

A threat to national security

Charles Stott

This play can be done with a minimum of 6 men and 6 women using the following cast list.

- Cast:** Ma'am. Very prim and proper. Dark suit unless otherwise specified.
- Montague. Smart. Dark suit unless otherwise specified
- Clive. Lab coat.
- Helen. Jeans and blouse./Announcer at airport.
- Mike. Dark blue uniform trousers, light blue shirt./Policeman/Man wanting coffee.
- Sid. Dressed same as Mike./Voice in briefing/Man in pub.
- Ivy. Smartly dressed./Inspector Riley/ Answerphone.
- Jed. Smartly dressed./Detective Symonds./Old man.
- Instructor. Combat trousers and shirt./Bomb disposal man/Pilot
- Policewoman. Lorry diver/Technician.
- E. Driver 1. Gendarme.
- E. Driver 2. Driver 3./ Person with water/ Technician with paper.

Full cast list if you have the people.

- Cast.** Ma'am. Very prim and proper. Dark suit unless otherwise specified.
- Montague. Smart, dark suit unless otherwise specified.
- Clive. Lab coat.
- Driver 1. E.

Helen. Jeans and blouse.

The rest of the cast can be doubled or trebled up.

Mike. M. Blue uniform trousers with a light blue shirt.

Sid. M. Same as Mike.

Policeman. M.

Policewoman. F

Instructor. M. Combat trousers and shirt with boots.

Ivy. F. Smartly dressed.

Jed. M. Smartly dressed.

Man in pub. Rain coat.

Driver 2. E.

Driver 3. E.

Old Man.

Lorry Driver. E.

Gendarme. E.

Technician. E.

Man wanting coffee.

Bomb disposal man.

Pilot. E.

Inspector Riley. E.

Detective Symonds. E.

Voices off. Announcer in airport. E.

Answerphone. E.

Voice in briefing. E.

Lines in red are people's thoughts and should be said as if to themselves.

Scene One

Scene: Small desk and two chairs, phone on desk.

Opens to an empty stage.

(Enter Ma'am wearing a business suit, reading letter, she drops it on desk. Enter Montague smartly dressed, he crosses to desk and puts his hand on a chair.)

Ma'am: Ah! Good morning Montague.

Montague: Good morning Ma'am, do we have a problem?

Ma'am: *(Walking to rear stage and facing away from him.)* What makes you think that there should be a problem?

Montague: Ma'am! With respect, you only call me in at four thirty in the morning if there is a problem.

Ma'am: Yes you may sit. We do have a problem as it turns out. There's a letter on my desk, read it!

Montague: *(He picks letter up.)* This is addressed to the Prime Minister.

Ma'am: Correct!

Montague: Should you have it?

Ma'am: I have just come from number ten where he gave me that; it arrived at seven thirty Tuesday morning.

Montague: A bit early for the Post Office.

Ma'am: *(Turning to face him.)* It was delivered by bicycle courier.

Montague: *[A bit early for them too.]* We should have a description of the person who sent it then.

Ma'am: I'm afraid not! The courier was questioned of course but all he could tell Scotland Yard.....

Montague: Scotland Yard.....!

Ma'am: Was that he met a car on a street corner, a hand came out of the driver's window, handed him the letter and five pounds then drove off.

Montague: He didn't happen to make a note of the registration number did he?

Ma'am: You are not going to believe this.

Montague: Try me!

Ma'am: The car was a silver Aston Martin registration number JB double zero seven.

Montague: You have to be joking!

Ma'am: Am I laughing? I am quite serious.

Montague: Well someone's having a laugh. It says that they want one hundred million pounds sterling and Buckingham Palace.

Ma'am: That's what they want, now read on.

Montague: If they don't get it then they will poison the Thames, well that'll kill off a few fish.

Ma'am: It will also kill three quarters of the population of the capital because that's where the water for London comes from.

Montague: A bit stupid wanting Buckingham Palace though.

Ma'am: If you read on you'll see that they want it taking down brick by brick and when it is all on pallets they will tell us what to do next.

Montague: You can't hide something that big.

Ma'am: If you choose the right country or place then I suppose you can. Read what else they have to say.

Montague: To prove that they are serious they will blow up Watford Gap service station on the M1. This has to be joke. Who'll miss Watford Gap?

Ma'am: ***(Crossing to desk.)*** The PM is taking this very seriously indeed.

Montague: Why! Is that part of his constituency?

Ma'am: I don't care about your politics Montague. The people of this country are being threatened and we are employed to ensure their safety.

Montague: I know that Ma'am but..... Why Buckingham Palace?

Ma'am: Because that is the symbol of power in this country.

Montague: I should have thought Westminster was more a symbol of power; after all it is the home of democracy, allegedly.

Ma'am: Buckingham Palace is a house, Westminster is not. Everyone who comes to this country wants to see where the Queen lives, Buckingham Palace is still thought of as the centre of the British Empire.

Montague: I know all that Ma'am, even though the Empire no longer exists.

Ma'am: Yes!

Montague: This is a photo copy.

Ma'am: The boffins received the original yesterday and have been going over it with a fine tooth comb.

Montague: Any leads on the paper?

Ma'am: Common! Available anywhere in the country.

Montague: The lettering?

Ma'am: Taken out of newspapers and magazines.

Montague: Any one in particular?

Ma'am: No!

Montague: That gets us nowhere then.

Ma'am: Except for one letter which comes from a particular magazine.

Montague: Really!

Ma'am: The paper is produced specifically for this one periodical and has a date code imprinted into the paper during manufacture. The printer only uses one batch for an issue so each issue has its own unique date code.

Montague: What have we found out from that?

Ma'am: That particular issue was printed in the first week of September last year and the magazine those letters came from was sold at a newsagents' on Windsor High Street. Before you ask, we don't know who to. We have someone down there waiting for the newsagent to open and give them a list of customers who receive this magazine. The trouble is that if it was sold over the counter he won't know who bought it. There are a lot of people who have been dragged out of their beds for this Montague.

Montague: **Me included.** If it was delivered to number ten on Tuesday why are we only just getting it? On Thursday.

Ma'am: That is what I asked the PM when I met him at three o'clock this morning. He was at a conference in Brussels until late Tuesday night and flew home around midnight. He managed a few hours' sleep then started looking through the mail from Tuesday.....

Montague: And found this?

Ma'am: Yes! He immediately called Scotland Yard.....

Montague: Oh god!

Ma'am: Who tracked down the cycle courier and got all the details from him, then the PM called me in to continue the investigation.

Montague: He got one thing right at least. What does he suggest we do?
Surround Watford Gap with troops and search every vehicle for
explosives as they drive in?

Ma'am: We wait! As you will have read, our friend.....

Montague: This clown!

Ma'am: Whoever. They say that they'll contact us again soon. In the
meantime I suggest you go off on a well-earned rest.

Montague: That's what I was planning on doing when you called me in.

Ma'am: Good! Keep in touch, we may need you urgently.

Montague: Everything to do with this department is urgent; we are the last to
get called in and have to pick up all the pieces the rest have left
behind. It would be nice, just once, to be in at the beginning and
be able to see something through to the bitter end without being
slowed down or interfered with.

Ma'am: Now we have a chance Montague because the Prime Minister has
given this to us and only us, we have his full authority to use any
means possible to deal with this clown, as you call him, so long as
there isn't any collateral damage.

Montague: That will be hard. All we have to go on is that someone who
drives a silver Aston Martin with the registration number JB
double zero seven. He wants one hundred million pounds and
Buckingham Palace, and to prove he's not joking he is going to
blow up Watford Gap services.

Ma'am: Go on leave Montague. Where had you thought of going anyway?

Montague: I was planning on visiting my thirteen year old daughter Helen,
from another life, in Australia.

Ma'am: Good! Don't change those plans, go ahead with them and have a
nice time. Should anything develop we'll be in touch. ***(She crosses
to the window and looks out.)*** I don't think that I could ever tire
of this view.***(Montague exits and she crosses to the desk then***

picks up the phone.) Keep an eye on Montague; we may need to revert to plan B with him. *(She puts the phone down then crosses and looks out of window again.)* I do like this view. *(Exit Ma'am.)*

(Desk and chairs are removed.)

Lights down then up again.

Scene Two

(Enter Montague carrying two shopping bags.)

Montague: Don't drop those keys darling. That's my car next to the black van. Yes Helen that's the one.

(Sound of explosion and flash of lights.)

Montague; Noooooooooo!

(Montague throws himself to the ground and rolls to the left then goes into the foetal position, his hands holding his collar at the back of his neck. Enter Ma'am. He stands slowly.)

Ma'am: Don't let emotion cloud your judgement. There was nothing you could have done.

Montague: That should have been me.

Ma'am: Yes well it wasn't. Your job now is to.....

Montague: Find whoever did this and.....

Ma'am: No!..... You are to leave that to someone else.

Montague: I must find out who did this. She was all I had left in the world. Now there is nothing!..... Do you hear me?..... Nothing!

Ma'am: I quite agree and we will find out who did it but you will not be on this case. You are too involved, too close to it. Your anger and feelings may cloud your judgement; I'll put someone else on this case. You concentrate on finding our friend who is threatening to poison the water supply to three quarters of London.

Montague: But!.....

Ma'am: No buts Montague. This is an order, and no I will not take away your license and suspend you because I know that all you will do is to continue on your own.

Montague: But.....

Ma'am: I said no buts. ***(She turns away wiping a tear from her eye.)***

Montague: ***(To himself)*** [So this has affected you as well, you are human after all.] Hey! Put those bags down. ***(Rushes to side of stage.)***

Ma'am: It's no use they can't hear or see you.

Montague: But I bought those things for.....

Ma'am: I know..... ***(She crosses to him and puts her hand on his arm.)***
Things can be replaced, memories cannot. Here are your air tickets to London, you'll fly first to Paris where, hopefully someone will meet you and give you an update on our friend. You'll then carry on to Heathrow, again a car will meet you and take you wherever you wish to go. You are not to interfere with this investigation under any circumstances, do you hear?

Montague: Yes.

Ma'am: I mean that Montague. Under any circumstances.

(Exit Ma'am.)

Lights down the up again

Scene Three

(A chair is brought on stage. Montague sits.)

Montague: I'll get those bastards if it's the last thing I do.

Announcer: ***(Off)*** Charles de Gaulle airport. Please stay in your seat until the aircraft has stopped.

Gendarme: ***(Entering)*** Monsieur Montague. Bienvenue a Paris.

Montague: Merci. Euro star terminal. *(Taking his mobile out.)* This is Montague; I'd like a car at Victoria Euro star terminal in two and a half hours

(Exit Gendarme)

Lights down then up again

Scene Four

Montague: Ah the comfort of Euro star. How did I get into all this?

Lights down then up again.

Scene Five

(Enter man in pub.)

Man in pub: Excuse me! You've just left the Army haven't you?

Montague: Yes I have, why do you ask?

Man in pub: Have you got a job yet?

Montague: Not yet. I hadn't really thought what to do.

Man in pub: Well if you're interested be at number twenty seven Stewart Street at eight o'clock in the morning.

Montague: What sort of job is it? Hey!

(Exit man in pub.)

Lights down then up again

Scene Six

Montague: [Well here I am but where the hell's number twenty seven. That's twenty nine and there's twenty five but twenty seven is a bomb site. Somebodies winding me up here. Taxi back to the station then home.]

(Enter Ma'am.)

Ma'am: You must be Montague. You'll be working under me. Do you have a problem with that?

Montague: No Ma'am!

Ma'am: Your wife and her parents were killed in an air accident weren't they?

Montague: Yes they were. *[What else do you know about me?]*

Ma'am: You have a daughter do you not?

Montague: I do yes. *[Is nothing sacred?]*

Ma'am: In this business there is no room for families or sentimentality. Is that understood?

Montague: Perfectly! *[What the hell am I getting myself into?]*

Ma'am: You have a sister in Australia don't you?

Montague: I do. *[How do you know about her?]*

Ma'am: I suggest that you ask your sister to bring up your daughter for you. She'll be safer down there and out of the way should anything crop up.

Montague: You're asking me to part with my only remaining family? *[Can I do that? Can I take my Helen and leave her with my sister?]*

Ma'am: I am! Believe me; she will be far safer with your sister and well looked after. We will see to that.

Montague: What sort of job will I be doing?

Ma'am: Your questions will be answered when you begin your training.

Montague: Training?

Ma'am: ***(Walking round him, looking him up and down.)*** Keep your voice down..... Yes training..... It will be gruelling and exciting, hard and exhausting, but above all challenging. You will come out of it fitter and more able to cope with what life throws at you.

