"Ladies and gentlemen," the butler said as he walked stiffly into the lounge at Tudor Close, "may I have your attention?"

His name was Hobart and he was every inch the proper manservant. There was instant silence in the room as the guests waited for his announcement. They were hoping it had something to do with dinner, or at least cocktails and a few hors d'oeuvres. But the butler's news was of quite a different nature.

"Dr. David Black," he continued in a voice cloaked in formality, "has been murdered."

The gasp one might expect on hearing such a statement did not occur. Hobart's announcement instead was met with uneasy silence. The guests simply waited, looking precisely like suspects. It would have been difficult to assemble a more suspicious looking group.

"Very funny," Professor Peter Plum finally said, as he leaned casually on the ornate fireplace mantle. He forced a laugh, but no one else joined in. "What's the old man up to? A little game before dinner?"

"A game of Hide and Seek perhaps," Miss Vivienne Scarlett suggested, as she studied her own good looks in a small hand mirror. But the others didn't seem to find her comment amusing either.

"I'm afraid it's not a game, madame," Hobart went on. "I have just discovered Dr. Black's body in the conservatory. I assure you he is quite unamusingly dead."

"Good heavens," Reverend Jonathan Green exclaimed. He tried to find divine inspiration somewhere in the cracks of the ceiling but soon gave up the effort. "He is serious!"
"Are you certain?" Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock asked, as she rolled the pearls of her necklace around her finger to create a noose.

"Quite certain, madame."

"But how can you be sure that he's dead?"

"The lack of heartbeat, madame," Hobart answered.

"Black didn't have a heart," Plum responded, "so how could it have a beat?"

"Nor is there any pulse," Hobart explained, "and he is not breathing. There is no doubt, sir. Dr. Black is deceased."

"Not just deceased," Mrs. Blanche White protested. She was sitting in the stuffed armchair, spreading the pleats of her apron a bit too neatly. "You said *murdered.*"

White practically shouted the last word. The sound gave everyone in the room quite a start.

"That's right," Colonel Mike Mustard said. He was standing with his feet spread wide apart as though waiting for a horse to arrive between them. "You *did* say that. Now what on earth makes you think he was murdered?"

"Blood, sir," Hobart answered.

"Whose?"

"His, sir."

"Where?"

"Near the head. As though from a wound, sir."

"What caused it?"

"I didn't examine it, sir. I felt that was a task more properly left to the Constable."

"Constable?" Reverend Green gasped. "Did you call the police?"

"Not yet," Hobart replied. "I shall do that now. I felt it was my duty, under the circumstances, to inform you all first. Dinner will *not* be served."

As the butler left the lounge, the uneasy tension began to lift. The fact of the murder was starting to sink in. And the initial shock was soon replaced by mutual distrust. After a while, accusations and alibis took the place of the civil gossip that had ruled before.

"Obviously one of us did it," Professor Plum said gleefully. He was American and enjoyed a good fuss.

"Nonsense, my good man," Mustard bellowed. "It wasn't anyone in this room."

"How do you know that?" Mrs. White asked.

"Because it was the butler," Mustard answered.

"Hobart? What makes you think he killed Dr. Black?"

"Because he's the butler. And the butler always does it. Don't you people go to the cinema?"

"But this isn't a film, Colonel," Miss Scarlett said. "And Hobart is the one who found the body and who called the police. Why would he do that if he were guilty of murder? No, I agree with the Professor. It had to be one of us."

"Well it certainly wasn't me," Mrs. Peacock was quick to add, twisting a diamond ring nervously around her little finger. "I simply came over this afternoon, at around two o'clock I think, to welcome Dr. Black back from his trip to India. I didn't come to murder him. I even brought him a gift, a handsome pair of gold pruning shears for his garden."

"Not a bad weapon," Plum commented. "Maybe you changed your mind when you found him in the conservatory and decided to give them to him sharp end first."

He made a stabbing motion in the air that caused Mrs. Peacock to wince.

"Nonsense," she replied. "I didn't even find him. I searched for a while, then I gave up. And went to have tea in the study."
"And the shears?" Plum asked. "What did you do with them?"
If she was annoyed by his interrogation, her calm reply
didn't show it.

"Why, I can't recall," she said plainly. "I must have left them
somewhere in the mansion. There are so many rooms, after all.
But I didn't go into the conservatory. You remember, Reverend
Green. I was in the study when you came in and found me there."

Reverend Green had been sitting in the corner, quietly
tapping the tips of his fingers together in a tiny round of applause.
He jumped when he realized Mrs. Peacock was talking to him, and
his fingers collapsed into a tangle.

"Yes, yes," he said, pulling on his collar anxiously. "I did
encounter you in the study, Elizabeth. I had come to welcome Dr.
Black back from India as well."

"What kind of gift did you bring," Plum asked, "a nice bottle
of poison?"

Plum was joking, of course, but the Reverend failed to see
the humor.

"Why no, not at all," Green replied. "I purchased a small
garden rake in town this morning. That's what I brought. As a
little homecoming gift. I arrived at about half past two. The butler
wasn't here, so I let myself in. I, too, looked for Dr. Black for quite
a while. But I couldn't find him either."

"Even in the conservatory?" Mustard asked.

"No, I didn't think of it. Instead I went into the library to
read a book while waiting for him to show up."

"Aha! But which book?" Miss Scarlett asked, trying to catch
him out.

"The Maharajah's Last Fling," Blakely. A most amusing little
novel. Then I heard a sound in the study and went in, thinking Dr.

Black had returned. But I found Elizabeth Peacock there, also
waiting. So we waited together. We came out into the hall to
begin a second search for our missing host. That's when we saw
you, Professor, wandering around like a lost soul."

"Yup, that's right," Plum said bluntly. "Same old story. I came
at three and couldn't find Black either. I brought over some
African Violets. You know, the purple ones, shaped like little
trumpets. Three of them in a pot. The girl at the flower shop said
that Dr. Black liked them."

"And I suppose you didn't see Dr. Black when you brought
these flowers into the conservatory?"

Miss Scarlett asked that question. But in spite of her sweet
smile, there was a distinctly sinister inflection in her voice.

"Never got there actually," Plum answered. "As you all said
before, Hobart wasn't around. So I went to the billiard room
thinking Dr. Black might be there. We often had a game of billiards
in the afternoon. But who do I find there? Not Black at all but the
good Colonel himself. Wrapping some black tape around a lamp
wire. Strange thing to be doing."

"Not if you're wiring a lamp," Mustard shot back. "They do
have lamps in the States, don't they?"

"You came over today to mend a lamp?"

"I came for the same reason I always come on Saturday.
Same reason we all do. Dinner. But I had promised Dr. Black that
I would repair that lamp when he got back from his trip. So I
brought over my tool kit."

"And I suppose you never went into the conservatory either,"
Mrs. White said, pointing her finger at the Colonel.

"Indeed I did, Mrs. White. At around half past two. He was
there all right. Fiddling around with that damn orchid of his. Can't
see why. Never much of a flower man myself."

"What orchid?" Mrs. Peacock asked.

"Oh you know," Vivienne Scarlett replied. "The black orchid. It's the pride of his plant collection. I heard that he was offered quite a large sum of money for it. But he still refused to part with it."

"He was busy potting it," Mustard resumed, "or repotting it, or whatever you do with the damn things. So I just said 'cheerio', and went to mend the broken lamp. Simple as that. Plum here showed up a bit later. Then the two of us came in and found the rest of you."

Mustard put his fists on his hips. In that pose he appeared to be daring anyone to contradict him.

"It's true," Miss Scarlett said, "I saw him walking into the billiard room with his tool kit when I was on my way to the ballroom."

"What were you doing in the ballroom?"

"Looking for Dr. Black, of course. We usually met there on Saturdays at half past three. For our dance lesson. I didn't know if he was back from his trip yet, so I decided to call in and see for myself."

"Dance lesson?"

"Oh yes. I was teaching him the rudiments of ballroom dancing."

"You didn't by any chance go into the conservatory first, did you, my dear?" Mrs. White said.

"No," Scarlett said simply.

"Then how do you explain this?" Mrs. White demanded.

White got up from her chair and walked directly over to Miss Scarlett. It looked for a moment as though she were going to sit down in the younger woman's lap. But instead, Mrs. White simply reached into the folds of Vivienne Scarlett's dress and retrieved a single long-stemmed rose.

All eyes turned to Scarlett as they waited for an explanation.

"I didn't get that from the conservatory," Miss Scarlett said, as innocently as she could. She seemed truly wounded by the suggestion. "It was lying on a table in the ballroom, so I picked it up. I love the smell of roses. And the color suits me so well."

She held the flower up to her cheek and posed with it to make the point.

"But what about you?" Miss Scarlett said before White had a chance to take her seat again. "Where have you been all afternoon?"

"In the kitchen, of course. I always work in the kitchen on Saturdays."

"You work for Mrs. Peacock," Plum said. "So what were you doing in the kitchen of Tudor Close?"

"Mrs. Peacock occasionally lets me off on Saturdays. So I come here in the afternoon to help Dr. Black's cook get dinner ready. But his cook didn't feel well this morning. I had to prepare things myself."

"No witnesses, eh?" Mustard said.

"Not quite," Mrs. Peacock said. "I saw her there."

"I did too," Reverend Green added. "I passed through the kitchen on my way to the library. Mrs. White was there, just as she says. Polishing a candlestick."

"Great," Mustard blustered. "That's just great. So to sum it all up then... each of us arrived unexpectedly, no one went into the conservatory, and no one actually saw Black...."

"Except you," Peacock reminded him.
"...except me. And every one of us has an alibi, witnessed by all the others. Oh, the good Constable is going to love this."

As Mustard said the word 'Constable', the lounge door began to creak, as though the word itself had some kind of magical power. Frozen by the sound, they watched the door open slowly, not sure if the Constable, or the ghost of the late Dr. Black, was about to enter.

But neither was the case. As the door swung wide, it was Hobart who walked into the room.

"I have contacted the authorities," he said. "They will arrive shortly. The Constable suggested that no one leave the mansion until he arrives to question you. He also requested that we do not go into the conservatory."

"While we're about it, Hobart," Miss Scarlett said, "where were you all afternoon?"

"Off on an errand, Miss. Dr. Black asked me to take a small piece of jewelry to the appraisers."

"So that's it!" Mustard exclaimed.

"Yes, I left Dr. Black at about a quarter past one this afternoon."

"Left him where?"

"He was in the conservatory. He had just rolled up his sleeves and put on his gardening gloves. He seemed quite happy actually. Tending to that prized orchid of his, I imagine."

"And you were out all afternoon?"

"Yes, I was. I didn't get back until about five o'clock this evening. That is when I found the body in the conservatory."

"Didn't by any chance whack him on the head with a pot and clean up the pieces, did you?" Plum asked jauntily.

But a look of contempt from the butler gave Plum his answer.

"Well, that's it then, isn't it," Mrs. Peacock said. "Nothing to do now but wait for the police."

"Are you daft?" Mustard boomed from the back of the room. "We almost have the damn thing solved. Can't give up now."

"We have?"

"We know who was killed... Dr. Black. And we know where he was killed... in the conservatory. The only thing we don't know is which one of us did it."

"A minor point, to be sure," Peacock observed.

"We don't know how he was killed either," Miss Scarlett suggested. "I mean what weapon was used."

"I would suggest a heavy object," Hobart said, "judging from the wound."

"We also don't know why he was killed," Reverend Green said. "I, for one, certainly had no reason to murder Dr. Black."

He cast his eyes heavenward, trying to look saintly. But the effort largely backfired.

"Money," Plum said.

"What money?"

"Robbery. There's plenty of stuff around Tudor Close that could fetch quite a bundle."

"That's absurd," Green said. "Why would I want to steal money, or anything else, from Dr. Black?"

"Maybe something to do with that rumor I heard about the Bishop."

"The Bishop?" Green said, as his complexion started to match his name.

"I heard he was a bit upset to find that the church funds were low this year. The first time that's ever happened. And in the very same year you bought the lovely cottage up on Crestfall Lane."
"Yes, well. That may be, Professor," Green responded, almost spitting the last word. "But you’re the one buying up all the land around Darkham. Now tell me this, how does a displaced Yankee professor come by that kind of money? A loan that must be repaid?"

"Gentlemen!" Mrs. Peacock said. "Let’s not jump to hasty conclusions. We all have our financial problems. I’m sure my tax difficulties with the Inland Revenue are no secret to all of you. But that doesn’t mean I murdered Dr. Black to solve my problems."

"That’s true," Miss Scarlett said. "From what I’ve heard, you’d have to murder half a dozen Dr. Blacks to solve your problems."

"Well! You should talk, my dear," Peacock answered. "David told me about your little request."

"What little request was that?" Reverend Green inquired.

"It seems our Miss Scarlett here intends to marry. But before she can do that, she has to buy back certain love letters from a young naval captain. She came to David asking for money and he refused."

"Utterly ridiculous," Miss Scarlett said. "You think that I would kill Dr. Black just to get money? Everyone here has as much of a motive. The Colonel has well-known gambling debts to pay. And Mrs. White also asked him for money to buy a new set of dentures. Dr. Black told me so himself. Now, let’s not play games. We didn’t befriend Dr. Black because of his charm, of which he had none. It was his money that appealed to all of us."

There were protests about that last sweeping statement, but they weren’t very lengthy or convincing. Eventually a gloomy silence settled over the group.

"Ever feel like a pawn in a game?" Mustard asked Professor Plum during the pause.

"All the time," Plum said glumly.

"Enough of this," Mrs. Peacock said. "We have to do something. I suggest we go into the conservatory and see what we can find."

"What is there to find?" Mrs. White asked.

"Perhaps we can help the investigation. It will be easier for the Constable if we can put together what happened."

"And much easier if he doesn’t have to question us," Plum said, nodding wisely.

"Yes," Green agreed. "Perhaps there is evidence that an intruder broke in and murdered the doctor!

He lingered on the word intruder, so the implication would sink in. It did. The notion that some stranger might have committed the crime was most appealing. They all moved towards the door, when Hobart suddenly placed himself between them and the hall leading to the conservatory.

"We can’t do that," he said. "The Constable gave me direct orders to keep you all here."

"Stuff your orders," Mrs. White said and led the charge.

The conservatory was just as they all remembered it. It was Dr. Black’s pride and joy. The room was filled with zinnias, begonias, ivy, and marigolds. And the rich smells that filled the air gave a momentary sense of serenity.

"How beautiful," Miss Scarlett said, posing like a film idol near a pot of daisies.

"Of course it’s beautiful. Positively idyllic," said Reverend Green. "Too bad it has become The Garden of Evil!"
The serenity was gone in a flash. Green was pointing to the body of Dr. Black on the floor of the room. The position of his arms and legs recalled the violence of his final moments. And as the six guests gathered around, the flowers themselves took on a funereal look.

But the hope of blaming it all on some intruder was quickly dashed. Looking at the body and the objects nearby, it was all too easy to reconstruct precisely what had happened.

Assemble the jigsaw puzzle and see if you can solve the crime by answering these three questions: who killed Dr. Black, what weapon was used, and what was the reason for the crime?