

# **Many Happy Returns**

## **An Original screenplay by Wesley Britton**

### **Inspired by a short story, "The Edge of the Evening," by Rudyard Kipling**

#### Author's Introduction

Throughout 2007, I was heavily involved with plans to launch a new television series that would have been called *Secret Heroes*. The creator and master-mind of the concept was producer/writer Paul Guffan. Paul's premise was to create an anthology series in which, each week, viewers would see ordinary people rise to the challenges that drew them into the dangerous worlds of espionage. Each story would have been set in different places and times, from the American Revolution to World War II to the Cold War to the present. Each story would have a different tone, from the realistic to science-fiction to the romantic or even humorous.

Paul wrote a dozen or so scripts to establish the backbone of the first season and, as I helped work on the marketing and merchandising of the concept, I thought I'd try my hand at a story myself. Below is the result. Before his death on March 17, 2008, Paul helped me polish my first apprentice piece and taught me much. He taught me to leave out instructions for directors as they should be free to make their own stamps on the productions. He taught me to cut out too many historical details that would confuse modern viewers. He taught me to find ways to always remind audiences they were watching a spy story—get in more danger, danger, danger. Had he lived, I'm sure he would have taught me more.

The original idea for the script was a comic Rudyard Kipling short story called "The Edge of The Evening" in which a group of Englishmen discover a pair of German spies in a crashed bi-plane. To that, I added a number of new characters and a seance that had nothing to do with the Kipling story. I did try to retain Kipling's light tone and maintain a streak of humor throughout the proceedings, and for fun I tossed in a number of references to writers, past TV shows, and circumstances fellow spy aficionados might recognize. For example, if you know who Miles Mercerby is, this story could be considered the first mission for the Admiral who would become "M" in the Bond books. The title, "Many Happy Returns" is taken from, of course, a rather famous episode of a certain 1967 British series.

Well, as I said, this is but an apprentice piece I fully expected professional scriptwriters would have adapted if the series had come to fruition. I dearly wish I could post Paul's own and far superior stories, but I believe his heirs should make any such decisions, not his junior partner in the endeavor. So I hope you find "Many Happy Returns" an entertaining, if rough, romp into a time when spies wondered about what was brewing across the English Channel in the days when movies were silent and Britannia ruled the waves.

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In a small British theatre, a silent movie is flickering on a small screen. It is 1913 and the theatre is clearly one designed for stage shows with a screen set up near the front of the stage. A clanky piano is providing the score as we see a man holding up a letter in a threatening motion before a frightened woman on the screen.

The audience is completely women with one exception. At the back of the theatre, Mabob Ali sits, his attention more on two women in the audience than the film. While he has Indian features, he is intentionally dressed to be as non-descript as possible. The seats are partially filled, the theatre is not packed. Camera focuses on the two women Mabob is watching, both in their 50s in genteel clothes. One is Lady Emma McNeil, the other Lady Berni Buchan. They are talking quietly.

Emma: So melodramatic!

Berni: Such expressions!

Emma: Why do they always put some young girl in danger? No wonder no men ever attend these Odeons.

Berni: I think they'd be embarrassed to see all these mustached blaggards. Such cads!

Emma: A woman's virtue is never safe. Oh goodness, the spy is going to shoot the poor girl's father!

Berni: Oh no, she'll get him first. She has the hidden derringer. See?

In background, Mabob laughs.

Emma: No wonder they say all spies are suitable for hanging.

The film ends, and the lights come on. The crowd rises and begins filing out. The women walk and talk as they leave the theatre and begin walking down the street passing various shops. While they don't notice him, a smiling Mabob is tailing them. He is carrying a book in a sack.

Berni: A nickel for one hour in the theatre. We now have the entire afternoon. I wonder. How expensive would it be to set up your own movie company? It doesn't look like that it would be that hard.

Emma: I've read in the movie magazines American women are already doing that. Of course, they're famous actresses starring in their own movies. Like Marion Davies. The one who's always tied to railroad tracks.

Berni: Oh, that wouldn't be us! Dickie would whip me for even breathing such a thought!

Emma: George would think I've gone over the deep end at last.

They stop in front of a small bookstore. In the window's reflection, Emma sees Mabob across the street. A puzzled look crosses her face, but it quickly disappears.

Berni: Well Emma, here we are. Are we ready to indulge ourselves in another one of our own little shows?

Emma: George says it's fine by him.

Berni: Dickie is always so good about these things.

The women enter the shop. Inside, arranging books on a shelf, is Fatima Gironi. She is clearly Indian with a dot on her forehead. She has large bracelets on each arm and looks exotic. She sees the women and turns.

Fatima: Ah, A very good afternoon to you two, Lady McNeil, Madame Buchan. It's good to see friendly faces on this quiet day. Can I offer you ladies a cup of fresh tea? I just brewed a fresh pot in the back room.

Emma: No, thank you, it's not tea time for me.

Berni: Nor me. Business is slow?

Fatima: (walking behind her counter) How do you English say it--dead as a doorknob?

Bernie: Actually, dead as a door nail. Now that you mention it, I don't know why.

Emma: It is a strange expression, now that it comes to mind. Wonder where it came from.

While they talk, Mabob walks in and quickly disappears behind tall shelves.

Fatima: That I do not know. Perhaps we can find a book explaining quaint English expressions on the shelf of encyclopedias.

Emma: Perhaps another time, thank you. We're not here to buy books today.

Fatima: Ah, I see. It is time, then, to make our arrangements? You've decided.

Emma: My husband finds the idea acceptable. And your commission is most acceptable to me as well. So Friday, a week?

Fatima: My evening with you will be completely private? Your guests will know that nothing of what we do can be told to anyone, anyone at all?

Emma: Our husbands would insist on the very same.

Berni: And this will be a most small, select company. An intimate evening.

Fatima: (bowing her head after accepting an envelope Emma passes to her) Then I am your humble servant. Friday a week, then.

Emma and Berni in near unison: Friday a week.

Emma: I will make all the proper arrangements, then, exactly as you told me. Good day, Madame Gironi. It should be an exciting evening!

Berni: We're so looking forward to it!

The two turn and walk out, still talking but the words are not distinguishable. Fatima looks to see Mabob apparently taking down a book on a shelf. He approaches her carrying the book and it's obvious he fills her with unease.

Fatima: Aren't we overdoing it a bit, Mabob? You didn't need to tail those ladies to find out we've now done what the Colonel wanted.

Mabob: Oh, but I wanted to see the movie they just attended. It was all about spies in Berlin. I thought I might learn something.

Fatima: (snorts) And did you?

Mabob: Oh yes! I learned a good spy steals government secrets, never a woman's heart.

Fatima: Always the professional, Mabob Ali. I think all women's hearts are safe from the likes of you.

Mabob: Oh Fatima, you wound me! I'm not as cold as all that.

Fatima: Oh yes you are. Am I not sitting here because of you?

Mabob: (Trying to change the subject) This book here, this author Dornford Yates, is it worth a read?

Fatima: I hear he is quite popular. I don't know. I don't even recognize that book.

Mabob: (placing the book on the counter) You're not much of a bookseller. No wonder your business is slow.

Fatima: I know nothing of this trade, you know that. I sit here counting the days.

She casually opens the book and gasps. She sees the pages are cut out in a block, and a derringer pistol is lying in the hole.

Mabob: (laughs) I brought you this present thinking I was most clever. Imagine my surprise when I saw a poor woman shoot a spy with one of these in that movie but a few minutes ago!

Fatima: You have lost your mind! I would never use this . . . this thing!

Slams cover shut and glares at Mabob.

Mabob: Never be too sure what you might need to do, P38. I just thought all storekeepers might need protection . . .

Fatima: From the likes of you! A chala, a disciple of Kali does not shoot guns! We also do not deceive kind English women.

Mabob: Unless you're paying a debt. You're in this country to do one thing, and then you're free of me and the Colonel. Fatima, remember. I've not asked you to steal. I've not asked you to harm anyone. You have nothing to resent. You really don't.

Fatima: You can say that. You are a man of the world, Mabob Ali.

Mabob: And a man who keeps his promises. I am not heartless, Fatima.

Fatima: So you will be my guardian angel when I do this deplorable thing?

Mabob: I will be your chauffeur, I will see you there, I will see you home. I will be close at hand all night should anything at all go awry.

Fatima: Still, I pray the goddess will forgive me. This is not the work of a holy path.

Mabob: For the last time, I remind you when your game is over next Friday, that's it. I have sworn this. Many times. On two continents, I have promised this.

Fatima: I believe you. I know you are a man of your word. But I'm less sure of the Colonel.

Mabob: If you succeed with your little tricks, the Colonel will be well pleased. With more than enough to do besides pulling your strings.

Fatima: Then I will take time to spend in prayer to prepare my spirit.

Mabob: Then I will leave you and make my own arrangements. Be easy, P38. As I said, nothing asked of you should cause you such distress. Now, where would those ladies have gone?

Fatima: You're the special agent. What do you think they'd do on this quiet afternoon?

Mabob: Unless I miss my guess, gift shopping for their husbands.

Smiles, turns, and walks toward the door. Fatima looks down at the book and quickly hides it under her counter.

Cut to small private library and office. Two walls are lined with full bookshelves. By the back window is a desk full of papers. Behind it sits Sir Richard Buchan, about 50 years old, wearing reading glasses. A humidifier, pipe stand, and empty wine glass are on the desk. He is engrossed in reading the papers before him. On the wall facing the bookshelves is a long sofa next to a drinking cart. On it is a brandy snifter and several glasses. He looks up as his wife Berni enters from a hall door. She wears the same outfit from the bookstore scene, now carrying a small shopping bag.

Richard: Welcome back, my dear. A pleasant day in town?

Berni: Very pleasant. I got into such a good mood that I brought you a present. Do you deserve one?

Richard: Probably not. But since you already bought it . . .

She walks up to the desk and hands Richard a small box. She turns and walks out of the room to take off her jacket and hat.

Richard: (opens box) Well, thank you my dear. A very nice Sterling Cross writing pen.

Berni: (calling from other room) They say it's a very modern design. I hope it's smooth enough to make your atrocious handwriting understandable to your long-suffering correspondents.

Richard: (chuckles) Let's see. (scrawls on scrap of paper. Illegible, illegible. No improvement. Maybe this pen will help my spelling instead.

Berni re-enters room. She sees an empty glass on Richard's desk and walks to collect it. She takes it to the snifter to fill it and a glass for herself as they talk.

Berni: It's a pen, not a magic wand. Speaking of such, we made arrangements for next Friday. Madame Gironi will entertain us ladies, Emma will decide for some other entertainment for you gentlemen. (sits)

Richard: I see. Who else is invited?

Berni: Well, Emma invited the Americans, John and Hanna Standish. Emma thought you and George might finally settle your minds on his proposals.

Richard: Umm. (Picks up a pipe and begins packing it.) I don't know, it still seems very odd for a Yank to be the one trying to urge the British Parliament to expand our armaments. Not a single General, Sea Lord, or anyone in the Ministry of Defense agrees with this American.

Berni: And George is as unconvinced as you?

Richard: Less than I. Speaking of, who else is attending your little séance next Friday?

Berni: Emma is inviting George's nephew. She thinks that sooner or later, George will have to accept Miles as his heir.

Richard: Oh my word, that rather takes the spark out of the night for George! That lad can suck the sour from a lemon without bothering to peel it!

Berni: (imitating Lord George McNeil, talking in a deep bass voice) "I say, that boy's teachers had but one pleasure when he was their student. The holidays!"

Richard: (laughs) That's George sentiments exactly! I confess, I've always found Miles rather harmless. It's around his uncle he pulls into himself. Puts up that dour front.

Berni: For George, I think Miles is just too plain. Bland. He never has anything interesting to talk about. It would help if he'd decide on some sort of career for himself.

Richard: Well, we've tried. Can't interest him in anything we are connected with. I admit, he has a good heart. Just too idealistic.

Berni: So what's going to help you decide? About the American proposal, I mean.

Richard: I just don't know. I need something to show, really show our England is indeed in the peril the arms merchants claim. Fear mongering, that's all I hear. And read. You'd think Bolsheviks are in everyone's cupboards, anarchists hiding under everyone's beds! You'd think hot-air balloons will be bombing Brighton by breakfast! Good Lord!

Berni: (picks up newspaper) Well, you only have to read the papers. The Spanish Prime Minister shot, another bomb in an Italian café. Two Irish revolutionaries hung at Wormwood this morning. Perhaps the American has a point.

Richard: (sighs) This fellow Standish is right about one thing. Every capital in Europe rattles their sabers and sticks up their chins and prances around like everyone is spoiling for a fight. I say, let them duke it out on the continent. England has nothing to gain from siding with any of that lot.

Berni: (rises) Perhaps I'll ask Mrs. Gironi about that next Friday. That sort of thing, after all, is supposed to be her cup of tea.

She trips over a stack of books and spills her wine on documents on the desk.

Richard: I say, I say, just because they're illegible doesn't mean they're not important!

Berni: (giggles) Fatima didn't warn me about this! Some fortune teller!

Cut to wide view of tall cliffs with lapping waves at the bottom. We hear gulls and see a line of trees at the top.

Cut to back view of a Victorian mansion--the elaborate home of Lord George and Emma McNeil. The area is filled with carefully arranged and well taken care of botanical arrangements of hedges, vegetables and numerous flowering plants. Emma steps out the center back door.

Emma: George! George! Where are you?

Her eyes fall to one area of her garden where she sees a groundhog crushing one of her plants.

Emma: Hay, you, you! Shoo, shoo!

Then she has a surprised look as the groundhog stands on its back legs, trembles, and falls over. A straw or stick of some kind is protruding from his head. Emma then hears her husband's voice, and turns her head. She sees the rather comic sight of George rushing forward holding a long stick over his head. It is about five feet in length, ribbed with elaborate workmanship. One end is wider than the rest of the rod, smoothed flat. The other end tapers almost to a point.

George: Huzzah and huzzha! Tally-ho and tally ho! Got you, you blighter, got you!

Emma: George, George, what in perdition is going on?

George: (running to side of dead groundhog) A new toy, my dear, a very practical and helpful new gardening implement!

Emma: (walking forward) What on earth are you talking about?

After inspecting his kill, George turns his attention to Emma, showing off the rod in his hands.

George: While you were out with Berni today, Reggie popped by with this present. Brought it with him from Capetown. And perfect timing, excellent timing!

Emma: I still have no idea.

George: (waving his hand) Come, I'll show you.

The two walk along to the other side of the house. There, Emma sees a pile of hay bales stacked on each other by the side of what looks to be a stable or barn. A large target is fixed to the bales. All over the target, various straws are protruding. Emma then looks to a table set up some thirty feet from the target. She walks with George behind the table, seeing piles of straws on it.

George: It's a savage's blowpipe, my dear, a most perfect jungle technology!

He picks up one of the straws and places it in the larger end of the pipe.

George: Lookit here. You don't blow hard, just puff.

He blows into the pipe and a new straw hits near the middle of the target.

George: Practice leads to perfection! And with but an hour of practice, I blasted one of the blighters tormenting your plants! Now, isn't this a wonder?

Emma: A wonder indeed. An accomplishment that doesn't require the blow hard qualities of Lord George McNeil.

George looks at her and laughs.

George: Care to give it a try?

Emma: Don't mind if I do.

She steps forward, and George tutors her in holding up the rod, holding it out and aiming it. Emma makes spluttering attempts, making funny noises and faces as she tries to get it right.

George: Just puff! You're not playing an elegant bassoon passage at the philharmonic! Oh perdition, this isn't a bagpipe! Don't blow up your cheeks--you don't need to learn the tuba!

Emma: It's very long, too long for my hands.

George: (holding the middle) Right-O. Does this help?

Emma: Let's see.

George: Don't try to be a whale spout--just say hah and blow!

Emma: Hah.

She blows into the pipe and a new straw hits the haystack, far from the center.

George: That's the idea, that's the idea! All it takes is practice and you'll be a hunter of the back acres yourself!

Emma: I think not. But you've solved one problem for me. Next Friday when Berni and I host our next little do, I now know what you can do to entertain our male guests.

George: Ah, instruct the boys in Congo weaponry!

Emma: If you must. I was thinking you gentlemen could use whatever weapons you like and continue your campaign against the relatives of your corpse in the garden. Speaking of, would you care to remove that disgusting sight from my delicate sensibilities?

George: (gives mock bow) Oh, I obey, I obey at once! My feet are like wind, Sahib.

Cut to wide view of the front of the McNeil mansion. It's a week later. Shot establishes the house sits by itself in the midst of nature in all directions. In the circular drive in front, we see a young couple parking their car. The young man—Miles Mercerby—steps out, comes around, and opens the passenger door for Priscilla Barnes. They talk as she steps out and they move toward the house.

Miles: Well, here we are. I hope you're ready for this.

Priscilla: Goodness gracious, Miles Mercerby, it should be me nervous tonight, not you! I'm the one being introduced for the very first time.

Miles: I keep telling you. Every time I come here, all I can think of is what happened in that room right there. (points to window on second floor) The day my cousin died, everything fell on me. Everyone seemed to think I had to start living Danny's life. Do the things he would have. Soon as I step through those doors, I'm under a very disapproving microscope. I hate it.

Priscilla: But there's nothing you have to do. Nothing they can make you do. Except marry me, of course.

Miles: (laughs) The only choice I may ever get to make.

Priscilla: When do you plan to tell them you want to go into the ministry?

Miles: When I know for sure. When I know enough to argue my case and maybe win.

Priscilla: Well, tonight, I am the one on display. You, relax! Remember one thing, Miles. You're no longer alone. You're not fighting your battles by yourself anymore.

Miles: Yes, yes, you're right. That makes all the difference.

Cut to a small closet-sized room where Fatima Gironi is kneeling before a statue of the six-armed goddess, Kali, on an altar. Incense is burning and the only lighting is from two tall, tapered white candles and a small window covered with a thin, translucent curtain. Otherwise, the wood walls are bare, a carpet covers the floor. Her hair is covered with a shawl, her arms crossed in front of her breasts. She is wearing a long skirt that covers all of her except her shoes. Her eyes are closed and she is murmuring quiet, incomprehensible words.

Then her eyes open when she hears a distant store bell. Quickly, she rises and blows out the candles and stops her incense with a metal cup on a handle. She removes her shawl, shakes her hair loose, and places the shawl on the altar.

Fatima: Forgive me one last time, my goddess. One last time.

Moving quickly, Fatima steps out of the room, a beaded curtain is the door. Fatima sees Mabob standing across her bedroom in the hall door way. He is dressed in dark clothes for the outdoors.

Mabob: Are your prayers complete? Your nerves settled?

Fatima: I am ready. My soul is quiet.

Mabob: Then your chariot awaits for the last time, my P38.

Cut to view of Emma McNeil and Berni Buchan sitting on a sofa in formal clothes. They are in a lavish English sitting room lined with comfortable sofas, the walls filled with large family portraits and trophies of travels and equestrian events. To the right is a bright fire burning. Sitting beside each woman is their husband. All four hold glasses of brandy and are watching two other couples in the room.

Playing a piano with clear enjoyment is John Standish. His wife Hanna is standing beside him, singing along. They are in their late 20s. Hanna is looking at Miles and Priscilla dancing in the middle of the room.

A butler escorts Mrs. Gironi into the room. The music abruptly stops, and all the men rise as the butler speaks.

Butler: Your final guest is here, Ma'am. Allow me to present Mrs. Fatima Gironi.

The McNeils move forward to greet their guest, the Buchans a step behind them.

Emma: Thank you, Charles. Fatima, would you care for a drink, anything to refresh you after your drive?

Fatima: Not just now, thank you. Perhaps after I meet everyone.

Emma: Just let me know! Charles, you now have the night off, as I promised.

Butler: Thank you, Ma, am. I'll be back before breakfast.

Emma: Be sure to bring back some of your sister's excellent crumpets!

Butler: I will indeed, Ma'am.

The butler bows and departs. Emma turns to Fatima.

Emma: So good to see you again, Fatima. Allow me to introduce you to my husband, Lord George McNeil, formerly of His Majesty's Afghan regiments.

Fatima: Good evening to you, my Lord. Thank you for allowing me to be a guest in your wonderful home.

George: Delighted, absolutely delighted to have you join us, Madame Gironi. Allow me to introduce, ah, members of our two parties for this evening. Richard Buchan, the notable Sir Richard Buchan, here is a very old friend of ours. We don't have to tolerate him quite as much as Berni here, which makes her all the more a remarkable woman!

Fatima: Hello again, Berni. I'm very pleased to meet you, Sir Buchan. You are fortunate to have such an intelligent, curious wife.

Richard: Oh, she's curious, alright! Whatever others may say, it's a great comfort to live with an educated woman. I say, I'd vote to give such as her the right to do the same!

George: Oh, rather! I wholeheartedly agree, Madame Gironi! Dick could have married no better! But this rascal didn't always deserve her, oh ho, not by a long shot! I've known Dick since a few adventures in Deli, what, thirty years ago?

Richard: Thirty-two, as I keep reminding you. But you've never been one to keep your war stories straight.

George: I am wounded to my core! I remember everything, absolutely everything whether it happened or not! Perhaps I should regale our guest with the facts before you muddle them with your corrections.

Emma: Oh no, no, not tonight! Mrs. Gironi is not here for the weekend. We don't have the time to suffer through your memoirs again!

George: Again, I am wounded to the heart! Very well then, allow me to introduce our other guests, Madame. Over here, John, come meet our new guest. Madame, You've no doubt heard good words about my American pilot friend, Major John Standish. He's here to try and sell Dick and I on the idea of persuading Parliament to invest in some munitions made in the good ole U.S.A.

John: Good evening, Madame.

Fatima: Good evening to you, Major.

Emma: John is a lovely man, but his wife is the even lovelier Hanna Wallis Standish of Hartford and. .

Fatima Oh, but Mrs. Standish and I have already met! Hanna and I met at Lady Sutton's charity for the Middlesex Hospital this May.

Hanna: The night Mr. Kipling read that dreadful, grisly poem about marching microbes! What a subject for verse, germs and disease in soldier's tents!

George: To complete our circle, Madame Gironi, allow me to present my very young nephew, Mr. Miles Mercerby. He looks rather embarrassed I'm afraid to say. I don't know why. The lad has just become engaged to this charming young lady, Miss Priscilla Barnes of Newcastle.

Fatima Congratulations to you both! The blessings of your God upon you together for all times!

The couple look slightly puzzled by these words, but mutter their thanks.

Emma: Fatima, Why don't you come with me so I can show you our preparations? Everyone, please take a few minutes to relax and freshen up! Ladies, we can let our hair down. Gentlemen, you can change into your sporting clothes.

The McNeils and Mrs. Gironi walk into the hall. While the other couples move toward the main doors, we see a whispered conversation between John and Hanna.

Hanna: John, do you find it strange that I met Mrs. Gironi at the hospital charity and now see her again tonight like this? Something about that seems very strange.

John: I did think all this was a bit your fault. I presumed you met Madame, heard her stories, and passed them along to Mrs. McNeil who likes unusual people.

Hanna: Actually, I didn't hear many stories from her. She more asked me questions, questions about your work. Questions about your attempts to get the British to see sense.

John: Well, it's a small country. If Madame used you for a bit of social climbing, I can't see the harm.

Hanna: Still, I wonder. I feel uneasy about all this.

Cut to Mabob sitting in his car. He's pulled it into a grove of trees and he has a clear view of the McNeil's mansion although he is hidden from any view of the house. About to leave the car, he hears a "beep beep" coming from under his seat. He reaches down, and pulls up a microphone on a long cord. He reaches out and flicks a switch. He hears a scratchy voice coming from a very primitive speaker.

Colonel: Come in Dover Beach, come in. Over.

Mabob: Dover Beach here. Over.

Colonel: Hello, hello, can barely hear you.

Mabob: (reaches out and adjusts a knob) Can you hear me now? Over.

Colonel: I say, Dover Beach, are you close to your target? Over.

Mabob: In plain view, sir. Over.

Colonel: I say, anything interesting in the skies? Any unusual aircraft? Over.

Mabob: Not at this moment. What should I be looking for? Over.

Colonel: I say, anything unusual. There's word something might be afoot tonight. Over.

Mabob: Just something in the sky? Over.

Colonel: Good chap. Get to it. Over.

Mabob: Right-o. Over and out.

Opens car door, pulling on gloves.

Mabob: Watch the girl, watch the skies. Watch yourself as well tonight, Mabob Ali.

Cut to the McNeils and Mrs. Gironi entering a dining room. It is large with a long table, covered with a lacy cloth. At one end, we see items set up before four chairs. There is a long, tapered candle before each chair. Set before the head chair is a bowl of water, bowl of fine, powdery dirt, another candle, and an incense burner. Mrs. Gironi walks around the table, talking while inspecting the items.

Fatima: Did I understand you to say, Lord McNeil, that you are hosting two parties this evening? I see but five places set. There are nine of us I know of.

George: (laughs) Rather! You women will gather in here while we men will be enjoying some fresh air. We're not exactly--

Fatima: Believers in fortune tellers. Spiritualists. The eyes of divinity you believe are fakes and hucksters.

She sits at the head chair, giving the items a closer inspection.

Emma: It's true, George has never been one interested in things--well, things not of the world he knows. A world he can measure and balance. Things he can make jokes about. But tonight, Madame Gironi, the men folk have a legitimate excuse for not joining us at the table. We've been having some trouble with some groundhogs on our grounds. Our gallant men are on a mission to help preserve my gardens.

George: I must confess, Mrs. Gironi, I thought you would be coming with, ah, more--

Fatima: Props, my Lord? Strange devices to levitate your table? Megaphones to make my voice deeper and more mysterious in the dark? All the gimmicks and trappings of the fakes that disparage the work of those such as me?

George: I was surprised, I admit, you were willing to hold your, ah, séance here instead of your own chambers where, ah, I'm sure, ah--

Fatima: Where I could indeed use magician's tricks to deceive the gullible? No, Lord McNeil, I need none of that. The soil in this bowl, the water in this were set by your wife's own hands. No strange powders from me to make sparkling lights illuminate the dark. I am a Chala of my Goddess, not a charlatan lying on a bed of nails to impress travelers seeking exotic sights. No, Major, you have met none like me. I need only these mere symbols before me. I need only--

She reaches into her satchel and pulls out a deck of Tarot cards.

Fatima: --the ancient tools of the soothsayers of truth.

She splays the deck on the table, the pictures on the cards visible.

Cut to table by the blowpipe target range. Three of the men now carry rifles, George his blowpipe. They have changed to less formal clothes and are wearing caps and jackets. It appears George has completed his demonstration and the two younger men are walking away to inspect the grounds.

Richard: I say, tell me George. If the mystic in your dining room could bring anyone back from the grave to dine with you in your house, who would you choose? Whose skeleton would you pick to share a cup of good English tea?

George: Oh without doubt, I'd like to dine with King Solomon. They say he was wise and had 100 wives. The two things don't blend, no sir. Like brewing tea from sawdust. Sounds 99 times the fool to me. How about you, Dick? Any particular dead Smith or Jones you'd like to shake hands with?

The two start following the younger pair.

Richard: Anyone who can tell me if Master Standish's intelligence reports are supportable. I can get nothing from our people to confirm the American fears. Everything seems to be falling apart on the continent, but we don't seem to be in anyone's gunights. Not that I can see.

George: (waving his rod) Everywhere but here. Merry old England is still what she has ever been, a beacon of civilization.

Richard: But for how long? I keep thinking there is something unseemly in all these arms merchants popping up these days. Like they want a war just to justify their factories.

George: And our factories too. You and me, we're both rather heavily invested in these industries. And we talk here as if we're adverse to making a profit.

Richard: I like making money, I admit. But we both know it's our voice in Parliament that matters. If it seems we're barking up things to our own advantage . . .

George: . . . the real issues, if any, would get lost in the press. We couldn't carry the flag on this one, no matter what the Yanks think.

Richard: But they know well we pull strings. Mr. Standish has done his homework. But if Fleet Street gets wind, it's our purse strings they'll think we're pulling.

George: Yes, I'm inclined to tell Mister Standish to float his fears to Fitzsimmons and Wallace in the House of Commons. Let them raise the debate.

Richard: Yes, that makes sense to me. I see no urgency, myself.

Cut to women in dining room. All are sitting at their places, Emma and Berni closest to Fatima. The ladies have changed into less formal clothes.

Berni: I didn't want to ask this in the parlor and stir up anything. But Madame Gironi, can you tell me what's the difference between a spiritualist and a fortune teller?

Fatima: I will try to explain, although I do not indulge in the games of the spiritualists you speak of. Those in the papers. From what I see, they are interested in unfortunate souls buried in the grave, bringing back glimpses from the other side. Those who seek these visions seek the comforting words of passed fathers, husbands, wives.

Priscilla: I don't believe that is possible. Sorry.

Fatima: It is possible, Miss Barnes. But it is rare. But I assure you, it is not my purpose, it is not my gift to resurrect those peacefully slumbering in their tombs.

Hanna: Then this is not a séance at all!

Fatima: If you mean by that you shouldn't expect ghosts or ectoplasms tonight, you are correct. Tonight, you will pose questions to the forces beyond our current state. Call them angels, spirits, whatever you will. It is best you ask a question about something you hope for in your own future. Let the slumbering ones slumber.

Priscilla: Oh, what a relief!

Berni: Then we'll have no visitations tonight? What a disappointment!

Fatima: I did not promise visitations. I did not say there would be no messages from the dead. It depends on your question. But you will have your answers. Just not in, ah, melodrama or rattling of your cutlery or cries in the night like a cheap movie show.

Berni: Oh, then I am ready! I understand now. Oh, I am curious as a schoolgirl!

Fatima: Is everyone else ready as well? Hanna, Priscilla? Is everyone settled, easy in your minds and hearts?

Emma: Whenever you will, I am ready and eager.

Cut to John and Miles, far away enough from George and Richard to not be overheard.

Miles: You have these things in the States, these spiritualists rattling up dead relatives and showing off weird ectoplasms?

John: Oh sure, all over the place. Some are famous, some with little booths in carnivals. So long as you're not paying them big money, I don't see the harm.

Miles: Do you think my aunt and Lady Buchan take them seriously?

John: (laughs) From what I see, I imagine they'd be just as happy inviting some undiscovered poet or missionary returning from the Orient. I think they're bored women who like occasional outings with less stuffy types than their husbands bring around.

Miles: I don't mind the stuffy types. I like the settled life, not gallivanting around all the time.

John: Someday, I hope for that too. Sitting in my cozy parlor with four kids and taking them for trips to Niagara Falls. Maybe take them out west to see some tame Indians.

Miles: But I get the impression this someday isn't any day soon. At least what you think.

John: No. No. No, I'm betting that all the forces in Christendom can't stop a carnage never seen before. Folks like you and me, we'll be the ones in the thick of it.

Miles: No, not me. I'm seminary bound. At least, I think I am. What I'm suited for would be a good, simple country parson.

John: With this estate to have for a parsonage.

Miles: Doesn't really fit the image, does it? Whatever I am, it's not anything like filling the shoes of my uncle.

John: (laughs) Oh my word, what's wrong with us? This is no evening to dwell on the future! Good Lord, man! How serious can you take an evening when your objective is shooting up groundhogs in the flowerbeds? Isn't that enough of the settled life for you?

Miles: (smiles) A hit, a very palpable hit Horatio! You're exactly right. (Sticks out his hand) Let's shake on an entertaining bout with the old codgers behind us. (They shake hands)

As the men shake hands, we see another man crouching behind bushes watching them. It is Mabob Ali.

Cut to women in dining room. Fatima is standing in front of her chair.

Fatima: This eve, my sisters, in the hour of twilight between sunlight and moonrise, is the time for cracks between the realms! Now is The perfect time to learn from the past, the time to peer

into the future! Sisters, join your hands together! Close your eyes and clear your thoughts like a prayer in a Sunday pew!

Cut to men. They've moved farther from the house, all together and looking around.

Miles: A nice salty sea breeze tonight. Too bad we can't see the channel from here.

John: (pointing to the distance) And a wonderful sunset as well. About how far to the channel from here, Lord McNeil?

George: I say, but a half-kilometer. Three hills and one slope. Forests in between till the cliffs. Most of what you see, it's all mine. Mine and the badgers and foxes and deer.

John: (looking to the right beyond a waist-high stone wall) Looks like open green over there. That yours as well?

George: No, no, that's club land. Golf greens, that. Splendid sport, splendid!

He stops short, spotting a groundhog.

George: Gentlemen, gentlemen, tally-ho! (points his rod near the stone wall) I see a blighter, I see the bugger! To arms!

The men spot the groundhog, and take off after him.

Cut to women. Fatima picks up the bowl of water.

Fatima: In your minds, Sisters, picture an image of water, a river, a sea, a lake, whatever you will.

Taking a few steps behind the other women, Fatima sprinkles small throws of water around the group, and then picks up the bowl of earth.

Fatima: Sisters, think of our world of nature, your plants, your animals, a forest, the touch of your mate!

Cut to men. They are yelling and bumping into each other in comical scene.

John: Watch out for roots there, Miles! Nearly took a spill.

Miles: Watch yourself, American!

George: There he goes! Shoot someone, shoot!

Near the wall, the three with guns all raise their rifles and blast away at the groundhog.

Cut to women. Fatima lights her incense.

Fatima: Sisters, now, in your minds, join with water and nature the sweet inhale of your breath! Breathe in, breathe out, slowly, slowly, slowly. Slower--slower.

She sits and lights the candle before her.

Fatima: Now, Sisters, think what it means to be a woman, a woman holding a newborn babe in your arms. Think of a mother's love, the first love of smallness finding nourishing protection in your arms. Think of love, nothing but warm, unspoken love. When you feel the caresses of the natural world, of earth, water, your breath, then light the candle before you. When we all have a light before us, then the time for divination will begin.

Cut to men outside.

Richard: Well, I'm a nickel short of a dime novel! Three Brits, one Yank, and the little monstrosity got away!

John: Most embarrassing. Sorry, Lord McNeil.

George: Oh no, we're not done yet! There's daylight yet! Come, maybe over the wall we'll have better luck. More open space.

As the men look in that direction, they hear the sounds of a plane motor. They all look up in the direction of the sound. They are unaware that Mabob, from another hiding place, is also watching the plane with wide eyes. He disappears into the darkness.

Cut to the dining room. The five women sit close together, the only light from the now lit candles. The others stare at Madame Gironi as she sits back in her chair, muttering an incomprehensible incantation. She raises her hands, and presses her palms and fingers together. She whispers a few more words, drops her hands to the table aside the Tarot cards, and opens her eyes.

Fatima: Each of you, my daughters, seeks insight into the future tonight. Each of you, in your heart this eve, has one question to pose to those from another plane, perhaps from loved ones on the other side. Right now, each of you must frame your one simple question and think on it only.

She takes the cards and places them before Emma.

Fatima: Let us begin with you, Emma McNeil. Take these cards, shuffle them, fill them with your energies. Fill them with the question of your heart.

Cut to the men leaping over the stone wall onto the golf green, all looking to the sky. Then George looks down and points to a hole at the base of the wall.

George: There's one end of the pest's underground escape route. Wish I could figure the other end of the bugger's tunnel.

John: (still looking up) That engine sounds like it's got trouble. A spot of bother.

Miles: (looks at ground) Hah, looks like someone else had a bit of bother.

Picks up a golf club, bent in the middle. He holds it up and the men laugh.

George: I wager a wager was lost near here not long ago!

Richard: Or perhaps a member saw your bugger and took aim at his furry features!

The men laugh, their attention returning to the bi-plane coming into view. Black smoke trailing, the plane is heading for a hard landing. It carries one pilot and one passenger in two seats. They are wearing helmets and goggles.

George: Looks like we're getting a special exhibition.

Richard: What make is she?

John: Continental Renzalaer. Good plane. Usually quite reliable.

The plane hits the ground and rolls forward to a stop. When it stops, we see the two airmen leap out on the opposite side of the plane.

George: Oh ho, the club secretary won't like that! Members without paying dues! (Calling out) Hallo there! Can we be of assistance?

Cut to Mabob by his car, the door open. He's holding his microphone and talking into it.

Mabob: Dover Beach to Whitehall. Come In. Over.

He hears only static.

Mabob: Dover Beach to Whitehall. Come in. Over.

No reply.

Mabob: Whitehall, I hope you can hear. A plane is down by target. Repeat. Plane is down by target. Will investigate. Over.

Throws microphone on seat, closes door, and hurries back across the road.

Cut to dining room. Emma places the shuffled cards in front of Mrs. Gironi.

Emma: I am ready. I know my question. Mine and my husband's.

Fatima: (Turns over first card--a Seven of Coins) Ah, you wonder about money, Lady McNeil. No, it's your husband. He worries an important decision could hurt his reputation if others think he's out to make a fortune. He and you are well off. You don't need money. It's public perception your husband fears.

Emma: That's the life of a politician. Fearing what the press will say.

Fatima: Hmm. Well, this is a seven. The perfect number, a most positive number. It would seem to suggest he should not fear this. Let's see.

She lays down a second card, making the shape of a V. It is the seven of swords.

Berni: A pretty pair!

Emma: I'll raise the pot one shilling.

Fatima: Ah, the money issue deals with an investment, an investment is in arms of some kind. Weapons. New weapons.

Berni: The proposals of Hanna's husband.

Hanna: But he didn't know about any investments! He just wants our friends and allies to be prepared!

Emma: I haven't heard about investments of this kind. I don't know what George has his fingers in! But now I get an idea why he'd want to distance himself from all this talk of weapons. Could seem quite self-serving.

Fatima: I know nothing of these concerns. All I can say is the cards are most positive. They say yes quite plainly. Yes, matching numbers is always a good sign of the positive. The deeper meaning is--(she turns over a card which she lays above the V.) It is the Wheel of Fortune.) This project is part of a larger purpose, that is certain. Of meaning to many.

Hanna: Just what John has been saying! It's important for all of England!

Emma: Most intriguing. Tell me more! Then I want to see what the cards tell Berni.

Cut to the men walking toward the plane. The plane's pilot jumps in front, opening a hatch to examine the engine. Cut to the two airmen talking--the first, Klaus, is looking at the engine. The second, Eric, is large and brutish.

Klaus: Eric, do something about those fools out there! We cannot permit anyone to see our cargo!

Eric: Klaus, they are armed. I cannot speak with them--I know no English!

Klaus: Then use your gun! Speak with bullets! Keep them away until I can repair this cylinder!

Eric lays on the ground under the plane and pulls out a pistol. He begins shooting at the four men. Richard cries out and slaps his hand on his right shoulder. As he buckles, the others look first at him, then toward the shooter. As if synchronized, George and John drop to the ground, John leveling his gun and firing. Richard also falls flat, Miles does the same after looking at his companions. George fumbles with his blowpipe and straws in his pocket.

Miles: What the hell? What did we do?

George: (muttering) Of all the times to be caught flat-footed with a savager's invention! Dick, are you hit!

Richard: Damned nuisance! A glancer on my shoulder!

John: I'll cover you, everyone behind the wall!

John keeps firing at the airman as the other three scramble behind the wall.

Richard: (leveling his gun over the wall) John, come on! I'll cover you!

John, keeping low, runs and joins the other three behind the wall. Both sides stop shooting. Cut to airmen.

Klaus: What are the Englishers doing?

Eric: Hiding behind a stone wall.

Klaus: Keep them there! I'm going to have to find a spare cylinder in the storage compartment.

Cut to men behind wall.

Miles: Damn! My gun jammed!

John looks over at George who has turned his attention to Richard.

George: A scratch old boy, a nick.

Richard: (pulling out a handkerchief) Right-o. I'll just stuff this bit of white to catch any spots. Would be a damned nuisance for my jacket to be ruined more than it is.

George: (calling out) Hello out there! What's the bother? We mean you no harm!

A bullet bounces off the wall.

John: A most single-minded conversation.

George: Something very cock-eyed is going on. Like to see what those buggers are up to.

Richard: Good thing the plane faces west. They can't bear their machine guns on us.

John: If they only know one language, I'll show them a bit of my wit.

He fires, and Klaus cries out and falls. Cut to airmen.

Eric: Klaus! Klaus! Are you hit!

Klaus moans. Eric moves beside him, turning him over.

Eric: Gott in Himmel! Klaus, you must rise and fix the engine! I cannot fly the plane!

Klaus: You fool! I can fix nothing now! Run, run--at least one of us won't be captured!

Eric: But run where? Where can I go?

Klaus: Run to the cliffs and throw yourself over the edge! Run anywhere fool--just don't get caught!

Eric: I don't want to leave you.

Klaus: Then I'll shoot you myself.

Klaus starts digging for his gun. Eric jumps up and runs away from the coming men.

Cut to English men.

John: One down! I'll check him out.

He leaps over the wall, holding out his rifle. He moves cautiously toward the downed airman. Miles watches him, drops his jammed rifle in disgust, and then leaps over the wall. He sees the bent golf club, picks it up, and follows John.

Miles: What the devil is going on? Poachers? Anarchists?

John: I don't know. Damned unsociable. Damned inhospitable.

He nearly reaches Klaus when he freezes. Klaus looks up, his pistol aimed at John. As Klaus starts to rise, one hand holding his chest, we hear a whipping sound. Miles throws his club at the airman, the club striking his target in the face. We hear a groan of pain, and Klaus falls back on the ground.

John: My Lord! My word! How did you manage that?

Miles: (mouth gaping in astonishment) I don't, I don't know! Seemed the thing to do!

John: Color me grateful, Parson Mercerby!

John scurries up to the downed airman. He pulls off his helmet and feels for a pulse. Miles runs up beside them.

John: Well, he's not dead yet. Yet. He'll be a goner soon, that's for sure. That conk on the head knocked him cold!

George and Richard come running up, a white kerchief sticking up from the wound in Richard's shoulder.

Miles: You sure you're O.K., Sir Richard?

Richard: Buzzed by a gnat, mate, nothing more.

John: C'mon Miles, grab that pistol. Let's get the other one. We gotta save our reputations as worthy hunters!

Miles: We won't get beat this time!

John takes off running, Miles following after scooping up the airman's pistol. Insert Mabob also running, but he is not seen by anyone. From time to time, John and Miles pause to look for telltale signs of where the runner went.

John: Damn nuisance, this darkness!

Miles: Look over there, he dropped his goggles! He went that way!

John and Miles run until they are looking up a hill.

John: Not the best battlefield position for us. He could pick us off like Pickett's Charge. (looks to right) We don't want him cutting back that way toward the house.

Miles: If you want, I'll take the left flank, you the right.

John: Good thinking, Parson. Keep low, find the shadows.

Miles: And I'll be In Scotland afore ye.

The men split and race off in their various directions.

Miles: The Lord is my Shepard, I shall not want. He prepareth my path . . .

Cut to view of three cards on the dining table. They are the same from before--a 7 of Coins, seven of Swords, the Wheel of Fortune. This time, they are positioned closer to Berni Buchan.

Berni: Now, that's another pretty sight! You and me together, Emma.

Emma: Bound together by bounder husbands and duplicate cards. As ever, as always.

Fatima: And exactly the same question. And same answer. I admit, this is most remarkable. The Fates seem to put much into the hands of two English women.

Berni: I don't know about all that. But I will have an interesting story for Dickie.

Hanna: Oh, do me next! I hope you're on a roll, Madame Gironi!

Cut to line of trees where Eric pauses to look behind him and catch his breath. From his vantage point, he sees John and Miles working toward him on the right and left, Richard and George moving up the center. Eric hears noises to his left, and looks in that direction. While he can't make him out, it's Mabob also stalking him. Desperately, Eric fires off shots at all the men he can see. They all drop to the ground. Then the gun clicks, the magazine is empty. Crouching, Eric reloads his gun and moves quickly into the trees.

Cut back to George and Richard on the ground. George is still carrying his blowpipe, Richard his rifle.

George: Lying in short grass like this, I couldn't feel more naked.

Richard: Not exactly mountain terrain with rocks and caves to cover us.

George: He stopped firing. I'll get up, cover me.

Richard: If he's moved on, I'll be right behind you.

George rises cautiously, but hears no shots. He begins running forward, and Richard quickly rises to follow.

Cut to Mabob lying in dirt behind some bushes. He can no longer see the airman, but is watching John who is also moving along by keeping low, using trees for cover.

John: (to himself) Hope you're not Tarzan, mate. Hope you're just a sap running in the trees.

Mabob: (also whispering to himself) You and me, Mr. American, we got him cut off from the road. If we can let him know we're here, we should send him back to your friends.

Mabob looks around and finds a hand-sized rock. He watches to see John move into a position with his back to him, and then Mabob throws the rock as far as he can into the trees. Eric hears the rock hit a tree and starts shooting in that direction. John replies with one shot.

Eric: Gott in Himmel!

Turns and retreats in the direction he came from. At the base of one thick tree, he looks up. He begins climbing.

Cut back to Miles at the edge of the line of trees. He's holding out the pistol, listening carefully for any sounds. His face is covered in sweat. He's still muttering the Lord's Prayer.

Miles: He layeth me by the still waters, he restoreth my soul . . .

[Next scene perhaps shot in silent movie style?]

Suddenly, Eric jumps from above, landing on Miles. Miles cries out, falls, and drops his pistol. The two men begin to wrestle and fight. They take a brief pause, eyeing each other.

Miles: What the devil is wrong with you, mate? We met you no harm!

Eric: Die, Englisher!

He jumps at Miles again, and the airman is clearly the superior fighter. Cut to George and Richard, seeing the fight. George pauses, smiles, and begins to load his blowpipe.

George: Can I borrow your good shoulder, Dickie?

Richard looks at him and stands in front of George.

George: Hold on a second, got a little bottle in my pocket. A straw dipped in it, well, better than knock-out drops.

Richard: Hurry man! I feel like a standing target here!

George lays the pipe on Richard's shoulder and prepares to blow. Miles is getting the worst of the fight, and falls backward after a hard blow to his face. As he cries out, the airman laughs as he recovers the pistol. Unseen by either of them, Mabob is nearby, pulling a throwing knife and placing it between his teeth. He moves forward, and takes the knife, preparing to throw.

Miles: You'd shoot a man lying on his back? Hell, I surrender. Can't we talk?

Miles stares at the barrel of Eric's gun aimed at his head, then looks up into the airman's smile. Miles closes his eyes.

Miles: Christ, you're more scared than I am.

Eric is distracted by a sound, and sees Mabob rising to throw his knife. Eric shoots at him, but misses as Mabob drops back to the ground. Miles utters a quick sound when the shot goes off, certain it is aimed at him. When nothing happens to him, he opens his eyes and sees the surprised airman dropping his pistol. A long straw is protruding from his eye. Eric crumbles without a word. Miles watches the fall, then sees John breaking through the trees. Neither of them see Mabob withdrawing from his position.

John: What happened? I had a bead on him, then he keeled over before I could call out!

Miles: I thought I was a goner. Gone to my Maker for certain.

George: (running up with Richard) I'm what happened! If I'd know you had him covered, I'd have save my breath! Looks like he got off one wild shot.

John: He was shooting at something over there. Distracted him. Been hearing strange noises myself. Will be right back.

John goes to investigate where Mabob had been hiding. Mabob is gone. Miles picks up the pistol, looking at it almost fearfully.

Richard: Guess I'll turn him over.

He does so.

John: (walking back) Guess he just saw some animal. Some critter's lucky day.

Miles: He's dead. Uncle, I owe you my life!

George: None of that! We're all in this together, private! In this strange business. Damned strange business. Most ungracious guests. Deserve a poke in the eye.

The four men stand quietly for a minute, then Miles quickly steps away. We hear him retching. After he returns, he says softly:

Miles: My apologies, everyone. I just, I just . . .

George: There's nothing to apologize for, son. There's a first time for every soldier. It's never easy.

Richard: Wasn't easy for us either, as I recall.

Miles: I'm no soldier. I'm the family coward.

George: Oh, no, no, no, not by a long shot! Not by a country mile! You put yourself in harm's way. You took on a thug who wanted to kill you. Miles, whatever else, you should never call yourself yellow!

Richard and John: Hear, hear!

George: Looks like I have stories to tell you sometime. Sometime soon. But not just now. Now, best we take this one back with his mate. We have some thinking to do.

The men gather around the body, each picking him up by one limb.

Cut to women in dining room. Smiling, Hanna hands Fatima the cards after her shuffle.

Hanna: This should be interesting, very interesting indeed.

Everyone watches Fatima's hand as she picks up the deck and starts to peel off the first card. But her hands begin to shake, and a look of complete disbelief is on Fatima's face. She turns over the first card--La Morte, the card of death. After a pause, Fatima screams, her head falling back. As the other women rise in alarm, we see Fatima has fainted.

Cut to men as they drop the second body by the first.

George: Can't make this out at all. Doesn't make a lick of sense.

Miles: What did they want here, anyway? What spooked them so bad to just start shooting like that?

Richard: Clearly, they were up to something. Something not kosher at all. But what?

George: We can't leave them in the open. Some one might come.

Looks back to house. No one is seen.

Richard: Good thing it's so dark.

George: Hearing gunshots shouldn't bother the women. They were expecting a spot of blood and guts. Their delicate natures will keep them indoors with their spectral pursuits.

They Look down at John who is again checking for pulses on the airmen.

Richard: Wonder if all murderers do that. Check and double-check and double-check again.

George: Wonder if there's a light of some kind in the machine.

Richard: Yeah, we should see what's inside that plane. I'd like to know what these scoundrels were carrying.

George: Might be a clue to their business.

John rises and climbs onto the plane.

John: She's very well equipped up here. Two electric torches in clips alongside her barometers by the rear seat. Hey, this plane is full of cameras, all sorts of papers.

He jumps down and hands the torches to George and Miles who light them up. John returns to the pilot's seat and comes down with several armloads of cameras and papers. The men spread them around on the ground.

Richard: Maps, notebooks. (Picks one up.) It's in German.

He looks over as Miles opens an album of aerial photographs.

George: Maybe all these will tell us why our visitors were so prejudiced against our society.

Cut to women in dining room. Mrs. Gironi has fainted and the others are clustering around her.

Emma: Lights! Lights!

Someone turns on the overhead chandelier. Mrs. Gironi groans.

Emma: Are you alright Fatima? Fatima, Fatima speak to me!

She reaches for the bowl of water on the table and throws it into Mrs. Gironi's face. Fatima opens her eyes and looks around.

Fatima: Two, two are dead. But none must ever know. No, no one must ever know!

Priscilla: Dead, dead, who? Where's the butler, we must find Miles, find George and John and Richard!

She reaches for the servant's bell, but Mrs. Gironi cries out--

Fatima: No, no, summon no one! Your men are safe! (Her voice lowers.) But we must keep them safe. What is happening outside tonight, we inside here must never know! I must not know! None of us.

Emma: What on earth are you talking about?

Berni: Not know? If my husband needs anything at all--

Fatima: You don't understand! Secret currents have been disturbed!

The other women look at her open mouthed. Mrs. Gironi seems remote, lost in thought.

Fatima: All has changed. Yet, nothing has. I only know, I only know--

She picks up the card of death and stares at it.

Fatima: --that last card had no meaning for any of you in this room. It was a message for me, a message of what I myself do not understand this moment. But Berni, Emma, the cards turned for you have not changed. Your answers are as true as when the cards were turned.

Priscilla: Forget these cards! I'm going outside to look for Miles.

Emma: (after looking at Fatima) Ah, not just yet, Priscilla. Perhaps it's best we all stay together at least for the moment. Let me get you a brandy.

Priscilla: But Miles might need me! She said someone's dead, two people dead!

Fatima: But not your mate. Nor any man of this company. Please, let your energies settle. I must clear my mind. I feel a very, very strong message trying to break through. Everyone, please be quiet!

Cut to men by the bodies and plane.

John: Have you gentlemen ever seen a bird's-eye telephoto-survey of England for military purposes? See these close-range panoramas of forts and bases? This is what those two were trying to protect. Gentlemen, we just murdered two German spies!

George: I'll warrant, the evidence seems conclusive. Any other country would give them seven years in a fortress. First class miscreants, these bastards. But it seems the sentence preceded the evidence.

Richard: The evidence now, I fear, now rather points at us.

Miles: I should say not! They fired at us first!

Richard: Yes, we know that. But the evidence for that is?

Miles: What are you talking about? We have evidence lying all over the ground. A plane, all this!

Richard: Yes, yes. But there are two dead bodies here. We need to think this through.

John: You mean, make certain the evidence supports our story?

George: Think like a jury mates. What would a jury think of us tonight? What's the physical evidence against us?

Richard: Oh ho, what fun the prosecutor would have! One fellow here has a bullet in his chest, a lovely gash across his face.

Miles: I kaboshed him with the golf club. Oh God. (Bows head, hiding an expression of pain)

George: And I didn't think you had it in you!

Richard: And the other bloke has a piece of straw sticking into his brain. No, nothing unusual about that, nothing to stir the curiosity of the average coroner. Were I on a jury, I'd think something fishy was going on. Wouldn't you?

John: The press would love this. We'd be the sensation of the century. Especially you George, Richard.

George: Oh, what a trial! Your Honor, we just happened to find a deformed golf club lying around and knew it was the perfect way to give flying spies second thoughts about invading England!

Miles: (picking up the golf club) Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I swear the club was deformed before I found it! I swear on both Testaments I have no experience with British boomerangs!

George: And I Your Honor, am well known for traveling with jungle drums and savage blowpipes! Comes from spending too long in the Afghan heat!

Richard: Right-o. To make our yarn even more believable, we drug the second guy a piece from where he fell. Messing up the crime scene, playing with the evidence. And all that stuff on the ground is evidence we couldn't have known about until after the crime.

Miles: Blowpipes, golf clubs, spies, a crash-landed plane! Oh God, there has to be a way out of this!

Richard: It wouldn't be just us. George and I, well, all Parliament would be bursting at the seams with speculations.

George: No truth, no matter how simple, would escape debate after debate after debate.

John: And remember, I'm a Yank representing my country. What your courts might want to do is one thing. But my government might want something very different for me.

Miles: What are you three talking about? Spies are spies, and that should be mitigating circumstances! This is the evidence of what John has been saying all along!

George: Mitigating only reduces the sentence. Might even find ourselves pissing off the intelligence folks. If we hadn't fired off half-cocked, maybe there'd be one or two spies to interrogate.

Richard: Maybe the jury would never learn there were spies. National security.

Cut to dining room.

Fatima: (To herself) Kali, I understand. Thy Chala obeys. (To group) Sisters, we must now join our energies with your men outside. I cannot explain this, but the message I'm hearing is most clear. Trust in me--we can help them in a very secret way. But you must question nothing! I am speaking of nothing on this material world.

Emma: What do you want us to do? Any way we can help, we will!

Fatima: Sisters, please believe me when I say there are two angry spirits now hovering over this house. New, ugly spirits trapped without a grave. Sisters, we must send them to their rest!

Priscilla: Oh no, no, no! You promised no ghosts! I don't believe in ghosts! I've believed you so far, but now this is getting ungodly!

Emma: Dead spirits over the house? I too find that extraordinary, remarkable, and unbelievable.

Berni: As do I. This goes far beyond what we expected.

Hanna: Wait a minute, Fatima just said there are two spirits seeking their grave. She's not trying to raise the dead, not like an ordinary séance or something like that. She's talking about reversing the process.

Fatima: Yes, yes, that does explain what I mean. Explains my purpose very well. We must send the spirits to their yet unopened resting places.

Berni: And this will help our husbands in some way?

Fatima: Yes, yes, exactly.

Emma: Then let's do it. Priscilla, you don't have to believe. I'm not sure I believe this either. But why not try? We can seek answers later.

Priscilla: If you think it will help.

Fatima: I know it will!

Hanna: I only know it can do no harm.

Cut to men.

Miles: I still don't understand. You'd think we'd be hailed as heroes! Whatever else, we just did England a very good turn tonight!

John: Yes, we did. As you say, we have the evidence here that war is coming. Certain war. But Miles, should this news come out this way? With all the attention focused on us, the Huns could claim this all was the very provocation to start the war!

George: And we're not ready yet. We're not prepared. We need time to plan, not light this explosive fuse.

John: We can say whatever we want, but any savvy Minister could spin it another way. Claim we murdered two German citizens and planted all this to cover our crime.

Miles: So if I understand it all, if anyone finds out about this we could find ourselves candidates for a noose. Unless we talk ourselves out of it. Possible prison for we Brits, John might be in just as much trouble with his folks.

John: Could be embarrassing for my government, true enough. Might want to see to it I do some hard time to appease the Huns. Hold off the war, in fact.

Miles: But our intelligence folks might want all this hush-hush and we'd be off the hook.

Richard: Maybe. A Big maybe.

George: and the best thing would be if the government might want to trot us out as heroes, first class, famous, bothered by every reporter who picks up the story!

Miles: Oh, that's no excuse to hide our crime!

Richard: No, it isn't. None of us think that. The truth is simple enough. We killed one man in self-defense. You Miles, you'd be dead if not for that straw in the second bloke's eye. I say my conscience is clean.

George and John: Here, here.

Richard: But that's not enough. We can't let what we know just disappear. As John as been saying all along, England is now in great danger!

George: It's not important that our work tonight is ever known. so long as we make sure that we put what we know to good use.

Miles looks uncertain.

George: Son, you've heard all the options. You tell us. What good can come from making all this public?

John: I say we put it to a vote.

George: Right-o. All in favor of leaving things here as they are and calling the authorities say aye.

No reply.

George: All in favor of finding some way to bury this mess say aye.

George, John, and Richard say firm ayes. After a moment, Miles nods his head.

Miles: So long as we all swear to find ways to help prepare for the invasion!

George: I swear without reservation!

Richard: As do I.

John: This is what I've been saying all along.

Richard: If we're all agreed, we have one more decision to make. Gentlemen, we must now think like murderers. Gentlemen, I rather suspect the first thought a good murderer would have is how do we dispose of the bodies?

Cut to women.

Fatima: If we are agreed, Sisters, we must all join hands! We must send the angry spirits from earth to air to water. Come, join hands with me! Together say it--From earth to air to water! From earth to air to water!

All the women take their places, join hands, then chant in unison--"From earth to air to water . . ."

Cut to men by plane.

Miles: Bodies! We can bury, burn bodies! But how do we dispose of a plane and all its gear?

John: Lord McNeil, I have an idea. How far did you say the channel is from here?

George: Half a kilometer, that way. Why.

John: Well, here's my proposal. We button up the jackets on these two, put them back into their seats, and send them off the way they came.

Miles: What are you talking about?

John: Start up the plane, stand back, and let Lady Fortune take them wherever she wills. At least, away from here.

Richard: (laughs) Thank heavens for the Yanks!

George: I'll thank anyone who can rob an undertaker from collecting a monstrous commission! Heave to, maties! Fasten these boys in their seats before rigor mortis stiffens their arses!

In background, the sounds of the women chanting rises and falls.

Miles: What about all their gear?

George: Load it aboard, Mr. Mercerby. Wherever the evidence falls, let it be somewhere the club secretary won't find out about it!

As George, Richard, and Miles work with the bodies, cameras, and documents, John checks out the engine.

John: Here's the trouble, here's what brought them down. A misfiring cylinder.

George: Can you fix it?

John: Not without tools, I'd need more time. We don't need her to go far, just away from here.

Sounds of women chanting. After the bodies are placed, George, Richard, and Miles stand behind the wings. John plays with the controls.

John: Damned nuisance, not being able to do this from the pilot's seat.

Richard: Is his seat belt on? We don't want to risk our friend's safety!

The engine splutters on, and John jumps clear. The three men begin pushing the plane, and John joins them. The plane moves forward. While we watch the men, we hear the women chanting.

George: All she gotta do is clear the timber, and we're home free.

John: Hope I didn't give her too much nose. I'd hate for her to flip.

The plane hits one lump in the ground, and pauses. Then it works its way up a slope--slowly, slowly. Finally, it leaves the ground and flies gracelessly into the air. The men cheer. Insert of Mabob, hiding behind the stonewall. Wide-eyed, he is watching the show.

After a moment in the air, the plane tips, and the men gasp. It straightens out, and tips again. We see perspiring faces until finally the plane disappears from site and the engine noise vanishes. The men are too tired to cheer.

George: We therefore commit their bodies to the air.

Richard: And to the deep, deep, deep. Amen.

Miles. Amen. Poor chaps. Many happy returns.

Mabob: (in a whisper behind the wall) Well, pip, pip and cheerio! Rule Britannia!

John: Yes, many happy returns indeed. Poor buggers--poor England! Unless that plane crashes before the channel, no one will know what the Huns have in mind. Only we four have a glimpse into the future.

Richard: But we've done well chaps, exceedingly well! The first combined effort of an Anglo-American alliance! We've robbed the Hun of a first victory.

The men turn to return to the house.

George: Mr. Standish, when we get time, I want another look at your proposals. If we're going to need new armaments, I wish to join the cause.

Richard: Does sort of take the risk out of a roll of the dice, doesn't it?

George: Dick, I will wager the crown jewels of His Majesty what's coming will be no sport, no game at all.

Cut to plane flying over the last line of trees by the cliff edge. As we hear the women's chant, it begins to spiral and descend. It crashes into the water where it quickly disappears.

Cut to dining room. All the items of the séance are gone, the five women all have glasses in front of them. Talking quietly, they look up and see the men walking in.

Priscilla: (jumping up) Miles, Miles, are you all right?

Miles: I will be. After I join you in a drink. Some brandy, my dear?

Moving to the tray with bottles and glasses, Priscilla pauses.

Priscilla: Miles, what are you doing with that beat up golf club?

Miles: (holding it up) A trophy of war, my love. If you want to slay a gofer, try a golf club.

Hanna hugs John.

Hanna: Oh John, are you alright? I was so worried, it got so dark before you came in!

John: (laughs) Entirely, my dear. Hunting ground hogs has no fear for me! Not exactly tracking tigers in the bush.

Berni inspects Richard's shoulder, seeing the tear in his jacket. He has removed the white kerchief.

Berni: And you, Richard Buchan. How did you rip up that jacket?

Richard: I confess, my dear. I encountered a most valiant ground hog who cleverly lead me, well, over a well-placed tree root. Boom, crash, a sartorial tear!

Berni: Oh, posh! I don't believe a word of it!

George and Emma stand by the drink cart. George downs a large glass of brandy.

Emma: Major McNeil, you look positively smug. Shooting up pests shouldn't fill you with such satisfaction!

George: Oh, Emma, a hunt is a hunt, no matter the prey. What interests me is--what did you learn from the ghosts and goblins tonight?

He looks to where Fatima was sitting--she is gone.

Emma: My word! I didn't know she was going!

Cut to Fatima rushing out of the front door of the mansion. Her eyes are full of tears as she runs toward the road. She sees Mabob who waves at her. She runs to him, and the two run to their car parked in the grove.

Mabob: What is wrong? Are you alright?

Fatima: I will explain in the car! I need to get out of here!

They reach the car, jump in, and Mabob drives off quickly. Fatima is now sobbing.

Mabob: What happened? Did they discover you? Are you hurt?

Fatima: No, nothing like that. The mission succeeded. With the turn of but six cards, I completed the mission. Two women will encourage their husbands to push debate of arming England in their government. I am sure of this.

Mabob: Then what went wrong?

Fatima: Mabob, I performed my tricks. Then, Mabob, the goddess indeed touched me! For the first time, Kali filled me and spoke with her purpose!

Mabob: What? I cannot believe it!

Fatima: All my life, I prayed for this moment. But Mabob, she filled me with images of death! The souls of two dead evil ones!

Mabob: Two, two dead ones? I cannot believe this. I can believe nothing of this night.

Fatima: What do you know of this?

Mabob: Let me think about this. I can hardly believe this. I must absorb what you're saying.

Fatima: While you think, I must tell you I have made a decision.

Mabob: A decision?

Fatima: One that should please you. Mabob, before tonight, I was your reluctant agent. Your unhappy P38. No more. I have seen into the abyss of tortured souls. I will not abandon my prayers. But we seekers of mysticism will have no place in an unsafe world when hard men seek to destroy honest people. So tell the Colonel. Tell him he still has me in his web.

Mabob: Blessed be our Kali. Blessed are you, Fatima Gironi.

Cut to Emma looking out her front door. Clearly, she is puzzled. George steps beside her.

George: I say, Madame Gironi vanished into thin air with no word of farewell. And I had a question of my own for her.

Emma: Oh, I have your answer. George McNeil, you're a wiser man than King Solomon. You married much, much better.

George: (laughs) If you believe this wise man believes that was the question you posed, then you think me as gullible as a green private on his first leave.

Emma: (laughs) No, no, you're quite right. George, you read the papers. Watch what's happening on the continent. What do you think is coming?

George: The Hun, my dear, the Hun. And you and I and the rest of our good company, we are now the bell-weather for the coming storm. (Looks at her carefully.) Perhaps all of us should share some port and some information. If you're going to ask a question like that, then I wonder very much what went on in our dining room tonight.

Emma: As I wonder very much what happened on our grounds. I don't believe for a second any of you have told the truth about what happened tonight. Tell me, are there fewer ground-hogs in my gardens, George McNeil?

George: No. I admit, tonight was a victory for underground rodents.

Cut to the small room of Fatim's shrine. Again, Fatima is praying when she hears a bell in her store. Again, she quickly rises and walks through the beaded curtain, through her bedroom, and down the hall to her shop.

When she steps into the shop, her eyes widen. Behind the counter, standing where their wives had stood before, are George and Richard.

Fatima: walking behind the counter) Well, good morn, gentlemen. I trust everyone is well, that everyone slept well last night?

George: Oh, rather! A bit of excitement, a bottle of good port and good conversation always make for easy beds.

Fatima: I'm glad to hear this. I must apologize for my sudden departure. I confess I was overwhelmed by the power that filled me. Very overwhelmed.

Richard: We were all curious by your mysterious disappearance.

Fatima: The work of a chala is sometimes more than a poor mortal can expect. Again, my apologies. Since you are here, is there anything I can do for you gentlemen?

George: Yes, in fact there is. But first, Madame, I'd like to show you a trick.

He reaches inside his jacket and pulls out a deck of ordinary playing cards.

George: (shuffling the cards) As you must know, there's likely not a soldier on the planet who doesn't know his cards. They're better to some than others, they're a frightful nuisance to the novice. At one bivouac in the Afghan mountains, I had a sergeant who knew these cards better than most. (Places the deck on the counter.) Care to cut the deck, Madame?

Fatima studies his face, looks at the deck, and then breaks the deck into two parts. George puts them together and holds the deck up.

George: Sergeant O'Hara was a bit of an expert in all sorts of Pagan things. For example, he showed us how the ancient Tarot Deck, the two arcans used for fortune telling and divining and all that, ultimately became, well, these very cards here. In the Tarot, you have wands and swords and coins and cups. These became, well wands became clubs, cups became hearts, coins became--

He deals out a Joker.

George: Oh, not that one. My mistake. (flips over seven of diamonds) Coins became Diamonds! Last but not least, the swords became--

He deals out a seven of spades.

George: Spades!

Richard: Well, I'll be boiled in the skins of leprous apes! Lord McNeil, unless I miss my guess, you've just dealt yourself a fortune in the arms business!

The two men look carefully at Fatima. She smiles, and seems to absently rummage through a pile of books.

Fatima: I see. I presume you gentlemen are here to press me for a refund?

George: I should say not!

He reaches into his jacket again, but stops when Fatima slams open a book which has a block cut out of the pages. She grabs a small gun lying in the hole and aims it at George.

Fatima: I'm prepared to offer a full refund for my services, but anything more--

Before she can continue, both men break into laughter.

George: Oh you misunderstand, you misunderstand completely!

He pulls out his wallet and presents Fatima with a simple business card. With more serious tones, he continues.

George: Mrs. Gironi or whatever your true name is, we're not here to cause you one jot of trouble. None at all! Instead, last evening our little group got together and compared stories. Yes, we know, we know, you instructed our wives to keep their ears closed and tongues still. Clearly, you're not a married woman, not married at all.

Richard: The point is, Madame, it was child's play to determine your motivations. Clearly, you got wind of what our American friend was up to when you met his wife at the hospital charity. Obviously, you put the dots together and made the connections to Emma and Berni. Which brought us all together last night.

George: The question is--who do you work for? It seems strange, extraordinarily strange that an agent of a colony would make moves to improve armaments in England and not our home white-skinned services.

Fatima: Are we all not in service to His Majesty? Is it inconceivable that your white-skinned agencies would reach out to such as me proven and tried in Mother India to work their wiles here?

George: (nodding) Just so. Madame, we will not take up too much of your time. Please take this card to your masters. Tell them six English patriots would like to join the crusade. Even as we speak, two young Yanks are making their own connections in this pursuit. It may not be time to light the bonfires. But we all here know we need to be ready to feed the fire.

The two men turn to leave, and Fatima looks at their backs with astonishment.

Fatima: My Lords!

They turn back.

Fatima: How can you trust anyone who might approach you as someone from my company?

George: Tell them to say, ah, hmm.

Richard: Many happy returns. Yes, many happy returns Mrs. Gironi.

The men turn and leave.

Fatima replaces her gun and smiles.

Cut to movie house as in the opening scene. Again, Emma and Bernie are in the audience, watching a new film.

Emma: Unbelievable. Where do they come up with these stories? I've never known a woman in my whole life who shrieks so often.

Berni: Lucky for us, we don't have to hear the screams.

They watch in silence for a minute. Then Emma speaks.

Emma: You know, I don't think it would cost that much to set up a film company. So long as you don't have to hire famous actors, the costs, I imagine, would be quite reasonable.

Berni: But you need famous names to pack the houses.

Emma: Hmm. Maybe. Me, I was thinking if we had our own company, we could go to all sorts of interesting places for filming adventures. Say, all sorts of locations in Germany.

The film ends, and the lights go up. The pair rise and depart with the crowd.

Berni: I read a cloak and dagger book once. I think they would say you're describing a cover story for doing, well, something else.

Emma: I read in a movie magazine that many places love to cooperate with film companies. Gives them prestige and a way to publicize their attractions.

Berni: Castles of mad kings in Bavaria. Romance on ships on the Rhine. Dinners with cultural ministers to arrange filming.

Emma: Telling us good places to shoot--

Berni:--and places they think we should avoid.

Emma: We'd hire German actors and actresses. They don't have to speak English--we could write the cards.

Berni: And eavesdrop on their conversations in between takes.

Emma: I don't want to do films about aviators.

Berni: Oh, I don't know. Especially if we have good English pilots.

Emma: Let's pick up a good vintage and go bother the boys. I want to see their faces when we throw this bomb at them.

The women step out on the street. Emma looks down the walk and sees a man walking toward them. It is Mabob.

Emma: Unless I miss my guess, I see a potential investor coming.

Berni: And so dark and handsome. Do you think he'd make a better hero or scoundrel?

Emma: If he's a good investor, he can take his pick.

Ends with Mabob approaching the pair, bowing.