



"A night at the Mangled Mare"

written by

DB Morgan & Claire Morris

All enquiries: db@underdogcrew.org
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A NIGHT AT THE MANGLED MARE

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE - 'THE TRIAL OF SIMPKIN WEATHERSPOON'

BLACKOUT.

The distant CREAK of a rope.

One toll of a CHURCH BELL.

A match strikes.

A narrow shaft of light reveals SIMPKIN BARTHOLOMEW WEATHERSPOON standing proudly in the dock at the centre of a darkened **MAKESHIFT COURTROOM IN THE 'MANGLED MARE HOTEL' BALLROOM.**

He is bruised, overdressed and entirely unbowed.

Beyond him, barely visible in the darkness, sit the JUDGE, the JURY, the PROSECUTOR, townspeople, former lovers, creditors, clergy and alleged victims.

Simpkin surveys the room as though he has arrived for a command performance.

SIMPKIN

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury...
My esteemed uncle, presiding judge,
and indisputably sober mayor of
this fine shire. My lords, ladies,
tradesmen, debtors, widows, wives—
And those among you whose husbands
remain blissfully unaware.

Simpkin bows.

Music begins beneath him: playful, elegant and slightly sinister.

< MUSICAL NUMBER 1 - "SEND HIM DOWN" >

SIMPKIN (CONT'D)

It's a common misconception
That the art of misdirection
Is a necessary spectacle
To trick the human eye.
It is merely presentation,
A controlled hallucination,
With a little perspiration
And a confidently told lie.
For the eye will see it vanish,
And the rational mind will banish
Every doubt that might embarrass
(MORE)

SIMPKIN (CONT'D)
 What it longs to understand.
 Call it witchcraft, call it
 treason, Call it anything but
 reason— But a miracle is simply
 What you fail to see was planned.

Simpkin produces a coin from behind the ear of a JUROR.

SIMPKIN (CONT'D)
 Yet I bring before this jury, In a
 bout of tempered fury, That a man
 of my position Should be suitably
 admired. For my art— And yes, my
 art— May discombobulate, And ethics
 slightly fluctuate. At times, when
 needs must, If a gentleman is
 pressed. But the matter of the
 fact, And the definitive prognosis,
 Is I'm not the charlatan you paint
 me— Just extraordinarily blessed.

A beat.

SIMPKIN (CONT'D)
 Well... Perhaps "blessed" is
 overselling it.

The music stops.

SIMPKIN (CONT'D)
 I may be a rogue. A fraud. A
 libertine. A public nuisance. A
 private disappointment. And perhaps
 — Just perhaps— A bit of a cunt.

Silence.

One WOMAN in the gallery applauds before being dragged back
 into her seat.

PROSECUTOR
 Simpkin Weatherspoon, you stand
 accused of fraud, theft, grave
 robbery, public indecency,
 blasphemy, impersonation of a
 clergyman and the unlawful
 summoning of spirits.

SIMPKIN
 Unlawful?

PROSECUTOR
 You dispute the charges?

SIMPKIN
 Only the word "unlawful."

The orchestra strikes sharply.

PROSECUTOR
He sold us charms to cure
infection!

TOWNSPEOPLE
Send him down!

PROSECUTOR
He raised the dead without
permission!

TOWNSPEOPLE
Send him down!

WOMAN ONE
He promised me eternal passion!

WOMAN TWO
That was also my transaction!

WOMAN THREE
And mine was Tuesday afternoon!

TOWNSPEOPLE
Send him down—and send him soon!

The rhythm grows into a stamping courtroom chant.

ENSEMBLE
Send him down! Send him down!
Strip away his stolen crown! Silk
and silver, smoke and mirrors—
Now the gallows draweth nearer!
Send him down! Send him down!
Let him choke before the town!
Fraud and fornication, Sin and
desecration— Send the bastard down!

The JUDGE pounds his gavel.

JUDGE
Order!

SIMPKIN
I've always preferred chaos.

JUDGE
You have disgraced your family
name.

SIMPKIN
I improved it immeasurably.

JUDGE
You have preyed upon the
vulnerable.

SIMPKIN
I prefer "delighted the
suggestible."

JUDGE
You have exploited grief!

The atmosphere changes.

A low note enters the score.

JUDGE (CONT'D)
You told grieving mothers you could
speak to their children. You told
widows you could summon their
husbands. You made sport of the
dead.

For the first time, Simpkin's smile fades.

SIMPKIN
Do not speak to me of grieving. Do
not preach of false believing. You
sit comfortably condemning What
you've never had to lose. When the
earth has swallowed someone, And
the silence follows someone, You
will bargain with the darkness
For whatever hope it brews. If a
voice beyond the curtain Makes the
lonely heart feel certain That the
ones we loved remember, Who are you
to call it sin? You may call me an
illusion, You may damn my grand
delusion— But if death has locked
the doorway, I have only looked
within.

A hush.

Several TOWNSPEOPLE are visibly moved.

The PROSECUTOR steps forward.

PROSECUTOR
And what looked back, Mr
Weatherspoon?

Simpkin stares at him.

A long pause.

The playful music returns abruptly.

SIMPKIN
Nothing worth mentioning.

He turns to the jury.

SIMPKIN (CONT'D)

For my crimes, my Lord, my uncle,
 For each sordid little scandal, For
 the debts I've left outstanding
 And the hearts I've left unmanned—
 I submit myself before you, Though
 it frankly tends to bore you When a
 prisoner won't grovel As convention
 might demand. To the lords and
 ladies present, Each divinely
 shaped and pleasant, May I say your
 moral outrage Is remarkably
 inspired.

Simpkin leans towards a YOUNG LADY in the gallery.

SIMPKIN (CONT'D)

And my deepest apologies
 regarding your virginity.

YOUNG LADY

You said you were the Archbishop!

SIMPKIN

I had the hat.

The crowd erupts.

ENSEMBLE

Send him down! Send him down!
 Drag the devil through the town!
 Tar his name and break his tether!
 Let him swing in stormy weather!
 Send him down! Send him down!
 Plant his bones beneath the ground!
 No reprieve or pardon! Dig a deeper
 garden— Send the bastard down!

SIMPKIN

Oh, you're enjoying this.

ENSEMBLE

Send him down!

SIMPKIN

You've rehearsed.

ENSEMBLE

Send him down!

SIMPKIN

Mostly in tune.

ENSEMBLE

Send him down! Send him down!
 Let the church bells shake the
 ground!

(MORE)

ENSEMBLE (CONT'D)

No more tricks and no more
scheming! No more spirits, no more
screaming!

SIMPKIN

No more wonder, no more dreaming!
No more looking past the veil!

ENSEMBLE

Bind his hands and hood his head!
Men like him are better dead!

SIMPKIN

You may kill the man performing—
But you cannot kill the tale!

The orchestra crashes.

The JUDGE slowly rises.

An attendant approaches carrying a small square of white
cloth.

The Judge places the white handkerchief upon his head.

All sound drops away.

JUDGE

Simpkin Bartholomew Weatherspoon.
For the crimes brought before this
court, you shall be taken from this
place to the place from which you
came, and there confined until the
appointed hour. At eleven o'clock
tomorrow morning, you shall be
hanged by the neck until dead.
May God have mercy upon your soul.

The Judge raises the gavel.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Send him down.

The gavel strikes.

ENSEMBLE

Send him down...

JUDGE

Death by the gallows.
Eleven a.m.

ENSEMBLE

Send him down.

The courtroom explodes into full music.

FULL ENSEMBLE
 SEND HIM DOWN! SEND HIM DOWN!
 LET HIM FALL WITHOUT A SOUND!
 FROM THE DOCK INTO THE DARKNESS,
 FROM THE GALLOWS UNDERGROUND!
 SEND HIM DOWN! SEND HIM DOWN!
 WHERE THE LOST AND DAMNED ARE
 FOUND! LET THE ROPE BECOME HIS
 CROWN— SEND HIM— SEND HIM—
 SEND HIM DOWN!

The GUARDS seize Simpkin.

He does not resist.

Instead, he climbs onto the rail of the dock as though mounting a stage.

SIMPKIN
 Tie the knot and build it higher,
 Dress the scaffold, light the fire!
 Invite every saint and sinner—
 Give them all the best in town!
 For at eleven, when I'm swinging,
 You may hear the church bells
 ringing— But before the final
 echo... I'll be back to take a bow.

The music cuts.

JUDGE
 Remove him.

The GUARDS pull Simpkin into the darkness.

His face remains visible for one final instant.

SIMPKIN
 (bold and cocksure)
 Do make sure the hotel is ready.

BLACKOUT.

A HORSE SCREAMS.

The sign of THE MANGLED MARE HOTEL flickers to life.

COMPANY
 Send him down...
 Send him down...
 Send him... Down.

BLACKOUT.

END OF SCENE

ACT ONE - SCENE TWO

ACT ONE

SCENE TWO

INT. MANGLED MARE HOTEL - BALLROOM - NIGHT

ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY YEARS LATER.
BLACKNESS.

The faint CREAK of a rope.

A distant electrical FLICKER.

The ruined ballroom gradually emerges from the darkness.

It is the same room in which SIMPKIN WEATHERSPOON was condemned, but time has almost erased the makeshift courtroom.

The Judge's platform has partially collapsed beneath layers of dust. The dock is broken and buried under fallen plaster. Rotten velvet curtains hang in strips. Tarnished chandeliers droop overhead.

Tables lie overturned. Empty picture frames stare down from water-damaged walls.

At the rear of the ballroom, a faded section of floorboards marks the place where the dock once stood.

Something moves behind the curtains.

A soft metallic TINKLE.

Silence.

Another FLICKER.

For the briefest instant, the shadow of a MAN appears beneath the old chandelier.

Then it is gone.

The ballroom doors BURST open.

A FEMALE FIGURE, **DOTTIE LOVELACE**, stumbles into the room carrying equipment cases and tripods like a pack horse.

An unencumbered man, **REX GRAVES**, barges past her, surveying the room like a circus master. Finally **MILO SPARKS**. Demure and hesitant. They are all early to mid twenties – the presenters and crew of the struggling online television programme "**SCREAM INVESTIGATIONS**".

REX dresses as though he expects to be photographed rescuing someone from a burning crypt.

His jacket bears the programme's logo. His hair has been deliberately arranged to appear windswept, despite there being no wind.

Rex stops dramatically.

REX
Nobody move.

Milo nearly drops a heavy equipment case.

MILO
I wasn't planning to.
(strained)
My spine's just resigned.

MILO is the team's cameraman, sound engineer, lighting technician, editor, electrician and reluctant realist.

He wears practical clothing, several utility belts and the exhausted expression of a man who has personally read the cancellation email.

DOTTIE, a true believer and learned historian, drops the kit and leans on a table - pulling out a water bottle and glugging. She slings off her satchel and pulls out an assortment of old maps and notebooks.

DOTTIE
Oh.

REX
What?

DOTTIE
(muted excitement)
Oh, this is good.

MILO
That is not the word I'd use.

She nudges him playfully.

DOTTIE
Chicken shit.

MILO
Erm.. logical sceptic in creepy old house.

Dottie slowly turns, taking in the ruined ballroom.

DOTTIE
Don't you feel it?

MILO
Mould?

DOTTIE
No.

MILO
Asbestos?

DOTTIE
(playfully)
Milo.

MILO
Structural regret?

Dottie closes her eyes and breathes deeply.

DOTTIE
It's in the walls.

MILO
That'll be the damp.

DOTTIE
No. Deeper than that.

Dottie presses a hand against her chest.

DOTTIE (CONT'D)
I can feel it.

MILO
That's hypothermia.

Rex crosses into the centre of the ballroom, already
imagining camera angles.

REX
Look at this place.

MILO
We're looking.

REX
(authoritatively)
No. Look at it.

Rex spreads his arms.

REX (CONT'D)
The scale. The decay. The history.
This room is television.

MILO
This room's tetanus.

Rex ignores him.

REX
This is the one.

DOTTIE
It is.

REX
Yeah. THE place.

DOTTIE
I know right.

MILO
You both said that about the
laundrette.

REX
The ghost of Dot Cotton.

REX (CONT'D)
(excitedly)
Something did touch me. Oh.. and
the spirit of Well'ard the dog.

Rex places an equipment case onto an old table.

The table immediately COLLAPSES.

A ball bounces loudly to the opening beats of the Eastenders
theme tune.

The case strikes the floor with a violent metallic CRASH.

All three freeze.

A beat.

Rex turns towards the sound.

REX (CONT'D)
You heard that, right?

MILO
Yep.

REX
That, was a response.

MILO
Of the building objecting to us.
I'm out of here.

He turns to leave. Dottie grabs his collar.

DOTTIE
No.

Dottie listens.

DOTTIE (CONT'D)
No. That was the building listening
to us.

She walks away and hugs the walls. Leaving Milo and Rex
watching.

DOTTIE (CONT'D)
The problem with you, darling... is
you talk too much... If only you'd
listen.. And I don't mean with all
that fancy EVP rubbish... I mean..
with your heart and your energy...

Rex stares at her for a brief moment...

REX
(switching on)
Right. Well, Dippy's clearly had
her micro dose.

He stares at her like a disappointed parent.

REX (CONT'D)
Enjoy grinning at spiders for the
next few hours. We've got work to
do.

Rex immediately switches into presenter mode. His shoulders
straighten and his voice lowers.

REX (CONT'D)
Milo. Camera.

MILO
Bro, we've been in the building,
like forty seconds.

REX
Exactly. And we've already got
activity.

MILO
Yeah... mocked by a table for
watching too much Eastenders.

Rex claps hard twice....

REX
(demanding)
Okay.. Switch on... Camera.

Milo sighs and removes a compact camera from its case.

He checks the battery. Nothing.

MILO

Dead.

Rex turns to look at Dottie, who is caressing the walls oblivious to the 'CAMERA MEN'

REX

Oi. Batteries?

MILO

Wrong monkey mate!

Milo thumbs across to Dottie...

REX

Oi... Fairyland... You're supposed to be on batteries.

Dottie sighs and pauses.

DOTTIE

(bemoaning to herself)
And lights, memory cards, tripods,
EVP's... tagging and bagging.
Basically all the shit you can't be
bothered to do.

REX

(shouty/bitey)
DEE!

DOTTIE

Maybe just chill... a bit,.. yeah..
Read the room.

Rex looks across to Milo - desperately fighting to keep his professional hat on.

REX

(rising angry outburst)
You said you'd behave. No
batteries... no production... no
production, no redemption. No
redemption, no rent... no flat.. NO
PRETTY TRINKETS, CRYSTALS or
FLOWERY DOCTOR FUCKING MARTENS to
attempt to make you just the
slightest bit happy... no nothing.

He composes himself as Dottie slowly turns around - clearly upset.

REX (CONT'D)

Now please, pretty please... Tell
me you remembered to pack THE
FUCKING BATTERIES...

The room falls quiet.

Dottie takes a step closer to him - head high and ready for battle. She checks herself.

DOTTIE
Flight case 2. Next to the Go-pro
and mics.

Milo approaches the cases. He looks around... confused.

DOTTIE (CONT'D)
Silver. Laptop size.. Huge number
two on the back!

Milo finds the case. Grabs the batteries... Milo replaces the battery.

Rex performs a patronising little bow to Dottie...

REX
As you were...
(to Milo)
Right.. we need the opening piece
before the light goes.

MILO
There is no light. But there's
holes in the roof.

REX
Natural atmospheric light. Love it.
Like go cinematic on this bitch...

The boys excitedly begin setting up their kit. The light around them fades and warms up onto Dottie.

She walks slowly towards the window and stares out into the night.

PROJECTION 1

Ext. A large mansion - night. The camera (drone) rises up to the window, where Dottie looks out into the night. She opens the windows outwards. The moonlight kisses her face as the breeze brings her hair to life.

SONG #2 BEGINS.

'Don't kill my Ambition'