

Lettice and Lovage

Audition information and Sides

SYNOPSIS

Lettice Douffet, an expert on Elizabethan cuisine and medieval weaponry, is an indefatigable but daffy enthusiast of history and the theatre. As a tour guide at Fustian House, one of the least stately of London's stately homes, she theatrically embellishes its historical past, ultimately coming up on the radar of Lotte Schoen, an inspector from the Preservation Trust. Neither impressed or entertained by Lettice's freewheeling history lessons, Schoen fires her. Not one to go without a fight, Lettice engages the stoic, conventional Lotte in a battle to the death of all that is sacred to the Empire and the crown.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Auditions will consist of cold readings from the script. Audition sides are available.

Age ranges given are playing ages and not absolute.

Actors of all races, ethnicities, gender identities, sizes, etc. are encouraged to audition.

All roles except Visitors to Fustian House require British accents.

CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

Lettice Douffet (female-presenting, 40s+) – Lettice is a living anachronism. Raised by a bohemian mother in the world of a travelling Shakespearean theatre troupe, she is a dynamic, magnetic woman who knows how to command a room and a crowd. History is her passion, but she sees nothing wrong with embellishing it to make it more interesting, which gets her in a wee bit of hot water with her employer, The Preservation Trust.

Lotte Schoen (female-presenting, 40s+) – Lotte, a no-nonsense woman who works in HR at The Preservation Trust, appears to be the polar opposite of Lettice. While equally dominant as her counterpart, Lotte has a grounded, practical, stern personality that is in part an overcorrection for some youthful indiscretions. Despite her best efforts, she is drawn into Lettice's world and the two become fast friends.

Miss Framer (female-presenting, 20s+) – Lotte's timid, anxious secretary. She fears Lotte and is somewhat bewildered yet entranced by Lettice, as one tends to be when encountering the exotic. This actor will also double as a visitor to Fustian House at the beginning of the show.

Mr. Bardolph (male-presenting, 30s+) – Lettice’s lawyer. He tries his best to remain staid and professional, but like everyone else, he eventually finds himself swept up in Lettice’s energy. This actor will also double as a visitor to Fustian House at the beginning of the show.

Visitors to Fustian House (all gender identities, all ages) – The actors playing the visitors will be playing multiple characters over the course of four “tours”. There are a few speaking roles among the visitors, and those roles will rotate through the visitors throughout the run. After the tours are finished, the visitors will double as stage crew.

Rehearsals

Rehearsals will be 3 times a week in July and August. Only those on the call sheet will be needed but as the opening gets closer and we start full runs we will need everyone there.

The show run is 2-12 September, running Wednesday to Sunday in the first week and then Wednesday to Saturday in the second week.

Audition Sides

1. Miss Framer and Lotte
2. Lettice and Lotte
3. Lettice and Lotte Act 2
4. Mr Bardolph and Lettice
5. Lettice monologue

Audition Side 1: Miss Framer and Lotte

The faint noise continues: more sharply

Lotte Yes? ... Is there anyone there?

The knock sounds a little louder

Yes! Come in!

The door opens timidly. Miss Framer comes in: a nervous, anxious Assistant, frightened, breathy, and refined.

Framer *(a whisper)* It's me, Miss Schoen.

Lotte What?

Framer *(just louder)* It's me, Miss Schoen.

Lotte Miss Framer, I do wish you could learn to knock audibly. Not scratch at the door, or fumble at it like some kind of rodent.

Framer I'm sorry, Miss Schoen.

Lotte raps quickly and sharply on the desk, four times.

Lotte That is a knock! Do you understand?

Framer Yes, Miss Schoen.

Lotte Then copy it. Alert me to the fact that you wish to enter.

Framer Yes, Miss Schoen.

Lotte Now what is it?

Framer *(a whisper)* Miss Douffet is here to see you.

Lotte What?

Framer *(just louder)* Miss Douffet is here to see you.

Lotte Ah.

Framer I asked her to wait.

Lotte That was enterprising of you.

Framer Thank you ...

Lotte How does she seem to be?

Framer Bold, I would say.

Lotte Bold?

Framer Her clothes are bold ... Well, bolder than mine, anyway.

Lotte I see ... Did you have a talk with Mr Green about her, as I asked you to?

Framer Oh yes, indeed.

Lotte He did the original hiring, I understand.

Framer Yes, that's right.

Lotte Well? And?

Framer He says when he met her for the first time this Spring he thought she might make a valuable addition to our Staff of Guides. She appeared to be mad on History.

Lotte Just mad would seem to be more like it, judging from these letters.

Framer Oh dear ...

Lotte Does he know nothing about her at all?

Framer Nothing whatever, it seems.

Lotte Well this file is worse than useless. It just gives her address and nothing else. (*Consulting it*) Nineteen Rastridge Road, Earls Court ... Do you know it?

Framer I'm afraid not.

Lotte A singularly dreary street. What I would term Victorian Varicose.

Framer (*laughing sycophantically*) Oh that's good! That's very good, Miss Schoen. Victorian Varicose! ... Oh yes, indeed! Most amusing!

Lotte (*ignoring the flattery*) If she lives in London, what is she doing working in Wiltshire?

Framer I think it was the only position available ... Apparently Fustian House isn't particularly popular with Guides ... It was just for the summer.

Lotte I see ... (*Suddenly holding her head*) Oh God ...

Framer (*fussing*) What? What is it?

Lotte Nothing.

Framer Is it one of your headaches?

Lotte (*briskly*) No.

Framer Is there anything at all I can do?

Lotte No thank you.

Framer Perhaps an aspirin. Shall I get you an aspirin, Miss Schoen?

Lotte Nothing, thank you. Stop fussing! If you want to help, bring me a cup of tea. Strong.

Framer Of course.

Lotte And one for that woman out there. She's going to need it.

Framer Yes, Miss Schoen.

Lotte Show her in, please.

Framer Yes... Yes... At once... I'm sorry.

Miss Framer goes out.

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Audition Side 2: Lotte and Lettice

After a moment four slow loud knocks are heard and Miss Frammer shows in Lettice Douffet, then exits, closing the door.

Lettice is wearing a theatrical black cloak and carries a leather satchel. Lettice is very uneasy.

Lotte Ah, Miss Douffet: good afternoon. Please sit down.

Lettice sits in a chair on the other side of the desk.

I hope you had a pleasant journey up to London.

Lettice That is not very likely, is it? - considering one is about to be arraigned.

Lotte I'm sorry?

Lettice I'm at the Bar of Judgement, am I not?

Lotte Your position is to be reviewed, actually. I'm sure you see the inevitability of that... I have no choice in the matter.

Lettice Like the headsman.

Lotte I'm sorry.

Lettice The headsman always asked forgiveness of those he was about to decapitate.

Lotte I would really appreciate it if we could exclude historical analogies from this conversation.

Lettice As you please.

Lotte It is after all solely to do with your job, and your fitness to perform it. We both know what we have to talk about. As an official of the Department which employs you I cannot possibly overlook what I witnessed yesterday afternoon. I cannot understand it, and I cannot possibly condone it. Do you have anything to say in extenuation?

A pause

Lettice It is not my fault.

Lotte I'm sorry?

Lettice Except in a most limited sense of that word.

Lotte Then whose is it?

Lettice I respect accuracy in recounting History when it is moving and startling. Then I would not dream of altering a single detail.

Lotte That is gracious of you.

Lettice In some cases however I do confess I feel the need to take a hand ... I discovered this need working at Fustian House this summer. It is wholly the fault of the House that I yielded to it.

Lotte Of the House?

Lettice Yes.

Lotte You are actually blaming the House for those grotesque narrations?

Lettice I am. Most definitely ... Fustian House is quite simply the dullest house in England! It is actually impossible to make interesting! Not only is its architecture in the very gloomiest style of Tudor building—nothing whatever happened in it!—over four hundred years! A Queen almost fell downstairs—but didn't. A girl did fall—not even downstairs—and survived to be honoured by the poor. How am I expected to make anything out of that?

Lotte You are not expected to make things out of the house, Miss Douffet. Merely to show people round it.

Lettice I'm afraid I can't agree. I am there to enlighten them. That first of all.

Lotte Enlighten?

Lettice Light them up! "Enlarge!—Enliven!—Enlighten!"—That was my mother's watchword. She called them the three Es. She was a great teacher, my mother.

Lotte Really? At what institution?

Lettice The oldest and the best. The Theatre.

Miss Schoen bristles.

All good actors are instructors, as I'm sure you realize.

Lotte (*coldly*) I'm afraid I don't at all.

Lettice But certainly! "Their subject is Us—Their sources are Themselves!"—Again, my mother's phrase. She ran a Touring Company of players, all trained by her to speak Shakespeare thrillingly, in the French tongue.

Lotte The French?

Lettice Yes. She moved to France after the war, unable to find employment in her native England equal to her talent. We lived in an agricultural town in the Dordogne. It was not really very appreciative of Shakespeare.

Lotte The French peasantry is hardly noted for that kind of enthusiasm, I understand.

Lettice Nor the intellectuals either. Voltaire called Shakespeare "barbare"—did you know that? Barbarian.

Lotte I'm not surprised. The Gallic mind imagines it invented civilization.

Lettice My mother set out to correct that impression. Her Company was called in pure defiance—"Les Barbares!"

Lotte She was evidently not afraid of challenge.

Lettice Never! Every girl was trained to phrase faultlessly.

Lotte And every man also, one presumes.

Lettice There were no men.

Lotte You mean it was an all-girl Company?

Lettice Indeed. My mother married a Free French soldier in London called Douffet, who abandoned her within three months of the wedding. She took no pleasure thereafter in associating with Frenchmen. "They are all fickle," she used to say. "Fickle and furtive".

Lotte A fair description of the whole nation, I would say.

Lettice She brought me up entirely herself. Mainly on the road. We played all over the Dordogne—in farmhouses and barns—wherever they would have us. I was the Stage Manager, responsible for costumes, props, and fights. Fights, I may say, as ferocious as they can only be, enacted by a horde of Gallic girls in armour when their dander is really up! We performed only the History plays of Shakespeare—because History was my mother's passion. She herself was famous for her Richard the Third. She used to wear a pillow on her back as a hump. It was brilliantly effective. (*Springing up*) No-one who heard it will ever forget the climax of her performance—the cry of total despair wrung from her on the battlefield! (*Stooping, as the royal hunchback*) "Un cheval! Un cheval! Mon Royaume pour un cheval!"

Lotte stares astounded

Lettice All the translations were her own.

Lotte (*drily*) A remarkable achievement.

Lettice Not for her. Language was her other passion. As I grew up I was never permitted to read anything but the grandest prose. "Language alone frees one!" she used to say. "And History gives one place." She was adamant I should not lose my English Heritage. On a child's mind the most tremendous events were engraved as with a diamond on a windowpane ... And to me, my Tourists—simply random holidaymakers in my care for twenty minutes of their lives—are my children in this respect. It is my duty to enlarge them. Enlarge—enliven—enlighten them.

Lotte With fantasies?

Lettice Fantasy floods in where fact leaves a vacuum.

Lotte Another saying of your mother's?

Lettice My own! ... When I first went to Fustian House I spoke nothing but fact! Exactly what was set down for me by your office—in all its glittering excitement. By the time I'd finished my whole group would have turned grey with indifference ... Fustian is a haunted house, Miss Schoen. It is haunted by the spirit of nullity, of nothing ever happening! That had to be fought.

Lotte With untruth.

Lettice With anything!

Lotte (*implacably*) With untruth.

Lettice (*grandly*) I am the daughter of Alice Evans Douffet—dedicated to lighting up the world, not dousing it in dust! ... My tongue simply could not go on speaking that stuff! ... No doubt it was excessive. I was carried—I can't deny it—further and further from the shore of fact down the slipstream of fiction. But blame the House—not the spirit which defied it!

Lotte And this is your defence?

Lettice Where people once left it yawning they now leave admiring. I use that word in its strict sense—meaning a State of Wonder. That is no mean defence.

Lotte It is completely irrelevant!

Lettice Last month I put a soup bowl by the Rear Exit. Not from greed—though heaven knows I could be forgiven for that, with what you pay me ... I wanted proof! People express gratitude the same way all over the world: with their money. (*Proudly*) ... My soup bowl brims! It brims every evening with their coins—as they themselves are brimming! I watch them walking away afterwards to the Car Park—and those are Brimming People. Every one!

Lotte Really? If you were to look through those letters you might discover quite a few who were not actually brimming—except with indignation.

Lettice approaches the desk and examines a letter.

Lettice Churls are always with us. Curmudgeons are never slow to come forward.

Lotte (*furious*) Twenty-two letters! I have twenty-two letters about you, Miss Douffet! None of them exactly written in a state of wonder!

Lettice (*loftily*) Twenty-two—what's that? ... I have fifty! ... Sixty! ... Here—look for yourself! ... Here! ... Behold! ... Here! (*She grabs her satchel and empties its contents over the desk—a small avalanche of envelopes.*) Vox Populi! The Voice of the People! ... I wrote my address beside my bowl. This is the result!

Lotte (*protesting*) Please, Miss Douffet! ... This is my desk!

Audition Side 3: Lettice and Lotte Act 2

We in the theatre hear what Lettice hears.

Lotte (*briskly*) Miss Douffet?

Lettice (*faintly*) Yes ...

Lotte This is Miss Schoen.

Lettice Who?

Lotte Miss Schoen. From the Trust. Do you remember?

Lettice stands aghast.

Hallo? ... Miss Douffet? ... Are you there?

Lettice (*in a whisper*) Yes ...

Lotte Can you hear me? (*Insistent*) Miss Douffet? ... Can you hear me?

Lettice (*to the cat*) It's her ... The Executioner! ...

The buzzer sounds again, imperiously.

Lotte (*Into the phone; louder*) Hallo?

Lotte Please let me in. I have to see you.

Lettice No!

Lotte It's just for a moment. You won't regret it, I assure you.

Lettice (*faintly*) I don't choose ... I really do not.

Lotte What are you saying? I can't hear you!

Lettice (*a little louder*) I do not choose to receive you. Please go away.

Lotte Miss Douffet, I do very much need to see you. Please let me in. (*Pause*) Are you listening?

We see Lotte crouching down and peering through the side window, trying to see in. She raps sharply on the railings with her umbrella. Lettice shrinks back against the wall. The face disappears, and the buzzer goes again, and again, and again, alternating with sharp raps from the door-knocker.

Lotte (*raising her voice; sharply*) Miss Douffet, this is absurd! Please let me in at once! (*A long blast on the buzzer*) Miss Douffet, I insist!

Lettice (*in distress*) Oh dear!!! ... Very well!!!! (*She presses the button to release the catch on the front door, and opens the one to her flat. Calling up the stairs*) Enter if you must! ... Down to the dungeon!

Lotte's legs disappear into the house.

Lettice stands rigid.

We hear feet marching down the stairs and Lotte appears.

Lotte Good-afternoon. It is very good of you to see me— *(Seeing the cat in Lettice's arms; screaming)* Ahh!

Lettice What is it?

Lotte A cat!

Lettice This is Felina, Queen of Sorrows.

Lotte I'm sorry, I can't come in! Not with that!

Lettice Why not?

Lotte Allergy. The doctor calls it that anyway. I know it's something deeper. Either way it prevents me entering.

Lettice She can be banished for five minutes.

Lotte I'd be grateful.

Lettice Very well.

Lettice goes into the bedroom with Felina and returns alone, shutting the door.

Cautiously Lotte enters the flat and comes down the stairs.

Lettice *(coldly)* She is confined to the shoe cupboard.

Lotte Thank you. That's most kind.

Lettice Not to her. She prefers being in here ... What did you mean, something deeper than allergy?

Lotte I have an actual aversion to cats. Their sinuousness and slyness. I try to conquer it but can't. They actually make my throat swell.

Lettice Well that's mutual. Felina's throat swells when she meets people she doesn't like. They are creatures of deep instinct, of course.

Lotte So I have been told.

Lettice Would you like to sit down? *(She gestures to the wooden throne.)*

Lotte What an interesting chair. Was it one of your mother's?

Lettice How do you know that?

Lotte It looks rather like a prop.

Lettice That is her Falstaff chair.

Lotte looks at her startled.

You may occupy it if you like. *(Indicating the gilded chair.)* Or you may take the endored one.

Lotte I wouldn't presume.

Lettice You have my assent.

Lotte Well ... thank you. (*She sits on the wooden one.*)

An awkward pause.

Lettice goes into the kitchen.

Lotte Miss Douffet, I hope my coming here is not disturbing for you.

Lettice (*off*) Why should it be? After all, you have no powers here.

Lotte I beg your pardon?

Lettice returns with a tin of cat food, which she opens and empties into a bowl.

Lettice You have done all you can to me. I am quite beyond your jurisdiction.

Lotte My dear woman, I haven't come to do anything to you.

Lettice Don't ... Don't say that, please ... I am not "dear" to you. I am not dear at all.

Lotte It was just a form of words.

Lettice I respect words.

Lotte So do I. Intensely.

Lettice Why have you come? To gloat? To look on my condition?

Lotte To see how you are, certainly.

Lettice Well then, you see! Behold!

Lotte You've been well?

Lettice I can't believe you're interested in that.

Lotte You have found some work, one hopes?

Lettice Does one?

Lotte Of course.

Lettice (*coldly*) Since I saw you it has been, I think, ten weeks.

Lotte About that, yes.

Lettice In that period I have worked for one ... I found employment in a large store in Oxford Street. In the food department during British Cheese Week. I had to dress up in a green crinoline and a pink muslin cap—and offer samples of a new cheese called Devon Dream. My week did not run its full course.

Lotte You left?

Lettice I was asked to leave.

Lotte May I ask you why?

Lettice You mayn't.

She goes into the bedroom with the bowl of catfood

A loud miaow sends Lotte over to the stairs

Lettice comes back into the room to find Lotte standing there with some surprise. She shuts the bedroom door

Lotte cautiously returns to her chair

Lotte Miss Douffet ... to come to the point—since we met, you have been somewhat on my conscience.

Lettice (*still cold*) Really?

Lotte I am aware it is not easy for people of our age and background to find employment of any kind—let alone that which suits us ... I have been keeping an eye open on your behalf.

Lettice How peculiar.

Lotte Peculiar?

Lettice To push someone in the gutter and then toy with pulling them out. Remorse, my mother used to say, is a useless emotion.

Lotte (*stiffly*) It is hardly that, I can assure you. I was not remotely wrong in doing what I did. I would do it again. All the same ... in a friendly spirit—I have been on the watch for you. That is all I'm saying. If it's of interest. (*A pause*) I have actually discovered something you might enjoy doing. Should I go on?

Lettice (*equally stiffly*) If you wish.

Lotte A married couple who live next door to me run a business of tourist boats on the Thames. The public embark at Westminster Bridge and are addressed throughout by a Guide using a microphone. I have been speaking to this couple, and they are badly in need of helpers: people who have enthusiasm for history—with a particular regard to the river. I told them I knew exactly the person. I did somewhat exceed the limits of—

Audition Side 4: Lettice and Bardolph

ACT III

Lettice's flat. Six months later. Afternoon.

The room is in some disarray. The front door has clearly been smashed in, and hangs precariously against the wall, exposing the dingy staircase outside, descending from the hall above. The bedroom door is closed. One new object is a large square shape on the floor covered with a black shawl.

In the Falstaff chair, sitting quite inappropriately, is Mr Bardolph: a solicitor. He is in middle-age, dry and professional. Lettice stands looking up out of the window. There is a silence between them, which has obviously been of some duration.

Bardolph I am waiting, Miss Douffet. I hope patiently. My patience, however, is not inexhaustible. Nor is my time. I ask you again, will you now speak to me? Plainly and clearly? ... Well?

Lettice (*turning*) I really don't think you should have come here, Mr Bardolph.

Bardolph I would much have preferred to interview you at my office. I did suggest that, if you recall.

Lettice I really feel I have a right to my privacy: criminal though it may be, in the eyes of the police. I had always assumed that being granted bail meant also being granted that. Evidently I was wrong.

Bardolph My dear Miss Douffet, how can I possibly make you understand?

Lettice Please! Do not use that form of words to me. I am not your "dear". We have only met once before, please to remember.

Bardolph I am fully aware of it—and a most unsatisfactory meeting it was. You told me nothing whatever.

Lettice I seem to recall you counselled silence.

Bardolph To the police. Not to me! I am—at least I am under the impression that I am—representing you. Defending you, Miss Douffet. Is that remotely clear?

Lettice My defence will come from other quarters.

Bardolph Do you mean you have engaged another lawyer behind my back?

Lettice No.

Bardolph Then from whom will it come? From what other quarters?

Lettice I would prefer to remain silent.

Bardolph This is unbelievable. Do you actually realize the situation you are in? You are charged by the police with a peculiarly unpleasant crime. You go to trial in less than five weeks, and you tell me nothing with which one can possibly defend you ... I have nothing to go on—nothing to send to Counsel! It is actually impossible for a solicitor to act for a client under such conditions!

Lettice Please do not distress yourself, Mr Bardolph. All will be made plain at the proper time.

Bardolph By who? When and where made plain?

Lettice In court. In the dock. By Miss Schoen.

Bardolph Miss Schoen?!

Lettice She is, as the Bible says, my shield and my buckler.

Bardolph (*incredulously*) I don't actually believe I'm hearing any of this! She is what?

Lettice My defence, in whom I rest. Is that such an obscure word for a lawyer to understand—defence?

Bardolph (*controlling himself*) Miss Douffet: it may have escaped your notice that the lady you mention is not appearing in your defence. She is a prosecution witness—against you. In fact she is the main witness against you.

Lettice (*loftily*) That is impossible. She will speak and all will be clarified.

Bardolph But she has already spoken.

Lettice What?

Bardolph The police interviewed her in hospital, and it is obviously on her statement alone that there is a case to answer.

Lettice There must be some mistake.

Bardolph No.

Lettice There has to be. A huge mistake has been made.

Bardolph By whom? She was your victim, was she not? We are dealing with an extremely grave offence. You are charged with attempted murder. It is somewhat unlikely that your victim will speak in your defence. Victims on the whole do not tend to do that. I would much appreciate it therefore if you would speak yourself. Forthwith!

A pause

Lettice What exactly did she say? I demand to know what she said against me!

Bardolph That you struck her with an axe.

Lettice And nothing else?

Bardolph (*drily*) That really is quite sufficient for the police.

Lettice She said I assaulted her?

Bardolph Apparently, yes.

Lettice And nothing else?

Bardolph Not so far as I know.

A pause

Lettice (*in sudden distress*) I have been betrayed ... Utterly betrayed! ... History repeats itself forever!

Bardolph What are you saying?

Lettice Nothing! ... I cannot believe it! ... She would never do this to me! She is the soul of honesty! Honesty and accuracy are her watchwords!

Bardolph All I know is that they have brought a case on her accusation—and you have to answer it.

A pause

Lettice I left a message on her telephone-answering machine. I said you would be coming here, I am not adept at such devices, but she will understand it all the same. She will come here herself and explain everything—you'll see. She'll come to my rescue! She'll throw the accusation back at you as deep as to the lungs!

Bardolph (*standing up; losing his patience*) Madam—I am making no accusation of her! It is you who are the accused—and you stand in peril of going to prison for a considerable time if you don't let me help you! ... Now—for the last time—will you speak to me or not? Otherwise I will recommend another solicitor and leave you.

A pause. He reaches for his briefcase.

Lettice If she has borne false witness and delivered me into the hands of gaolers—then so be it.

Bardolph That means yes?

Pause

That means yes, Miss Douffet?

Lettice (*exploding*) Yes! ... YES!!

Bardolph Good.

Lettice I have deserved better of her. I truly have ... (*Defiant*) Ask your questions, Mr Bardolph! I will speak everything.

Bardolph Thank you ... I will recapitulate the facts, you will correct me wherever necessary. I shall record our conversation if you don't mind. (*He produces a tape machine from his case.*)

Lettice (*sitting in the gilded chair*) Must you?

Bardolph It makes for accuracy.

Lettice As you will.

Bardolph Turn it on yourself, when you are ready.

Audition Side 5: Lettice Monologue

Act I, Scene 1:D

Lively music. The crowd of Tourists again mills around the stage, deftly changing into summer attire. The Lights come up. A brilliant day.

The same scene as before. Lettice again lecturing, now very much in control: her public listens attentively and enthralled. Amongst them, holding a guide-book, stands Lotte Schoen: a severe-looking middle-aged lady, her hair and clothes aggressively plain.

Lettice *(standing below, in the hall)*

The incident I have just described to you—in which the Virgin Queen Elizabeth was saved from almost certain death by a feat of daring completely unachievable today by even the greatest Olympic athlete—is only one of many deeds of high drama which have been enacted upon the stage of this historic staircase. *(Pause)* Not all of them, alas, were so happy in their outcomes. The ensuing century was in every way darker, and the doings on its staircase were correspondingly more murky. It was upon these very stairs one hundred years later that the most terrible of all events connected with this house occurred—on Midsummer morning, sixteen hundred and eighty-nine.

All look expectant. Lettice warms to her tale.

This day was intended to celebrate the marriage of Miss Arabella Fustian to the handsomest young Lordling in the region. The bride was a radiantly beautiful girl of eighteen: “the catch of the County”, as she was called. On the morning of her wedding her father, Sir Nicholas, stood precisely where I stand now—waiting to escort his only daughter to the church. The door of the bed-chamber opened above—*(she points)*

All look

—and out stepped this exquisite creature, in a miasma of white samite. But then—ah! suddenly!—a terrible drumming is heard! A frantic pounding along the oak gallery—and behind her, galloping at full speed, is Charger, the faithful wolfhound of the family, wild with excitement at smelling the nuptial baked meats roasting in the kitchen below! In his hurtling frenzy he knocks the girl aside! She staggers—flails the air—shoots out her hand for the banister which alas is too far from her—and falls headlong after the beast!

A general gasp of horror

—her lovely body rolling like a cloud down the fifteen stairs you see—until at last with one appalling jolt it comes to rest at her father’s feet! ... *(She points to the spot, at her own feet)* Is she dead? No, the saints be praised! Her neck is unbroken.

A general sigh of relief

In a dreadful echo of the gesture with which his ancestor won the family title, he catches the girl up in his arms and—watched by the agonized dog—carries her upwards to her room. A room she was never to leave again. Arabella regained consciousness yes, but her legs—which had danced the Gavotte and Coranto as no legs had ever danced them—were now twisted beneath her, in mockery of the love-knots which grace the plaster ceiling above you!

All look up

By her own choice the girl immured herself in that chamber up there for life—receiving no visitors but howling incessantly the Marriage Hymn, which had been specially composed for her by Henry Purcell himself! ... The Family Chronicle records that her attendants were all likewise distorted. I quote it for you. “The wretched lady would employ as domestics only those who were deformed in the legs and haunches: knotted women, bunchbacks, swivelhips, and such as had warpage and osseous misalignment of the limbs!” Servants of all shapes clawed their way daily up this staircase—which was

now known no longer as the Staircase of Ennoblement—but the Staircase of Wound and Woe! This name it has retained ever since.

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