



T. James Belich

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Ace of Diamonds
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*In memory
of
Marjorie Deakin*

Ace of Diamonds was first performed by the Artistic Community Theatre in Pekin, IL, in January 2001: Ed Henry, director.

JACK BARON: Bill Homel

KENDRA WHITE: Janet Munson

GUY WHITLEY: Brian Sutton

CYNTHIA OPAL: Suzanne Wheeler

BLAKE HOWARD: Grant Golden

TARA REED: Lacey Rollo

Ace of Diamonds

MYSTERY. Six strangers invited to a remote manor discover they are all connected to the theft of the priceless Bloodstone ruby. All past owners of the cursed gem have either been murdered or met with unusual “accidents.” It doesn’t take long before the guests realize they have been brought together by the mastermind, Iago, to murder each other so that he can seize the gem for himself. In this classic Agatha Christie-style mystery, twists and turns abound as the guests are murdered one by one.

Performance Time: Approximately 75 minutes.

Characters

(3 M, 3 F)

JACK BARON: Cold, arrogant card shark.

KENDRA WHITE: Nervous, fidgety Smithsonian Museum curator and computer hacker.

GUY WHITLEY: Friendly, easy-going smuggler; smartly dressed.

CYNTHIA OPAL: Elegant, charming reporter.

BLAKE HOWARD: Dignified gentleman who looks like a member of the British aristocracy; wears a monocle and has a small mustache.

TARA REED: Unassuming, observant lady.

Set

A well-furnished living room. Bookshelves line the SR wall. In the USR corner, there is a chair and a small table with a reading lamp. There is a fireplace DSL. An ordinary wooden box sits on the fireplace mantel. At DSC, there is a large couch with a table in front of it. Several chairs are also next to the table. The upstage half of the room is raised a couple of steps above the downstage half. The main entrance is USC. There is another door at the USL corner, which leads to the kitchen and dining room. A third door is located at the DSR corner and leads into a hallway.

Synopsis of Scenes

ACT I: Living room

ACT II: Living room, moments later.

Props

Deck of cards	Small cream pitcher
Newspaper	3 Handguns
2 Invitations	Small plain wooden box
Bookshelves	Large "ruby" the color of
Books	blood
Couch	Gloves, for Cynthia
3 Teacups with saucers	Blank envelope filled with
3 Teaspoons	papers
1 Coffee cup	Ace of diamonds card
Serving tray	

Sound Effects

Gunshot

*“Well, this is wonderful.
We’re all stuck
with four strangers,
a dead body,
and a killer.”*

—Cynthia

ACT I

(Lights fade up onto a well-furnished living room. Sitting at the table DSC is Jack Baron. He is in the middle of a game of solitaire. A paper lies nearby on the table. Kendra White enters USC.)

KENDRA: Good evening. *(Jack doesn't answer.)* I said good—

JACK: I heard you the first time. *(He keeps playing.)*

KENDRA: I'm sorry, but you didn't answer.

JACK: I'm busy.

KENDRA: I see. *(Trying to be helpful. Indicating cards.)* Black ten on the red jack.

JACK: *(Annoyed.)* I saw it. *(He plays the card.)*

KENDRA: Of course, I'm sorry. *(Pause.)* So, Mister...

JACK: Baron, Jack Baron.

(Jack looks at Kendra for the first time. She recognizes him and becomes frightened.)

KENDRA: K...Kendra White. *(She offers to shake hands. Jack glares at her.)* I...I'm sorry, I didn't know it was you. I...I didn't mean to disturb you...or anything.

JACK: Shut up. *(He resumes his game.)* You've got nerve coming here, Kendra.

KENDRA: I wasn't told you were going to be here. *(Jack throws her a look.)* I'm telling the truth! He didn't say you were coming!

JACK: Who didn't? *(Kendra hands Jack an invitation. Jack reads it over to himself.)* "Sincerely, Mr. Iago." *(He hands it back.)* The same as mine. Ever met Iago? *(Kendra shakes her head no.)* Me neither.

KENDRA: Are you going to kill me?

JACK: As much as you deserve it, no. Now listen good...you don't know me, you've never met me, and you've never

heard of me. Understand? (*Kendra nods.*) Because if you say one wrong word –

KENDRA: I understand.

JACK: Good. (*Jack resumes his game. Pause.*) I hope you've enjoyed my money. Any big jobs lately?

KENDRA: No, I don't do that anymore.

JACK: Oh, given up the jewel racket and gone straight, have we?

KENDRA: Yes.

JACK: Well, why not? You made plenty when you took my share of our last job. Too bad you failed to kill me, too.

Next time make sure you use enough poison.

KENDRA: (*Curtly.*) I will.

JACK: Don't get cocky with me, Kendra. I'll slit your throat faster than you can blink.

KENDRA: You don't need to keep threatening me, Jack. I know where I stand.

JACK: Just make sure you don't forget.

(*Kendra sits and reads the paper while Jack continues his game. Silence. Guy Whitley enters USC. He is smartly dressed.*)

GUY: Hiya folks, what's cooking?

JACK: Do you have any idea how much I hate that expression? (*Guy is a bit taken aback. To himself.*) So much for a quiet game.

GUY: Nice to meet you too, bud.

(*Kendra crosses to Guy.*)

KENDRA: Hello there. My name is Kendra White.

(*Kendra shakes hands with Guy.*)

GUY: Guy Whitley.

KENDRA: A pleasure to meet you, Mr. Whitley.

GUY: Hey, call me Guy. (*Indicating Jack.*) So what's with our friend there?

KENDRA: He's rather serious about his card game. I'd leave him to it, if I were you. He doesn't seem to be the sociable type.

GUY: We'll see about that.

(Guy starts to cross toward Jack, but Kendra stops him.)

KENDRA: I wouldn't.

GUY: Why not? Say, do you two know each other?

KENDRA: (*Startled.*) No, not at all. Good to have met you, Mr. Whitley. (*She crosses to the bookshelves.*)

GUY: Talk about high strung. (*He crosses to Jack and sits next to him.*) So, pal, do you have a name?

JACK: Yes, I do, and a reputation for orchestrating tragic accidents for anyone who interrupts my card game.

(Guy looks blank for a moment and then laughs.)

GUY: I like your sense of humor.

(Guy slaps Jack on the back. Jack stops playing. Tense pause.)

JACK: Unless you want to lose that hand, never do that again.

(Guy pulls his hand away.)

GUY: Fine! No need to be so touchy about it! (*Pause as Kendra pulls a book off the shelf and begins to read it. Jack finishes his game and begins shuffling the cards.*) So, any idea where this Iago fellow is at or why he's invited us here?

JACK: Did you get an invitation?

GUY: Yeah.

JACK: Then you know as much as I do.

GUY: I guess so. What did you say your name was?

JACK: I didn't, and stop asking stupid questions.

GUY: Okay, take it easy! *(Pause.)* Boy, you are a talkative one, aren't you?

JACK: Let me make one thing very clear to you, Mr. Whitley.

GUY: Call me Guy.

(Jack begins dealing a new game.)

JACK: Let me make one thing clear, Guy...I'm not here to socialize or exchange trivial babble, got it?

GUY: Sure, pal.

JACK: The name is Jack Baron. Don't ever call me "pal." *(He begins to play again.)*

GUY: Sure, bud. *(Jack glares at him.)* Sorry.

(Guy joins Kendra at the bookshelves.)

KENDRA: I told you that you should have left him alone.

GUY: Yeah, well, can't blame a guy for trying. What's that you're reading?

KENDRA: A book about the Bloodstone.

(Jack looks up from his game.)

GUY: Isn't that the ruby that was stolen from the Smithsonian a few days ago?

JACK: Yes, it is. What do you know about it, Miss White?

KENDRA: No more than you'd find in the papers.

JACK: Are you sure?

KENDRA: Positive. And yourself, Mr. Baron?

(Silence.)

GUY: Say, did anyone see a paper lying around?

KENDRA: Yes, over there on the table.

(Kendra points at the table CS. Guy crosses to the couch, sits, and picks up the paper. Kendra turns back to her book.)

GUY: *(Reads from the newspaper.)* "The police have yet to determine the whereabouts of the Bloodstone, the prize ruby stolen from the Smithsonian Institute on Sunday. The ruby fell into the hands of the Smithsonian after its previous owner passed away under mysterious circumstances. The Bloodstone was bequeathed to the Institute in his will." They make it sound like something out of a detective novel. *(Reads.)* "The police have no leads as to how the thief, or thieves, managed to circumvent the elaborate security measures of the Institute. No alarms were set off, and the theft was not discovered until early Monday morning." Sounds like the police are really in the dark.

JACK: I'll bet they are.

GUY: Interested in the Bloodstone, Jack?

JACK: I could ask you the same question.

GUY: Uh, yeah, well...never mind. Wouldn't want to keep you away from your game. *(Uncomfortable pause.)* So, Jack, do you play any poker?

JACK: I prefer games that rely on skill, not chance.

GUY: Really? I would have thought you'd like poker.

JACK: Why is that?

GUY: You seem like a guy who likes high stakes. *(No answer. Guy shrugs and crosses to Kendra. To Kendra.)* He may not play the game, but he has quite the poker face.

KENDRA: *(Startled.)* I'm sorry, what did you say?

GUY: Never mind. What's got you so interested in that book?

KENDRA: What? Oh, I...I have a professional interest in the Bloodstone, that's all.

GUY: Really? What do you do?

KENDRA: I'm a museum curator. Why do you ask?

GUY: No reason, just curious. Anything interesting in that book? It'd be neat to learn some more about the Bloodstone,

considering it's just been stolen and all. I mean, I like a good mystery and—

JACK: Has anyone ever told you that you talk too much?

GUY: Yeah, well... *(To Kendra.)* Maybe I'll take a look at that book when you're finished. I'm going to go and take a quick look around the house. *(Exits DSR.)*

KENDRA: *(To herself.)* I wonder why he's so nervous...

(Kendra continues to read the book. Cynthia Opal enters USC and approaches Kendra.)

CYNTHIA: Good evening. You must be Mrs. Iago. I want to thank you for the invitation.

KENDRA: I'm afraid you are mistaken. My name is Kendra White.

CYNTHIA: Oh. Well, where is our host then?

KENDRA: I couldn't say. I've never actually met Mr. Iago before. Are you a friend of his?

CYNTHIA: Not exactly. To be honest, I'm not really sure why I've been invited here.

KENDRA: No, neither am I.

(Short pause.)

CYNTHIA: I'm sorry, I forgot to introduce myself. I'm Cynthia Opal.

(Cynthia and Kendra shake hands.)

KENDRA: A pleasure to meet you, Miss Opal.

CYNTHIA: *(Indicating Jack.)* Would he be our host then?
(Crosses to Jack.) Good evening. Cynthia Opal.

(Cynthia offers Jack her hand, but he doesn't take it.)

JACK: Jack Baron. *(Insincere.)* Charmed.

CYNTHIA: (*Insincere.*) Pleased to meet you too, Mr. Baron.
(*Uncomfortable pause. To Kendra.*) Well...shall we look
around a bit? There doesn't seem to be much else to do until
our host arrives, wherever he is.

KENDRA: Certainly.

CYNTHIA: After you. (*Kendra returns the book to the bookshelf
and exits DSR. Jack looks up and makes eye contact with
Cynthia.*) We'll talk later, Mr. Baron.

(*Jack nods and Cynthia exits DSR. Jack continues to play. Blake
Howard enters USC.*)

BLAKE: Pardon me, my good man, but would you happen to
know where I might find Mr. Iago?

JACK: I would not, and at the moment, I don't particularly
care. (*To himself.*) I picked the wrong room to play cards in.

BLAKE: I say, you are a bit rude, aren't you?

JACK: Glad you noticed.

BLAKE: Enjoy cards, do you?

JACK: (*Sarcastic.*) No, I hate cards, that's why I'm sitting here
playing solitaire.

BLAKE: My dear sir, there's no need to be insulting.

JACK: You may call me Jack, or you may call me Mr. Baron,
but I am neither your "good man" nor your "dear sir." I'm in
the middle of a game, in case you haven't noticed.

BLAKE: Look here, Mr. Baron, I didn't come here to be
snubbed in this manner.

JACK: Then you came to the wrong place. The door's behind
you.

BLAKE: (*Annoyed.*) That's quite enough! I insist on being
shown some modicum of respect.

JACK: And I insist on being left alone when I play cards. It
doesn't look like either of us are going to get our wish.

BLAKE: (*Upset.*) You despicable wretch! I'll—

(*Jack jumps to his feet.*)

JACK: You'll what? Care to start something? I'm all for it.

(Tense pause.)

BLAKE: *(Recovers his demeanor.)* You had better watch yourself, Mr. Baron. That temper will be the death of you.

(Blake sits and reads the paper. Jack continues his game. Guy enters USC, crosses to the bookshelves, and begins looking for the book on the Bloodstone.)

GUY: Hey, Jack, do you know what happened to that book on the Bloodstone?

JACK: Haven't seen it.

GUY: Huh...Kendra must still be reading it, wherever she went.

BLAKE: If you're interested in the Bloodstone, I suggest reading today's paper.

GUY: Hey, pal. Didn't see you there. *(Crosses to Blake and offers his hand.)* Guy Whitley.

(Blake and Guy shake hands. As soon as they make eye contact, Guy becomes visibly nervous.)

BLAKE: *(Darkly.)* Blake Howard.

GUY: Uh, yeah...well, good to have met you, Blake. *(He starts to exit.)*

BLAKE: Please, Mr. Whitley, sit down and join us.

GUY: Uh, sure. *(Jack gathers up all his cards and stands.)* Hey, you leaving, Jack?

JACK: It's obvious that I'm not going to get a quiet game in this room. As much as I hate to say it, I'm sure we'll meet again later.

(Jack exits USC. As soon as Jack is gone, Blake's polite demeanor vanishes and he takes Guy by the collar.)

BLAKE: *(Vicious whisper.)* What are you doing here? I warned you what would happen if you ever came near me again!

GUY: *(Scared.)* Take it easy, pal! If I had known you were coming, I wouldn't have come near the place. My invitation never said you'd be here, I swear.

(Blake lets Guy go.)

BLAKE: Let me see it. *(Guy takes out his invitation and gives it to Blake. Blake looks it over.)* Yes, it's identical to mine...an invitation from Mr. Iago simply asking you to join him tonight. No mention of the other guests. I don't like it, Guy – or whatever you're calling yourself these days.

GUY: I like the name Blake. It suits you, bud.

(Blake smacks Guy hard.)

BLAKE: Shut up and stop calling me "bud" or "pal." You know I hate that!

GUY: Yeah, you and the card shark.

(Blake grabs Guy by the collar again.)

BLAKE: You mean that fellow Jack? Do you know him?

GUY: Never seen him before in my life!

BLAKE: Are you sure?

GUY: Yeah!

BLAKE: Why don't I trust you?

GUY: *(Guessing.)* Because you've never trusted me?

BLAKE: Not a good time to remind me!

GUY: Sorry!

(Blake pushes Guy away.)

BLAKE: Get out of here...now.

GUY: I can't...

BLAKE: I told you to leave!

(Guy gets up.)

GUY: Hey, take it easy! We'll be perfect strangers. No one has to know we know each other.

BLAKE: *(Calming down.)* Very well, but watch your back. I still haven't let bygones be bygones. And if I ever see you again after tonight—

GUY: Okay, okay, I get the idea!

(Tara Reed enters USC.)

TARA: Good evening, gentlemen. I hope I'm not interrupting anything.

(Blake assumes his polite mask and crosses to Tara.)

BLAKE: Not at all, my dear lady. *(He shakes her hand.)* Blake Howard, so nice to meet you.

TARA: Tara Reed. A pleasure, Mr. Howard.

BLAKE: And may I introduce you to Mr. Guy Whitley.

(Guy crosses to Tara and shakes hands with her.)

GUY: *(To Tara.)* Hey there, good to meet you.

TARA: And you, Mr. Whitley.

GUY: Call me Guy.

TARA: Of course. So, where can I find our host?

GUY: Beats me. No one seems to know who's running the show around here.

TARA: That's very strange. I assumed Mr. Iago would be here to greet us.

BLAKE: As did I.
GUY: Well, I'm sure he's around here someplace.
TARA: Do you know Mr. Iago well, Guy?
GUY: Uh, no, I've...
BLAKE: You've never met him before, have you?
GUY: Uh, no.
TARA: Do you know him at all, Mr. Howard?
BLAKE: No, I can't say that I do.
TARA: Nor can I. Rather peculiar, if you ask me.
BLAKE: Yes, indeed.
TARA: *(Gesturing to the couch.)* Shall we?
BLAKE: Certainly.

(Blake and Tara sit on the couch. Guy returns to the bookshelves to continue looking for the book on the Bloodstone.)

TARA: Won't you join us, Guy?
GUY: Nah, I'm looking for something...a book I wanted to read.
TARA: Suit yourself. What was the book about?
GUY: Um, uh, that Bloodstone ruby.
TARA: Dreadful business, that.

(Blake picks up the newspaper again.)

BLAKE: Yes, there's an article about it in today's paper.

(Guy finds the book.)

GUY: Here it is. *(He sits down to read it, away from Blake and Tara.)*
TARA: *(To Blake.)* Have they any idea who stole the gem?
BLAKE: None, it seems. A complete mystery. Whoever carried out the theft seems to have left no trace. The police are completely baffled.

TARA: "Curiouser and curiouser," as they say. They have no leads at all? *(Blake continues to peruse the article and then frowns.)* What is it?

BLAKE: You might find this bit interesting. *(Reads.)* "Only days before the robbery, the Smithsonian received a mysterious offer to purchase the jewel for half of its estimated value. The would-be buyer cited the history of the Bloodstone and warned the Institute that dire circumstances could befall it if they did not agree to sell the gem. The recent theft appears to confirm the warnings, but the police are not discounting the possibility that the attempted purchase and later robbery may somehow be connected."

TARA: Does it mention who it was that made the offer?

BLAKE: Let's see... *(Peruses article.)* Yes, here it is. *(Reads.)* "The buyer was identified only as 'Iago' and claimed to be an expert on precious gems."

(At the mention of Iago, Guy looks up.)

GUY: You mean the same guy who invited us here?

BLAKE: It would certainly seem so.

TARA: A most peculiar affair, indeed.

GUY: I wonder why this Iago fellow wanted us here tonight.

TARA: I'm sure he'll explain everything once he arrives.

GUY: Where'd he get a name like Iago anyway? Sounds like an alias, if you ask me.

BLAKE: It is a strange name. The name of a character from Othello, if I'm not mistaken.

TARA: I couldn't say. I've never read it. *(Changing the subject.)* So, Guy, what sort of work are you in?

GUY: Ah...well, you know...

TARA: No, I don't. That's why I asked.

GUY: Actually, uh...I'm in the shipping business. You know, moving things from here to there. Not, uh...not really worth talking about.

BLAKE: Dull, I'm sure.

TARA: *(To Guy.)* Does it pay well?

GUY: Depends what I have to, uh, ship. *(Uncomfortable.)* Say, I saw some coffee and tea in the kitchen. Either of you want anything? It looks like we're going to have to help ourselves.

TARA: A cup of tea, if you would. With milk and sugar, please.

GUY: Sure. And for you, Blake, a glass—

BLAKE: The same for me, if you please.

(Guy realizes his slip-up.)

GUY: Uh, sure. I'll be right back with those. *(Exits USL.)*

TARA: A very nervous man, I'd say.

BLAKE: Incompetent, if you ask me. That's been my observation. We only just met this evening, of course.

TARA: Of course. So, tell me, Mr. Howard, what's your interest in the Bloodstone?

BLAKE: Purely professional, I assure you. I have an interest in large, famous gems, particularly those with some history attached. I've been researching a number of such jewels: the Bloodstone, the Hope Diamond, the Moonstone, and other gemstones of that kind. I'm currently working on compiling a book from my findings. Some of these stones have a fascinating, if bloody, past.

TARA: Yes, this one in particular.

BLAKE: I have studied the Bloodstone in great detail. I find the recent events quite exciting, a whole new chapter for my book.

TARA: It sounds terribly interesting. Your research must take you all over the world.

BLAKE: It certainly does.

TARA: What was that book Mr. Whitley was reading? Didn't he say that was about the Bloodstone?

BLAKE: Yes, I believe so. *(He crosses to the bookshelves. He sees the book and picks it up.)* Here we are. *(He returns to the couch.)* I've read this one, as a matter of fact. Rather out of date now but a very detailed account nonetheless. Odd, it's not a well-known book except to those like myself. I must say, I'm rather surprised to find a copy of it here.

TARA: A coincidence, I'm sure.

BLAKE: A most remarkable one.

TARA: Mr. Iago seems to also have an interest in such jewels. That could be why you've been invited here.

BLAKE: I must say, I hadn't thought of that. And you...what's your interest in the Bloodstone?

TARA: Curiosity, nothing more. I enjoy a good mystery, especially a real-life mystery. I certainly look forward to reading your book when it's finished. *(Pause. Blake is deep in thought.)* What's on your mind, Mr. Howard?

BLAKE: This Iago fellow. You said you haven't met him, but do you know anything of him?

TARA: No more than you, I suspect.

BLAKE: So I thought.

(Kendra and Cynthia enter DSR.)

KENDRA: Oh, hello. Some more guests, I see. Unless one of you is our host?

(When Blake sees Cynthia, he reacts with some surprise, but she gives no hint of recognition.)

TARA: I'm afraid not. *(She stands. To Kendra and Cynthia.)* My name is Tara Reed.

KENDRA: Pleased to meet you. I'm Kendra White, and this is Miss Cynthia Opal.

CYNTHIA: How do you do?

(They shake hands.)

TARA: And may I introduce Mr. Blake Howard.

CYNTHIA: Good evening, Mr. Howard.

BLAKE: A pleasure to meet you, my dears.

(Guy enters, carrying two cups of tea and one cup of coffee. He gives Blake and Tara their tea.)

TARA: And this is Guy Whitley. *(She gestures to Cynthia and Kendra.)* Cynthia Opal and Kendra White.

GUY: Good to meet you, Cynthia.

CYNTHIA: A pleasure, Mr. Whitley.

GUY: Call me Guy. Hey there, Kendra.

KENDRA: Nice to see you again, Guy.

CYNTHIA: Well, shall we sit and get acquainted? Our host seems to have left us to our own devices for the moment.

(They all sit.)

BLAKE: *(To Kendra and Cynthia.)* So, may I assume that you two have also been invited here by Mr. Iago?

CYNTHIA: Yes, though neither of us really know why. We've never met him.

TARA: Have you seen anyone else in the house?

CYNTHIA: No one except for Mr. Baron.

TARA: Mr. Baron?

GUY: Local card shark.

KENDRA: I don't like him. He frightens me. Cynthia and I saw him just a few minutes ago, and he seemed to be studying the house very carefully.

BLAKE: Did you ask what he was doing?

KENDRA: Cynthia did. She asked if he was looking for something, and all he did was give her a playing card from his pocket.

TARA: That's rather odd. What card?

(Cynthia takes a card out of her pocket.)

CYNTHIA: The ace of diamonds.

(Cynthia shows the others the card.)

BLAKE: What on earth is that supposed to mean?

GUY: I think the guy's just obsessed with cards. He was probably looking for a place he could play without us interrupting him.

KENDRA: I'm not so sure. I'd watch out for him. I don't think he's safe.

CYNTHIA: At any rate, we seem to have a more important mystery on our hands than Mr. Baron's strange behavior.

BLAKE: Do you think we should be expecting anyone else? Besides Mr. Iago, of course.

CYNTHIA: The table in the dining room is set for seven, I noticed.

GUY: Guess we're it then—the six of us and Iago.

TARA: It would seem so.

CYNTHIA: Then perhaps we can puzzle out why we have been invited here tonight, and why Mr. Iago is nowhere to be found.

(Unseen by the others, Jack enters USC.)

KENDRA: Too much like "Ten Little Indians," if you ask me.

CYNTHIA: Mr. Iago obviously knows each of us, as we have all received an invitation from him, correct?

GUY: Yeah, but that doesn't tell us how this guy knows us.

BLAKE: We must have some connection besides this Mr. Iago.

JACK: Of course we do, and it should be obvious if you'd stop and think about it. Not that thinking is your strong point, Mr. Howard.

(Blake stands.)

BLAKE: Look here, I've had just about enough of your attitude.

JACK: I'm just getting started. Sit down.

BLAKE: And what gives you the right to be in charge?

JACK: Superior intelligence.

TARA: You must be Jack Baron.

JACK: And you must be Number Six.

TARA: Yes, Tara Reed.

JACK: (*Insincere.*) A pleasure, I'm sure. Well, now that our little party is complete—

TARA: Aren't you forgetting our host?

JACK: You think he's going to show up, do you?

TARA: Why wouldn't he, Mr. Baron?

BLAKE: Yes, why? Demonstrate your "superior intelligence" for us.

JACK: I've read enough mysteries to know when something is up. And let me tell you, ladies and gentlemen, something is definitely *up* in this house.

GUY: Can't say I disagree with you there.

JACK: This has all the makings of a classic mystery: six strangers, a missing host, a house in a remote location, no telephones—

KENDRA: What do you mean no telephones?

JACK: There are no telephones in this house.

BLAKE: And how might you know that?

JACK: I looked. It's called "observation," Mr. Howard. Contrary to what some of you might think, I don't spend all my time playing cards.

KENDRA: I don't like it. I don't like it all.

CYNTHIA: Anything else we should be aware of?

JACK: Guns, and lots of them.

KENDRA: What?

JACK: Didn't you see the display in the trophy room?

KENDRA: Surely those are all for show!

JACK: I wouldn't bet my life on it, but you go right ahead.
Last but not least, our mystery is topped off by one large
and very priceless ruby.

GUY: The Bloodstone?

JACK: Bingo. You want to know our connection? There it is.
Whatever our reasons may be, we all have an interest in the
Bloodstone. Our host Iago does as well. Mark my words,
that ruby is at the center of this little puzzle.

BLAKE: How do you know all this?

JACK: That would be the superior intelligence at work.

TARA: Is that your part in this? The arrogant know-it-all?

JACK: (*Bows.*) There can be only one.

TARA: Usually the first to go in a mystery, aren't I right?

JACK: Every good mystery needs a murder.

KENDRA: Don't say that!

JACK: Why? Afraid it will happen? I didn't think you'd be
the type to shy away from blood.

KENDRA: (*Looking away.*) And how would you know that?

JACK: How, indeed.

TARA: Mr. Baron, you're saying the reason Iago has brought
us here is linked to the Bloodstone?

JACK: That's exactly what I'm saying.

TARA: What makes you so certain?

JACK: I didn't get where I am by being blind to the obvious.

BLAKE: And just where have you gotten yourself, Mr. Baron?

JACK: Wouldn't you like to know...

BLAKE: What's the matter...guilty past?

JACK: No more than the rest of you.

BLAKE: And what do you know about us?

JACK: Enough.

BLAKE: What's that supposed to mean?

CYNTHIA: That you should sit down and shut up!

BLAKE: I beg your pardon?

CYNTHIA: You have no clue as to what's going on here, so let
someone talk who does!

GUY: Hey, guys! Take it easy! It's not like there's been a murder or anything.

BLAKE: There might be, if you don't shut your mouth!

KENDRA: Please, there's no need to shout.

BLAKE: *(To Cynthia.)* And you, why should we trust Mr. Baron when he refuses to tell us anything about himself?

TARA: An excellent point.

JACK: I could care less if you trust me or not. Suffice it to say I am an appraiser of precious gems, somewhat of an authority on the matter.

TARA: That would be your interest in the Bloodstone.

JACK: Very good, Miss Reed. I'm glad to see someone else around here has some brains. *(Blake becomes visibly angry. To Blake.)* Doesn't take much to rile you up, does it?

BLAKE: You enjoy pushing other people's buttons, don't you?

JACK: You're almost too easy.

GUY: So how come you're so talkative all of a sudden?

JACK: I'm not in the middle of a card game.

KENDRA: How do you know so much about what's going on here, Mr. Baron? That is, if you don't mind my asking.

JACK: I figured it out. We're in the middle of a big game here, and I don't intend to be on the losing side.

TARA: I think you may be making too much of nothing. You have no proof this isn't anything more than an ordinary dinner party.

KENDRA: Well, we do all seem to be interested in the Bloodstone.

BLAKE: I'm not convinced that isn't mere coincidence.

CYNTHIA: Perhaps you'd like to tell us about your interests, Mr. Howard.

BLAKE: As I explained to Miss Reed, I am currently writing a book about the Bloodstone and other such famous gems, nothing more.

JACK: You'll forgive me if I doubt that.

GUY: So, Blake, can you tell us why this ruby is so famous? Why is it called the Bloodstone, anyway?

JACK: Yes, *Professor*, do tell.

KENDRA: It's because of the curse. Ever since the raw stone was cut into its present shape, all the owners of the Bloodstone have met with a rather unpleasant fate.

BLAKE: Yes, that's right. Some of the past owners have been murdered. Others have met with unusual accidents. I, however, am inclined to assign such events to coincidence, accentuated by human imagination.

JACK: My experience is that there is no such thing as coincidence.

KENDRA: But isn't it strange, Mr. Howard, that such terrible things have happened to everyone who has owned the ruby?

CYNTHIA: How do you know so much about it, Kendra?

KENDRA: I'm a curator at the Smithsonian. I oversee the wing of the Institute where the Bloodstone was displayed. I've read a great deal about it.

CYNTHIA: Now that does seem to be more than just coincidence. What can you tell us about the theft? How did the thieves get around the alarms?

KENDRA: I...I have no idea how it was done. I'm not in charge of security.

CYNTHIA: Still, you must know something about how the security system works.

KENDRA: Yes, a little.

CYNTHIA: And why is it you've been refusing to talk to reporters?

KENDRA: (*Startled.*) What do you mean?

CYNTHIA: I tried to speak with you the day after the theft, but I was told you weren't available for comment.

BLAKE: What were you doing at the Smithsonian?

CYNTHIA: I'm a reporter. I was covering a story. I had a hard time getting any answers.

KENDRA: I...I was told not to speak with reporters. The Institute issued an official statement. It gave all the details. I really can't tell you anything more.

JACK: Or won't.

GUY: Hey, take it easy on her. If she doesn't know anything, then she doesn't know anything.

CYNTHIA: And you, Guy? How do you make your living?

GUY: (*Uncomfortable.*) Me? Uh, well...like I told Blake and Tara, I'm in the shipping business. Nothing exciting.

CYNTHIA: And how does that connect you to the Bloodstone?

GUY: I used to know someone who had a thing for valuable gems. (*Blake shoots Guy a look.*) This whole business caught my eye, that's all.

CYNTHIA: Would your friend know anything about the Bloodstone? Or the theft?

GUY: I, uh, couldn't say. Haven't talked to him in quite awhile.

CYNTHIA: Some sort of disagreement?

(*Blake is shooting Guy a fixed, penetrating stare.*)

GUY: (*Really uncomfortable.*) You could say that.

CYNTHIA: What exactly is it you ship?

GUY: Stuff for museums mostly. What about you, Tara? What's got you so interested in this ruby?

TARA: I enjoy a good mystery, that's all.

JACK: The Bloodstone certainly provides that.

GUY: That's for sure.

BLAKE: (*Sarcastic.*) This has been a fascinating discussion, but pointless!

KENDRA: Except Mr. Baron is right. We do seem to be connected by the Bloodstone, if nothing else.

BLAKE: As I said, coincidence, nothing more. Just about everyone at the moment is interested in the Bloodstone. It's simple curiosity. What do you say to that, Mr. Baron?

JACK: Curiosity and coincidence didn't invite us to this house. However many people may be fascinated by the mystery of the Bloodstone, we're the six who are here.

GUY: He's got a point. What other connection could we have?

BLAKE: Mr. Iago will undoubtedly explain that when he arrives.

GUY: What if Jack's right? What if Iago isn't coming?

KENDRA: Or what if he's here already...hiding somewhere and watching us?

BLAKE: I think Mr. Baron's imaginative notions of a "classic mystery" are beginning to get to you, Miss White. What possible reason could Iago have for inviting six strangers only to murder them?

KENDRA: Have you ever read "Ten Little Indians"?

BLAKE: No.

KENDRA: Perhaps you should. I wish I hadn't.

GUY: Hey, it can't hurt to take a better look around this place. Jack, Kendra, and Cynthia said they saw you poking around earlier. Find anything interesting?

JACK: Yes. No telephones, no Iago, and enough weapons to equip a small army. Look around, if you like, but don't expect my help.

BLAKE: What's the matter...afraid of what you might find?

JACK: I already know what you'll find...nothing. You don't even know what to look for.

GUY: What should we be looking for?

BLAKE: Perhaps you'd care to enlighten us "poor fools."

JACK: Not particularly.

BLAKE: Very well then, stay here. If we're fortunate, Iago will do you in while we're gone. I'll take the upstairs, if anyone would care to join me.

TARA: I will, Mr. Howard.

JACK: Happy hunting.

(Tara and Blake exit USC.)

GUY: Guess I'll poke around downstairs. *(To Cynthia and Kendra.)* Coming, you two?

CYNTHIA: I think I'll stay here as well.

JACK: Why don't you go with Guy, Miss White. I'm sure he'd enjoy the company.

KENDRA: Yes, I...that sounds like a good idea.

GUY: After you, Kendra.

(Kendra and Guy exit DSR.)

JACK: What a bunch of saps. They don't have the slightest idea what's going on here.

CYNTHIA: Are you certain that we do? We could be wrong.

JACK: I'm never wrong.

CYNTHIA: If you're not careful, Jack, that ego's going to be the death of you. So, did you find it?

JACK: Not yet, but I will.

CYNTHIA: But you still think the Bloodstone is here?

JACK: I'm certain of it. Classic mystery, classic mastermind behind it. I understand how they think. Mark my words: Iago has brought the Bloodstone to this house.

CYNTHIA: Don't get too confident, Jack. We're nowhere near finding it, and now we have some competition on our hands. Kendra told the others about the card, and they aren't all as stupid as you may think.

JACK: You got the message, that's all I cared about.

CYNTHIA: In case you haven't noticed, the others are all rather suspicious of you.

JACK: Let them be suspicious. I don't care.

CYNTHIA: I thought we agreed to keep a low profile and not attract any attention.

JACK: I changed my mind.

CYNTHIA: Look, Jack, I don't want to blow this because you feel like pushing everyone around!

JACK: I'll handle this however I choose. Don't forget who's in charge here. You do exactly what I tell you to do.

CYNTHIA: Fine, so long as we split the money 50-50, like we agreed. Just remember, I'm not someone you can push around. We're partners again.

JACK: Just for tonight. Don't push your luck. You double-crossed me once, and I haven't forgotten it. We'll sell the Bloodstone, split the money, and part company. This time for good.

CYNTHIA: First we have to find the Bloodstone.

JACK: We will.

CYNTHIA: What if the others find it first?

JACK: They're looking for a person, not a ruby. They won't find anything they aren't meant to find.

CYNTHIA: And if there is someone else in the house?

JACK: There's no one else here. Iago will want to be watching us, and the best way to watch us is to be one of us.

CYNTHIA: You think Iago is one of the others?

JACK: Or one of us.

CYNTHIA: Are you saying I'm Iago? Your ego must be getting the better of you, Jack. The last thing I'd do would be to set up all this in order to join up with you again.

JACK: Who said I thought you were Iago? How do you know he's not me?

CYNTHIA: Because you didn't want to renew our partnership any more than I did.

JACK: (*Sarcastic.*) I wonder why. After our last job together you turned me in.

CYNTHIA: It was that or get caught myself. You would have done the same, and you know it. Besides, you got your share of the money.

JACK: Only after I gave the police the slip and tracked you down.

CYNTHIA: You still got it, so what are you complaining about?

JACK: Just watch your step, or next time you'll be the one to get it.

CYNTHIA: Do you treat all your partners this way?

JACK: Yes, and they usually deserve it, too.

CYNTHIA: No wonder your last one tried to do you in!

JACK: How do you know about that?

CYNTHIA: I've kept tabs on you. I have contacts of my own, you know.

JACK: She'll get hers, too.

CYNTHIA: Anyone I know?

JACK: Not until tonight.

CYNTHIA: Someone here? *(Thinks.)* Kendra? *(Jack nods.)* I wouldn't have thought her capable of murder.

JACK: Nor would anyone else. That's what made her such a perfect partner. You should have come to see me the other day. I could have given you quite the story on Miss Kendra White.

CYNTHIA: Do you think she knows something about the theft?

JACK: Maybe, but what she does know something about is the security system. She neglected to mention in your little interview that she's an expert on computers. If she put her mind to it, she could hack her way into the Pentagon in five minutes flat.

CYNTHIA: And how would you know that?

JACK: I timed her.

CYNTHIA: She's just full of surprises, isn't she?

JACK: Tell me about it.

CYNTHIA: So what happened?

JACK: She eventually decided she wanted out of our partnership...felt it was too dangerous. What she didn't understand is that a partnership isn't over until I say it's over. So she put a dose of arsenic in my tea. Unfortunately for her I'm too stubborn to die.

CYNTHIA: You mean fortunately for you she didn't know how much poison to use.

JACK: The point is, I'm still alive and her days are numbered.

CYNTHIA: She can wait until after we have the Bloodstone.

JACK: Don't worry. Kendra White isn't going to get between me and my money again.

CYNTHIA: Then what are we sitting around here for? Shouldn't we be looking for the Bloodstone?

JACK: Not yet.

CYNTHIA: What are you waiting for...a murder?

JACK: What else? It's what Iago lured us here for. Keep your eyes open. He just needs to wait for us to be alone.

CYNTHIA: Maybe that ruby really is cursed.

JACK: I don't believe in curses. Besides, I don't want to own it. I just want to sell it. *(He starts to exit.)*

CYNTHIA: Where are you going?

JACK: I want to see what the others are up to.

CYNTHIA: Didn't you just say we shouldn't be alone?

JACK: You can take care of yourself, and so can I.

CYNTHIA: So what's our next move?

JACK: To stay alive. The rest will follow.

(Jack exits USL. Blake enters USC.)

BLAKE: Ah, Miss Opal, you're still here. Where's Mr. Baron?

CYNTHIA: He just left. He got tired of just sitting and waiting. Find anything?

BLAKE: No, but Miss Reed was worried about you. She thought that perhaps Mr. Baron might take advantage of our absence and attempt to murder you.

CYNTHIA: I know how to deal with the likes of Mr. Baron, just like I know how to deal with you.

BLAKE: I beg your pardon?

CYNTHIA: It's been a long time, Blake, but not nearly long enough.

BLAKE: I'm afraid I don't know what you're talking about.

CYNTHIA: Don't play the "perfect strangers" bit with me. I know who you are.

BLAKE: You are obviously mistaking me for someone else. I am quite certain we have never met before tonight.

CYNTHIA: Nice try, but I knew who you were the moment I saw you. Feigning ignorance won't help.

(Blake tries to exit USC.)

BLAKE: If you'll excuse me, I had better get back to Miss Reed.

(Cynthia blocks his way.)

CYNTHIA: *(Sinister.)* What's your hurry? No time to catch up with an old friend?

BLAKE: I assure you, Miss Opal, I am not who you think I am. Now, let me pass.

CYNTHIA: Drop the pretense, Blake, I see right through it. You never were a very good actor.

BLAKE: *(Angry.)* Look here, Miss Opal, I see no reason for you to harass me in this manner!

CYNTHIA: Now, that's the partner I remember! It was always easy to set you off. Well now it's my turn. I've spent years trying to track you down ever since the jewel heist in London when you split with the loot and left me to take the fall. Remember that? I certainly do. I'll have to thank Mr. Iago for arranging this reunion. Too bad it can't last.

BLAKE: Are you threatening me?

CYNTHIA: Right now I have more important things to worry about than revenge. But don't worry, I'll have more to say to you later.

(Guy enters DSR.)

GUY: Hey there!

CYNTHIA: Hello, Guy, found anything yet?

GUY: Nope, nothing so far.

CYNTHIA: Well, maybe I'll go and give the others a hand. It's been nice chatting with you, Mr. Howard.

(Cynthia exits USC. Blake grabs Guy by the collar.)

GUY: Easy! What'd I do now?

BLAKE: *(Angry.)* You said something to her, didn't you?

GUY: What are you talking about?

BLAKE: She knew who I was.

GUY: Who, Cynthia? You two know each other?

BLAKE: She's one of the people who'd like to see me dead.

Rather like I'd prefer to see you!

GUY: *(Trying to make a joke.)* Boy, there seems to be a lot of that going on around here, doesn't there?

BLAKE: You told her something, didn't you? Some clue as to who I was?

GUY: No, I've hardly spoken to her!

(Blake twists Guy's arm behind his back.)

BLAKE: *(Angry.)* Don't lie to me! Tell me what you said!

GUY: Ow! Nothing, honest! Let me go!

BLAKE: Then what are you doing back here?

GUY: I just came to let Cynthia and Jack know we hadn't found anything yet.

BLAKE: Tell me the truth!

GUY: That is the truth, I swear!

BLAKE: You're a rotten liar and always have been! You told her who I was to get me off your back, didn't you? Are you trying to get me out of the way for something?

GUY: I told you, I didn't even know you were going to be here.

BLAKE: You're lying! What's your game? Are you after my cut in the Bloodstone? Is that it?

GUY: What cut? I don't know a thing about that ruby.

BLAKE: Then what do you know about Iago? What aren't you telling me?

GUY: Nothing! I don't know anything!

BLAKE: Why did Iago want you here? I know there is a reason, so tell me!

GUY: I can't. He didn't tell me!

(Blake tosses Guy to the ground.)

BLAKE: I'm sick of you and your lies! I don't know why I ever put up with you at all.

GUY: Just take it easy, Blake. This whole crazy business is starting to get to you.

BLAKE: Get out of here! You're barely worth the trouble.

(Guy quickly exits DSR. Blake continues to fume for a few moments and then exits after Guy. Long pause. A gunshot is heard, followed by a scream. Blackout. If desired, intermission may take place at this point.)

[END OF FREEVIEW]