? Let me get things rolling. This occasion need to be quite so somber. Or, should I say sober?

SAVAARD pours wine and holds the glass.

BOWMAN

Your fingers.

SAVAARD looks at his black fingers.

SAVAARD

A side effect of the alternating current of your particularly uncomfortable chair. Along with the complexion, and my hair, which you shaved well, but, as you can, is beginning to return. I wondered if that was even possible. Now if I had died of natural causes...or more...humane...causes...I believe you'd see me in my pre-death state.

WILCOX

I don't believe it. It works?

SAVAARD

I told you it worked. I told you for ten days. At my trial. So did my lawyer and a partially validating committee of a dozen noted scientists. None of who will ever carry on any of my research, now that they've seen your small-minded precedent.

(Glass raised)

Cheers.

(Holds)

Please, who wants to celebrate with me? I didn't have time to stock a full bar, but you'll like this vintage a good deal, for those daring enough for a New World wine.

They just stare.

SAVAARD pours a few more glasses.

SAVAARD (Continued)

I assure you it's not poison.

He drinks, smiles, toasts again.

SAVAARD (Continued)

Judge Bowman...Mrs. Kozlov, Ms. Rose, Mr. Newton, Mr. Wilcox...District Attorney Trumble.

NEWTON

If you're intention was to bring us all together, you're a few short.

SAVAARD

Yes, unfortunate about those that passed.

NEWTON

I mean Mr. Sypniewski and Mrs. Turner.

SAVAARD

You mean the ones who fought for my acquittal for sixty hours before you beat them down? No one wants a hung jury.

(MORE)

SAVAARD (Continued)

It dirties the laundry. No, Mr. Sypniewski and Mrs. Turner had other engagements. I believe Mrs. Turner was taking her daughter ice-skating. Mr. Sypniewski had a football game -- his favorite team. I wouldn't dare intrude.

(Gesturing)

And I believe Bert has other plans as well, don't you?

BERT

Yes. I'll be leaving. It's been a pleasure to meet all of you. Goodnight.

When BERT leaves, he closes the iron bar doors and disappears.

BOWMAN

Savaard -- I don't know what you're up to, but I know I don't like it. I would be an idiot to stay.

SAVAARD

What could I do? You outnumber me seven to one. And even before my electrocution, I was well past my prime. I think Mr. Newton here could make quick work of me.

BOWMAN

If you have anything to say, Savaard, I'll hear it now. But I won't be staying for dinner.

TRUMBLE

As a matter of fact, Doctor, we have more business with you that you have with us. About those jurors who have died --

SAVAARD

My dear Mr. District Attorney, your law is shockingly bad. I have a perfect alibi. I am legally dead.

BOWMAN

If you have nothing to say, I'll be going. My office will follow up with you -

SAVAARD

One moment, please... I've asked you all here because there is a plot against your lives. That same fiend who killed the other jurors intends to kill each of you tonight.

BOWMAN

I was your presiding judge at your trial. These people voted for capital punishment. I prefer to be surrounded by armed guards than out here in the country with a man like you. Why should you want to protect me?

SAVAARD

I'll explain all that over dinner. Look, Bert has arranged everything so nicely. Note the placecards with your names on them. As well as the plot, I have some other vital information that you'd be very sorry you missed. Shall we dine?

No one moves.

SAVAARD (Continued)

If you leave, I will not stop you. But I know that anyone who leaves has a very slim chance of learning the full extent of the plot against you. And you lessen your changes at survival. There are forces against you that you do not understand. But I do.

Slowly, BETTY pulls out a chair.

As does NEWTON.

Soon, all the guests are awkwardly seated.

BOWMAN is the last to take his chair.

SAVAARD smiles then takes the head position.

SAVAARD (Continued)

It's not a very fancy dinner. But I do hope you enjoy. Cold soup and cold pheasant. Bert isn't much of a cook.

TRUMBLE

He says he's a student.

SAVAARD

That's correct. He studied with me last summer. He now is courting my daughter, Laura, who me consoled after my death.

BETTY

That sounds creepy.

SAVAARD

I suppose it does. As you know from numerous articles, courtesy of Mr. Wilcox, Laura is the light of my life since her mother died. She's believed in me and trusts me. I think her and Bert make a fantastic couple and I hope that one day they'll be married. You know, in her heart, Laura is still an innocent. She had been at my boots during many experiments -- successes, failures, praise and damnation. But to see me killed by the judging hands of others must have been --

NEWTON

How'd you do it, Savaard?

SAVAARD

I think I described the procedure quite well in my trial. I came back in the same way I intended bring that boy Martin Ribbich back...before your police thugs broke the door down. Here was this young man -- healthy in all respects except one: his heart. A surgery while living would be too much for a body, but after death the body feels nothing and heals faster. But there's the limited window before rigor mortis gets a foothold. We are organic creatures after all. If the heart is stopped for too long, you cannot recover. Poor Martin Ribbich. The police made me miss my appointment.

BOWMAN

You had someone put to death. By your hand.

SAVAARD

A volunteer! Then, you made me into a liar. This volunteer had put his trust in me. I would have done it. I would have saved Martin Ribbich. Looking at me should be all the proof you need.

TRUMBLE

If you were dead, who brought you back?

SAVAARD

It was Bert. He followed my notes exactly. He made only one adjustment to the timing of the machine and I was alive within an hour of my electrocution.

WILCOX

That's why you donated your body to science!

SAVAARD

I gambled on my young student, who came to visit me with Laura on the night of my execution.

JUDITH

Does your daughter know you're alive?

SAVAARD

She does not. Bert and I have kept it secret. Tomorrow I will tell her I'm alive.

TRUMBLE

All right, Dr. Savaard. It's time you told us. Did you kill those other jurors?

SAVAARD

And if I did, what lawman would dare to suggest it? A dead man can't kill. At least not kill and be tried for it. If I were to kill all of you tonight, who would bring a charge against me? There's no precedent.

As SAVAARD speaks, lights rise on the antechamber. BERT, in coat, appears through the small door. He finds a switch on the wall and throws it.

The dining room lights dim and return.

SAVAARD (Continued)

These county power lines. Unreliable in cold weather.

BERT exits the antechamber, lights down again.

BOWMAN

Doctor, you have exactly one minute to tell us what you know of the murders or I am driving out of here and coming back with a brigade.

Pause.

SAVAARD

This isn't your courtroom, Judge Bowman. You don't run the clock here. I will tell what I will tell when I will want to tell it. And it's in your interest to listen. I have been...consumed...with speeches these last weeks. Things I would say to each of you. Things I wanted you know about me. The kind of man I am. Ms. Rose: Who am I?

BETTY

I don't know what you mean.

SAVAARD

Did you consider me a madman?

BETTY

No. But you killed someone. It's the law to punish you.

SAVAARD

How about you, Mr. Newton?

NEWTON

Crazy as a loon.

SAVAARD

(Smiles)

I guess I've always been on the outside of things. I'm a fringe man, even in scientific community. Despite my awards and grants.

TRUMBLE

You were a vain main who thought he was God.

SAVAARD

Mrs. Kozlov?

JUDITH

I thought you were a mindless, craven monster.

SAVAARD

Let's ask the wisest "Wise Man" among us. Judge Bowman: not that it will sway the remaining jury...but what kind of man did you know me to be?

BOWMAN considers his answer.

BOWMAN

I think that you are driven. Driven by an intellect, and a desire that most men will never embrace nor understand. And sometimes, as is often the case with driven men...you forget about the *morality* of your actions.

SAVAARD nods, smiles.

SAVAARD

Did you think I would be capable of cold-blooded murder that serves no scientific purpose?

BOWMAN

No...I don't think so. You do everything with purpose.

SAVAARD

Well. Let's test that theorem tonight.

(Snappy)

I've got a party game for us all to enjoy. Take a look at your placecards. On the top, you'll see your names...

The guests examine their cards.

SAVAARD (Continued)

And in the corner, very small, is the exact time of your death this evening. Each of you ten minutes apart. Judge Bowman, because I have so much respect for you and your "wisdom," you have the honor of going first. You have exactly two minutes to live. Seven o'clock is nearly upon us.

BOWMAN looks to the grandfather clock and confirms it.

BOWMAN
You have resorted to threats.

SAVAARD
(Leaning)
Yes, I *have*.

BOWMAN
Then I have misjudged you.

SAVAARD
It wouldn't be the first time.

BOWMAN
Savaard, I'm leaving, and don't you try to stop me.

BOWMAN stands, as do others.

SAVAARD grabs BOWMAN's arm.

SAVAARD
If you attempt to leave this house, it will be the last act
of your life.

BOWMAN stalls, and then barrels to the
doors.

SAVAARD
You *will* die.

BOWMAN grabs the knob of the iron door.

Sparks and lights erupt.

BOWMAN convulses, unable to let go of
the doors for a moment before falling.

Lights out -- the stage is plunged to
blackness.

JUDITH screams.

TRUMBLE gasps.

Breathing. Dark. Silence.

After a lull, the lights rise again.

The room is as before, except:

BOWMAN lies dead, still clasping the doors.

SAVAARD is no longer in the room.

The antechamber is dark.

TRUMBLE races to BOWMAN's body.

WILCOX

Don't touch him!

NEWTON

What happened?

TRUMBLE

He's been electrocuted.

WILCOX

These doors must be charged with current. Stand back.

The men retreat.

TRUMBLE

Where'd he go?

BETTY

I didn't see him.

The clock rings seven chimes.

JUDITH

He knew exactly when Judge Bowman would die.

Slowly, the others drift to the dining room table, retrieving their placecards.

WILCOX

Who has 7:10?

Shakes of the head, then:

JUDITH nods.

TRUMBLE goes to a window and slowly pulls the curtain aside.

Behind the window: brick, a solid wall.

NEWTON checks the second window. The same.

NEWTON

Pardon me, Ladies and Gentlemen, but this has all the earmarks of a trap.

WILCOX

If we're bricked in, how did Savaard get out?

BETTY

There must be *some* way.

SAVAARD's voice comes over a loudspeaker.

SAVAARD

(Over speaker)

Don't bother looking. You won't be able to reach me, but I can reach you at any time of my choosing. Your situation is hopeless. In an hour, all of you will be dead.

(MORE)

SAVAARD (Continued)

Starting with you: Mrs. Kozlov. You were foreman of the jury. You worked so very hard to convince the others that I was this...mindless, craven monster. Well, has tonight confirmed your perception?

Lights rise on the antechamber.

SAVAARD climbs to the slat and looks upon those below. He speaks into the address system.

SAVAARD (Continued)

(Over speaker)

Rest assured you all made me this way. Before you killed me, I was a man of intellect, like the judge said. But he was wrong; I had my morality. My daughter could have confirmed that if you ever dared to call her to the witness stand. But you didn't want to believe what I had done was for the future of mankind. That it was a selfless act. You preferred to think of me as delusional. Now no man of science will ever attempt such a thing again. Because they've seen how it ends. In persecution and death.

TRUMBLE

Show yourself, Savaard!

SAVAARD

(Over speaker)

In four minutes, Mrs. Kozlov will be dead. And there's nothing you can do about it.

Lights out in the antechamber.

JUDITH

You've got to get me out of here! You've got to protect me.

TRUMBLE

(To JUDITH)

Panicking won't get us anywhere.

WILCOX
Look, a phone.

BETTY
Don't touch it!

NEWTON
It could be rigged.

WILCOX picks up the phone anyway and
puts it to his ear.

WILCOX
Dead.

JUDITH begins to weep.

NEWTON
Help! Help!

TRUMBLE
Shut up -- no one can hear you.

WILCOX
Look...what if, what if we surround her. Form a circle.
Like this.

WILCOX arranges the four facing out
around JUDITH.

WILCOX (Continued)
Join hands. Everyone keep a lookout for anything.
Anything at all.

The hold in a circle for a full minute.

RING! The telephone rings, startling.

NEWTON

(To WILCOX)

I thought you said it was dead.

WILCOX

(Defensive)

It was.

Another ring.

WILCOX (Continued)

We should answer it. It could be help.

NEWTON

It could be a trap.

WILCOX

Not if I answer it. I'm not until the last.

BETTY

No, don't answer it. It's bad.

WILCOX breaks the circle. He makes
TRUMBLE and BETTY hold hands.

BETTY (Continued)

He tricked Judge Bowman. He knew the surest way to send
him to the door was to demand for him not to leave. He's
doing something now, too.

Another ring.

WILCOX stands by the phone.

Another ring.

Quickly, he picks up.

WILCOX

(Into phone)

Hello! Yes. Who is this?

(Hand over receiver)

It's Mr. Kozlov!

JUDITH

My husband! I told him I-

WILCOX

(Into phone)

Yes -- yes...

TRUMBLE

Tell him to call for help!

WILCOX

(Into phone)

Listen, Mr. Kozlov. Just listen. Dr. Savaard is alive! Yes, he's alive. He's trapped us in a house off County Line Road -- at Route 7. He's trying to kill us all. He's already killed Judge Bowman.

Pause, WILCOX listens.

JUDITH

What's he saying!

WILCOX

I can't tell. I can barely hear him.

JUDITH

Dimitri!

WILCOX

Quiet! Will you be quiet!

(Pause)

What Dimitri?

(Pause)

I can't hear him. He's got an accent.

JUDITH

He's Russian. Give the phone to me.

WILCOX

(Into phone)

Listen. Wait. Mr. Kozlov. Wait. I'm going to put your wife on the line.

WILCOX stretches the phone cord.

WILCOX (Continued)

Don't break the circle.

He hands the receiver to JUDITH.

JUDITH

(Into phone)

Dimitri -- help us, help me. Please come quickly. Dr. Savaard is...is! Dimitri...Dimitri...

(To others)

I...I can't hear. I can't.

(Into phone)

What, Dimitri? Speak louder!

JUDITH suddenly begins to scream.
TRUMBLE tries to catch her from falling.

NEWTON breaks his grip and grabs the phone.

As JUDITH falls, the phone's receiver draws away from her head.

Sticking from the earpiece is a long, sharp spike.

JUDITH crumples on the floor, bleeding profusely from the head, dead, confusing. She dies.

BETTY hyperventilates.

TRUMBLE

Jesus Christ!

NEWTON examines the end of the phone,
the spike.

NEWTON

Must have been on a spring--

SAVAARD

(Over speaker)

I wouldn't touch that if I were you, Mr. Newton, unless you
wanted to get a jump on 7:30. There's a horribly painful
poison on the end of that spike.

WILCOX

You animal! You just killed a woman.

Lights up on the antechamber.

SAVAARD

(Over speaker)

Who is the animal? The one in the tower or the one in the
cage?

BETTY

Let us go. Please. Dr. Savaard. You don't have to do
this. You don't. Please.

SAVAARD

(Over speaker)

I'm afraid I have to, Ms. Rose. You've consumed my every
thought since I've come back to life. They have said death
is transcendent, and now I believe it to be true. The four
of you will know very soon that same waking dream. I will
join you again at 7:20.

Click.

Pause.

The four are aimless.

BETTY holds, watching the clock.
WILCOX combs the room for something,
anything. Slowly, TRUMBLE paces, as...

SAVAARD climbs down to the floor of the
antechamber. From a crate, he pulls
out a small rifle. He finds a box of
bullets.

Suddenly, the exterior door to the
antechamber opens.

BERT re-enters the antechamber,
startling SAVAARD.

BERT

(Surprised)

Dr. Savaard. Is the dinner over?

SAVAARD

Yes. Yes, Bert. Yes, it is.

SAVAARD sets aside the rifle.

BERT

How did they take the news? Was it like you said?

(No answer)

I wish you had let me stay. I would have liked to have
seen their faces when you showed them you were alive again.
Smarter than, than... Smarter than all of them. True?

SAVAARD

So you came back to see them shake my hands.

BERT

Well...sure. Curious I guess. I told Laura that I--. I
followed all your instructions. I set everything just as
you wanted. Even dimmed the lights like you asked before I
left. I know you told me to stay clear, but--

SAVAARD

I wish you had listened.

BERT
What did they say? Is it clemency so you can, can keep working?

SAVAARD
Not exactly.

SAVAARD points to the slat.

BERT, slowly, climbs and peers into the dining room below.

SAVAARD bends to the crate and withdraws something.

Realizing, he climbs back down.

BERT (Continued)
What's the rifle for, Dr. Savaard?
(Nervous)
This was the plan all along. Wasn't it? You told me the other jurors that were killed were coincidence...or someone else.

SAVAARD
If you had just given me the two days, this would all be taken care of. It would be a rumor.

BERT
I saw two bodies.

SAVAARD
The foreman. And Judge Bowman.

BERT
You'd never get away with it.

SAVAARD
You can't put a dead man on trial.

BERT
I should have stopped you. I should have talked some sense into you. What will Laura say?

SAVAARD
She was to never know!

BERT
She'll have to know.

SAVAARD
(With pity)
Laura loved you. You were going to be married.

BERT
Stop babbling, Doctor S--

SAVAARD takes a rope from behind his back and strangles BERT to death.

As the body falls, he holds the arms. Opening the door, he drags BERT's body out of view, to exit.

In the dining room, TRUMBLE points to the upper library.

TRUMBLE
Could we climb up there?

WILCOX stops his mad search. He looks up and around.

BETTY
I keep wondering how Dr. Savaard got out of the room. There must be another way.

TRUMBLE
Do you think he climbed up there?

WILCOX
No. He couldn't have. He'd need a boost from someone.

TRUMBLE
Here! You can ally-oop me. I think I can reach it.

WILCOX

Hold on...

WILCOX picks up forks and knives from the dining table. He throws them at the railing.

Sparks.

WILCOX (Continued)

It's electrified, too.

BETTY

He's thought of everything, hasn't he?

TRUMBLE looks at BOWMAN's dead body.

TRUMBLE

He was a good man. A lot of people hated him, but I didn't. He did a lot of things right. Including convicting Dr. Savaard.

(Pause)

I can't stand to look at him like this. Do you think it's all right to touch him?

BETTY

Don't touch anything!

NEWTON

Electricity lasts only a few seconds. He's not touching the iron.

WILCOX

Let's put him next to Mrs. Kozlov. We can cover them with the tablecloth.

They move to do this, but WILCOX stops.

WILCOX (Continued)

Wait. This may be what he wants. It's 7:17. Should we wait until 7:21? He's so precise. If he goes off schedule he might crack.

TRUMBLE

Or he might just kill us all at once.

WILCOX

No...he doesn't want to do that. He's loving this. He's drinking it down slowly like his lousy wine.

NEWTON

Is he watching us?

(Soft)

Can he hear what we're saying?

TRUMBLE

You're right. We should keep our voices down. The more he hears us say were out of options, the more he's in control.

TRUMBLE

Let's at least take off the tablecloth. He couldn't have predicted that. I can't look at these...people.

BETTY

Are you certain? You're the 7:20, aren't you?

TRUMBLE nods. It doesn't stop him.

NEWTON

Here, I'll help.

NEWTON goes to an end and grips the tablecloth.

TRUMBLE passes by the covered pheasant.

TRUMBLE

He probably didn't even intend to feed us.

TRUMBLE lifts the covered serving tray where the pheasant would be.

Underneath, no pheasant; instead, a child's rag doll.

TRUMBLE's face changes.

NEWTON

What? What is it?

WILCOX

Mr. District Attorney?

TRUMBLE eyes the doll.

Lights up on the antechamber. SAVAARD returns, BERT's body disposed. SAVAARD climbs back to the slat.

BETTY reaches out toward the doll and TRUMBLE grabs her hand.

TRUMBLE

Don't touch it. It might be booby-trapped.

BETTY

That's my doll. From when I was a little girl. Annie.

BETTY bends into see better and moves TRUMBLE aside.

TRUMBLE

How can you be sure it's the same doll?

BETTY

Look. Look. It's torn. He wouldn't have known that. How could he have known that? I tore her dress on Christmas morning.

She puts a finger forward.

TRUMBLE

I said don't touch it! He meant it for you. We may have found it early.

With a fork, he pokes the doll.

A trap door opens under TRUMBLE's feet.

He disappears.

BETTY

(Screaming)

No!

The trap door shuts.

BETTY dives to the floor and claws at it.

BETTY

No! No!

WILCOX

The floor just swallowed him up!

NEWTON

Is he dead? Can you hear us, Trumble!

WILCOX

He's probably got a bed of nails down there -- more poison and spikes!

BETTY

No!

NEWTON

I didn't hear a thing. He didn't even scream.

WILCOX

How did you KNOW you MONSTER! How did you know he would stand over it! Did you come back as a God! I bet you like to think that, don't you!

SAVAARD

(Over speaker)

I *would* like to think so, Mr. Wilcox. You must know what it's like to play God, using the printed word to manipulate the lives and deaths of so many others. You used my case to sell your newspapers and made quite a name for yourself. But after my killing, did you print one word about what was lost? Imagine a world where people could live forever. When a car's motor breaks, we don't throw out the whole motor. We replace a part and it goes on, just as we could have gone on. A body free from disease or brute trauma can live forever if allowed to undergo repairs. I'm living proof of that, Mr. Wilcox!

WILCOX

You're proof of nothing but how EVIL men can be!

BETTY

Please stop! Let us go! We won't tell anyone! You want us to say you're a genius. I'll do that. You want us to say we were wrong? Well, well, that's easy enough. We were wrong. We made a bad decision. I just received a summons and I came. To do what I was asked. Not this! Please. You can let us go.

SAVAARD

(Over speaker)

I certainly couldn't do that now, Ms. Rose. I'm "all-in" as they say in the card games.

NEWTON

This isn't a game. People will come looking for me, you know! When I don't turn up--

SAVAARD

(Over speaker)

I know all about your drinking, Mr. Newton. Or should I call you Tiny. It isn't fun being such a pip, is it? You think you can pass judgment? You're in the circus where you belong.

WILCOX

You haven't answered! How did you KNOW Trumble would be standing there! If we're sport, at least give us a fighting chance.

SAVAARD

(Over speaker)

I like your psychology, Wilcox. But it won't work.

WILCOX

Prove to us you're human. I have yet to see it.

Pause.

SAVAARD

(Over speaker)

Well, if you must know, it was luck. The doll was meant for you, Ms. Rose. So. There you have it. But just know that there's another deadly toy you've yet to discover. I'd be more careful, if I were you.

(Pause)

We meet again in seven minutes.

Click.

WILCOX

Savaard!

(Pause)

Savaard!

(Long pause)

Savaard!

NEWTON

It's no use. He's ignoring you.

WILCOX

I want to know where that goddamn voice is coming from. I want to RIP OUT ITS VOICE BOX.

WILCOX anxiously, excitedly combs the walls.

NEWTON

What if we asked for his forgiveness?

WILCOX

Yeah, you try that, Tiny.

WILCOX picks up a chair in frustration,
like he might just smash the clock.

BETTY

Don't! There might be a bomb inside for all we know.

WILCOX, at last, drops the chair.

Exhausted, he pants.

He spots something.

He moves to the body of BOWMAN.

WILCOX

(Softly)

Newton.

NEWTON approaches WILCOX.

WILCOX slyly puts a hand in BOWMAN's
coat. When he withdraws, he holds a
revolver to his body.

BETTY comes over and the three huddle.

BETTY

Savaard could have planted it.

WILCOX

Listen, listen...maybe, just...maybe, he's a judge, see?
And people hate judges. Crooks get out, they try to...like
our friend here. Try to exact revenge. Makes sense for a
judge to carry protection.

NEWTON

Why didn't he pull it on Savaard?

WILCOX

Good question.

(Pause)

No. The judge was too cool-headed for that.

BETTY

I still say it's a trick. Who's the last to go? It's you, isn't it? He walks in the room, you pull the trigger and it backfires and kills you.

WILCOX

Maybe. But how did he know I'd see it in the judge's coat. I only saw it because of the way he fell on the floor.

NEWTON

He might have guessed we'd move him at some point?

WILCOX

But how would he know I'd be the one to hold the gun. And not you.

BETTY

Is it loaded?

WILCOX checks, nods. He tucks the revolver into his jacket.

They look to the clock.

7:28.

In the antechamber, SAVAARD prepares the rifle.

BETTY looks down at the closed trapdoor.

BETTY

Do you think he used the trap door when the lights went off?

WILCOX snaps his fingers.

WILCOX

Hold the phone. Where's the light switch?

SAVAARD climbs up to the slat as the three survivors examine the dining room walls. NEWTON finds the lights and switches them off.

The dining room goes black. All that remains is the soft light of the antechamber.

SAVAARD can see nothing in the black room as he eyes the slat. He rests the rifle and picks up the speaker.

SAVAARD

(Over speaker)

You think by turning out the lights you'll stop me?

(Pause)

There are a million things you'll bump into in the dark.

(Pause)

It's 7:30. You'll miss your appointment, Mr. Newton.

(Silence)

You can't hide in the dark like frightened children forever. If it comes to it, I can starve you out.

(Pause)

You can't survive on doll soup.

SAVAARD, almost cruelly, flips a switch.

The fireplace lights, allowing a dim light into the room.

Even in this, we no longer see the three survivors.

SAVAARD aims the rifle.

CRACK!

Pause.

CRACK!

Pause.

He's firing, seemingly at random, into the dining room. He hit the dishware.

CRACK!

WILCOX cries out.

SAVAARD rests the rifle.

SAVAARD

(Over speaker)

You must take greater care to hide your shoulder, Mr. Wilcox.

(Pause)

I admit, I'm not much of a marksman. But you're not much of a mark.

(Pause)

I may have a little more trouble with the tiny one.

(Singsong)

Someone is late for an appointment...

WILCOX

Tell me something, Savaard. When you were dead, did you see God?

SAVAARD

(Over speaker)

Did I see God?

(Pause)

I met a man. He was sitting at a train station. I sat beside him and for a long time -- maybe an hour -- he said nothing, and I said nothing. At last, I couldn't take it any more.

WILCOX

What did you say?

SAVAARD

(Over speaker)

I asked him what time the next train would arrive.

(Pause)

Do you think that was God, Mr. Wilcox?

WILCOX

I think that was the Devil. Waiting to carry you home.

SAVAARD

(Over speaker)

Yes. You *would* think that, wouldn't you? What about the rest of you?

(Pause)

No guesses?

WILCOX

If I am ever within ten feet of you, Dr. Savaard...I will kill you. I will BREAK your in HALF!

SAVAARD again raises the gun.

SAVAARD

(Over speaker)

Change of plans, Mr. Wilcox. I believe I have an open slot in my appointment book.

There is a noise in the foyer, beyond the iron bars.

A door opens.

Footsteps.

Slowly, a figure approaches the bars

A woman. LAURA.

LAURA

(Calling into dining room)

Bert?

LAURA turns on the foyer light. She appears in silhouette.

She reaches for the iron.

WILCOX stands. His arm is covered in blood.

WILCOX

Don't touch it!

LAURA

(Scared, startled)

Who are you?

WILCOX

You've got to help us!

LAURA

What's going on?

BETTY springs up.

BETTY

You're Laura. Laura. Laura Savaard?

LAURA

What's going on?

WILCOX

You're father's murdered Judge Bowman, Mr. Trumble...he's locked us in here. Every ten minutes one of us dies.

LAURA

What? My father's dead.

BETTY

No he's not.

LAURA reaches again for the bars.

WILCOX

Don't touch it! It's electrified.

NEWTON

(Still in hiding)

Get the police, you dumb idiot!

LAURA

Who's that?

WILCOX

There're just three of us left. Your father shot me in the arm! Look, look -

WILCOX turns on the light switch and points to the dead bodies, his arm.

In the antechamber, SAVAARD lowers the gun, in shock.

LAURA holds.

LAURA

My father was executed five weeks ago.

WILCOX

Listen, can you, can you get us out of this room? Do you know the house? Is this your house, too? Didn't you grow up here?

LAURA

The windows--

BETTY

He's bricked them up.

WILCOX

You must know where he's hiding. We can hear his voice. The shots are, are from there...

LAURA

I don't hear any shots.

WILCOX

He hasn't fired in a few minutes. And he won't fire now.
He might hit you. You've got to help us get out.

LAURA

There's a door.

WILCOX

Where, where?

LAURA

Around the back. It leads to the antechamber.

WILCOX

The what?

LAURA

There's a chamber connected to the dining room. It's where
my father sometimes worked.

WILCOX

That's where he is, I know it.

LAURA still is dazed.

LAURA

Where's Bert? He phoned me. From the diner down the
street and sounded very strange--

WILCOX

He left hours ago. For Christ's sake, look at my arm!
Look at these bodies. Wake up!

LAURA

(Sensible)

I'll go 'round the back.

WILCOX

Yes, do that.

LAURA disappears.

Be careful.
BETTY

SAVAARD puts down the rifle and covers it with one of his machines.

He descends to the door of the antechamber.

In a moment, Laura is there.

She stares at him.

You're alive.
LAURA

I'm alive.
SAVAARD

I saw you--
LAURA

The technique.
SAVAARD
(Gestures)
These machines and notes. It was Bert.

They embrace.

Still in arms, they break apart.

LAURA (Continued)
Are you hurting those people?

I'm sorry.
SAVAARD

SAVAARD begins to drag her down.

Dad...
LAURA

SAVAARD

I'm sorry.

SAVAARD forces his daughter into the crate and locks it.

SAVAARD (Continued)

You shouldn't have come here, Laura. Not until I had finished my work. *This* is what I came back for. I would be done and then we could live again!

LAURA

(Screaming, through crate)

Dad! No! Dad! Stop it! Please!

SAVAARD retrieves the rifle, and takes his position.

He stops, covers his ears as LAURA's pleads continue.

He pulls a switch.

The fire in the fireplace snuffs out.

NEWTON notices.

NEWTON

(To WILCOX)

I can fit through there.

WILCOX

Don't be a fool, Newton. Don't you think he knows that?

As he prepares to aim, SAVAARD fires accidentally and a bullet hits the wall of the dining room.

WILCOX

(To BETTY)

He's up there. Against the wall.

LAURA

(Through crate)

Dad! What's happening! Stop!

WILCOX buries BETTY against the wall of the antechamber.

NEWTON races for the fireplace.

He's inside an up the wall...

WILCOX

Newton!

SAVAARD sees NEWTON.

Just as NEWTON's feet disappear up the chimney, he turns on the fire, full-throttle.

Flames!

NEWTON can be heard screaming off stage.

WILCOX and BETTY flatten against the wall.

Through the screaming and the eventual dissolve, LAURA's cries become more and more clear...

LAURA

(Through crate)

I love you! I love you, Dad! I love you. I love you. Stop it. I love you. Stop!

This repetition hits SAVAARD.

Realizing, almost shamefully, he switches off the fireplace.

Slowly, he descends from the slat.

SAVAARD looks at the rifle in his hands. He tosses it to the ground.

LAURA

(Through crate, weaker)

Dad! Dad! I can't breathe. Dad...

Quickly, he unfastens the crate and pulls his daughter from the inside. They embrace.

SAVAARD

Help me, Laura! Help me. I've gone out of my... Help me.

LAURA

How many?

SAVAARD

You couldn't save anyone.

LAURA

Where's Bert?

(Pause)

Daddy?

SAVAARD

He's in the garden.

LAURA

I can see him?

SAVAARD

No. It's too late for that.

LAURA

(Weeping)

Why? Why, Dad?

SAVAARD

He was going to stop me. I brought me back to life for this, only he never knew it. I made him my accomplice, but he was innocent.

LAURA

Are you going to kill me, too?

Pause.

SAVAARD

No, you've done nothing to me. I love you, Laura.

LAURA

Bring him back.

SAVAARD

I can't.

LAURA

He brought you back. You can bring him back. Can't you?

SAVAARD

It's his neck. Some traumas, I...

LAURA

(Through tears)

You can bring him back!

SAVAARD

No, no, Laura, I...

He solemnly shakes his head.

A moment.

She stands and pushes her father away.
She beats him.

LAURA

You let them go.

SAVAARD

No.

LAURA

I won't let you kill them.

SAVAARD

It's too late.

LAURA

It's not. Tell me it's not.

She stops beating him.

SAVAARD

There are two left.

Laura puts her neck out.

LAURA

Kill me.

SAVAARD

I won't. I can't.

LAURA

Kill me.

SAVAARD

You've done nothing wrong.

LAURA

Because I don't want to live knowing you've done this.

SAVAARD raises his hands, then drops.

LAURA reaches for the wall, for something unseen.

SAVAARD

(Pleading)

No, don't.

She pulls a lever.

The wall of the antechamber slowly slides, opening a passage to the dining room.

BETTY and WILCOX rush from the wall and to the center of the dining room.

Just as the door clears, WILCOX, without thinking, pulls BOWMAN's revolver from his jacket and fires at the opening.

LAURA is caught in the chest by the shot and falls, bloody, back into her father's arms.

SAVAARD

Don't shoot! Oh, God.

WILCOX realizes what he's done -- shot the wrong person.

LAURA slides to the ground.

SAVAARD (Continued)

No! No!

WILCOX

I didn't know it was her. I didn't.

SAVAARD examines his daughter.

BETTY

Is she dead?

SAVAARD

(At last)

She is. She is.

SAVAARD rises, panicked. He runs at WILCOX and BETTY, but then past them, to the dining table. He quickly clears the surface.

The antechamber: he pulls out machines and coils, notebooks.

WILCOX and BETTY stand helpless for a moment.

BETTY moves towards the iron doors.

SAVAARD

(Over shoulder)

I wouldn't do that. It's still armed. Here, help me get her on the table.

WILCOX

What are you going to do?

SAVAARD

The technique.

He attempts to lift LAURA.

SAVAARD

The bullet went straight through her heart. I think I can repair it.

The two others don't move.

SAVAARD (Continued)

(Urgently)

Come on, come on! We only have little time before the body gives itself over.

WILCOX

I want you to help the others.

SAVAARD

Yes, yes, I will. If they're not beyond.

(Softly)

Help me.

BETTY goes to help.

WILCOX sets down the revolver on the
phone table.

WILCOX

(Lifting)

How do we know this isn't a trick? You and her together.

SAVAARD

Dear God, I wish it were.

LAURA is on the table.

SAVAARD begins the procedure.

He keeps to himself.

Coils ignite; he consults his notes,
her body, ignoring BETTY and WILCOX
completely. He hooks his daughter to
machines.

Moments pass.

BETTY

What are you doing?

SAVAARD

Shhhh.

Work continues. At a point, SAVAARD becomes frustrated and throws down his notebooks.

WILCOX

What is it?

SAVAARD

Look -- my hands are shaking.

BETTY

But you know what you're doing. The volunteer.

SAVAARD

I was interrupted. I never made it this far.

WILCOX

But you --

SAVAARD

That was Bert. He brought me to life.

WILCOX

Follow the notes.

SAVAARD

Shut up! I'm thinking.

SAVAARD goes back to work, makes adjustments.

At last, he can do no more. He holds his daughter's hand and brushes her hair, waiting, listening.

SAVAARD

Mr. Wilcox...

WILCOX

Yes.

SAVAARD

Remember what I told you about the man at the train station? The one I asked for the next train.

WILCOX

I do.

SAVAARD

Do you want to know his answer?

(Pause)

He said, "Go back...and kill them all."

(Pause)

He was not God. Nor the Devil.

(Pause)

It was me.

Beeping. A machine.

BETTY

What's that?

SAVAARD

It's working.

The machines spark and die.

Silence follows great noise.

Startle: LAURA rises, shakes.

BETTY and WILCOX are stunned.

LAURA sees her father.

Gently, she comes forward and kisses
his cheek.

SAVAARD holds her tightly.

SAVAARD

I won't let you go.

She peels away.

She moves to the fireplace.

WILCOX follows her.

WILCOX

You're alive. You're alive. I didn't mean to shoot you.
Oh, thank God, you're alive.

(To SAVAARD)

You can bring all these others back to life. Can't you?

As WILCOX turns to SAVAARD, LAURA finds
the fire poker.

She beats WILCOX to death as SAVAARD
and BETTY watch in horror.

LAURA turns to her father.

LAURA

I saw a woman at a train station.

SAVAARD

(Horrorified)

I know.

LAURA

She told me to go back. She told me to go back...and kill
them.

She starts to move towards SAVAARD.

SAVAARD

No, Laura.

LAURA

You murdered Bert.

SAVAARD

No, Laura. It was to protect us.

LAURA

You killed the only man I ever loved.

LAURA raises the poker over her father.

SAVAARD is cornered at the phone table.

His fingers find the discarded
revolver.

Just in time, he shoots LAURA, who
falls.

SAVAARD and BETTY meet eyes, in shock.

SAVAARD wanders the dining room, looks
at the bodies: BOWMAN, JUDITH, WILCOX,
LAURA.

BETTY

I want to leave this house.

SAVAARD

This isn't a house. It's a mass grave.

SAVAARD goes to the grandfather clock.
He reaches for the hands of the clock.

SAVAARD (Continued)

This was to be my final trick. You stop time. And the
house burns.

SAVAARD holds his finger, not quite
touching.

SAVAARD (Continued)

Go.

(Pause)

There's a door to the garden through the antechamber.

BETTY exits.

SAVAARD stops the clock.

Sounds: gears, sparks, fire.

The stage glows red.

SAVAARD turns to the machines of his technique. He lays on the dining table.

He folds his arms, as if in a coffin.

Red, flames, brightness.

Final curtain.

- END -