

In Paradisum

A Play in 5 Acts

by

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Characters

- Andrew** An archaeologist, an academic and world authority in Tang dynasty. He is completely focussed on his work.
- Frances** His wife, she is elegant, quiet and well educated.
- Ros** Andrew's Personal Assistant is single, attractive, business like.
- Martin** A successful entrepreneur who lives in Colombia, he is single and charming.

All these four characters are roughly middle aged and were friends at university together.

- Min Hua** Minister for Culture – He is well educated, charming yet ruthless, and speaks formal English. He appears almost European as his father was French. He wears western clothes and a white scarf draped over one shoulder as a mark of his tribe.
- JonJon** A local servant at the dig. His English is stilted.
- A Waiter** at the restaurant in Bristol.

Description

It is the present time. The location is high in the mountains of an ex French colony in Indo China. There is an archaeological dig in progress at the site of a citadel which had been built on the ruins of an ancient monastery. In more recent history, the site was used by French Embassy staff as a Colonial Summer retreat to avoid the city heat. The action takes place in a bright lounge of a modern suit of rooms used by guests at the site. Up stage there is a door leading left and right. There is a balconied window stage right looking out over the garden and the jungle below.

Acts 3 and 5 take place in Bristol on the balconied veranda of an up market restaurant called "The Paragon" which towers over the Avon Gorge, the Clifton Suspension Bridge and the Georgian town spread out below. Stage left there is a door into the restaurant and table and chairs set for tea on the veranda where a balcony looks down front.

Both locations may be represented in one set with the scenes lit to focus the action and changed location.

Direction

Direction has been minimised to provide the director with the fullest opportunity to make use of theatre in order to enhance the drama.

Act 1

A lounge at the monastery

At rise we see a comfortable well lit lounge. Ros is sat at a table working on a pile of papers and has a glossy exhibition catalogue with photographs of Tang artefacts.

Enter JonJon carrying cold drink and glasses.

ROS: Oh thanks JonJon, just leave it, I'll pour it myself.

JJ: Yes Miss Ros

ROS: Will I ever get used to this heat?

JJ: It is much cooler up here in the hills than down in the City - the monsoon ends soon - then it will be cooler.

ROS: What about the rainstorm last night, the rain was coming off the roof like a waterfall

JJ: It is normal at this month.

ROS: I got out of bed to watch the lightning – it was one of the best I've seen yet!

JJ: Do you not have such storms in England?

ROS: Lightning? - yes but it doesn't last for long. The lightning here is unbelievable, the way it zips around the sky from cloud to cloud and the flashes over the forest go on for ever - you would pay money to see it – it's like a show!

JJ: Maybe the road down to the city is washed away again, then we cannot drive down until they repair it. - It happens so..... They say that is why the citadel was built up here – it is difficult to get to because the tracks were washed away by the rain

ROS: ...that's right, but I don't think anyone ever tried attacking it did they and the place had been deserted for centuries before the French came and built the road into the rock – no more attacking hordes, only armies of French civil servants coming up here to get away from the City – trust them to know a good thing when they see it. It is beautiful up here, I love it when the clouds fill the valley and you look down on the forest poking through the clouds and the misty mountain tops hanging like curtains draped one behind another, it's just heaven.

JJ: Our name for the mountain means heaven.... paradise.

ROS: Are you from the Hill People?

JJ: No – my family were fishing people – my Grandfather had his own boat. My mother moved to the city when it was the war – everyone left the village for the city.....Min Hua is "Araan", he is from the highland.

ROS: Is he? He doesn't look it, I thought he was half European.

JJ: Oh, yes – you must not say it to him, he will be angry. It was the French soldiers who came in the war.

ROS: Oh, I see, it's like that is it?.

JJ: You see the white cloth he wears on his shoulder, this is a sign of his people. He will tell you, before the Portuguese came and before the Dutch and before the French and the Americans his people were Princes of the Highlands, he is very proud and would like it back the way it was before.

ROS: I wonder if he would, really.

JJ: Excuse me?

ROS: As it was - want the old days back again – It's easy to forget how hard it used to be for most of the people.....have you seen him lately?

JJ: Min Hua?

ROS: Yes

JJ: He is with Mr Andrew at the dig.

ROS: They've hardly left it for a minute this week, Andrew ought to be spending more time on the exhibition.

JJ: After discovering the statue Mr Andrew and Min Hua were very excited – I have never seen Mr Andrew like that...Mr Andrew said he had waited all his life for such a moment.

ROS: He certainly was.....like the cat that got the cream.

JJ: Like a cat? (*thinks*) What does this mean?

ROS: Oh, a cat, you know, a domestic cat eating cream.

JJ: Why do you give cream to cat?

ROS: Well, when you.....well never mind. They were excited because the statue is of Kuan Yin ...

JJ: (*puzzled*) There are many such statues – this is the God of Mercy. I myself

ROS: Not like that one – it's made of jade – very rare, most of those you have seen are wood or pottery and better than that, this one is female.

JJ: But I think I have seen both men and women Kuan Yin?

ROS: That's right but for the date of this monastery, we would expect Kuan Yin still to be shown as a man. It would be wonderful to have it in NY, it would be the pinnacle of Andrew's exhibition.

JJ: (*pause, thinking what to say next*) Mr. Andrew must be very important man to have his own exhibition in America.

ROS: Well he is important, he has spent his life studying the treasures of the Tang Dynasty – do you know Tang?

JJ: (*slightly shakes his head*)

ROS: – he was the Chinese ruler at the time this monastery was built – a long time ago. Mr. Andrew has many fine Tang treasures which he's collected over the years, they say it is one of the best in the world so he has decided it is time for the world to see them. The exhibition will be like a crowning glory for him – recognising all his study and hard work.

JJ: The Kuan Yin figure will be shown?

ROS: No we don't have time - it's too late now and it's so special your country would never sell it – no, it will have a place of honour in your National Museum maybe in the centre of the Tang room just as you go through the door – in the main hall - you know – in one of those glass cabinets so you can see all around it. (*looks at exhibition catalogue*) Here, in a cabinet like that..

JJ: (*looks in admiration at catalogue*) This is the book for Mr Andrew's exhibition? – it is very fine.

ROS: Yes, the catalogue – they came from New York yesterday. Don't they look good.
(*Andrew enters*)

AND: What looks good?

ROS: I was just showing JonJon the catalogue and telling him about the Kuan Yin figure – why it would set New York on fire.

AND: Impossible – quite impossible – I would give anything to have it but I'm content that I found it – opening that tomb and seeing her by the sarcophagus – quite wonderful – wonderful. It will stay in your National Collection – one of the star pieces!

JJ: Mr. Andrew, I finish job.

AND: What?

JJ: I finish job – on the strong room – you say keep out dust and insects. I close all gaps of the door, not even a house gecko can get in now.

AND: Oh, that – Oh good – good. Where is the key now.

JJ: I give it back to Min Hua like you say.

AND: Good – good - the door must always be locked now. Remember, these latest finds are so precious we must keep the dust and air away from

ROS:and the insects, if they get into the silk relics.... They've been preserved in the tomb for over a thousand years, we mustn't damage them now that they are in our care.

AND: Thank you JonJon that is all..... (exit JonJon)

AND: ...yes, I sometimes think the Ministry of Culture here knew the heavy burden they were piling on my shoulders when they authorised me to manage this excavation. – I get nightmares of future generations blaming me for spoiling their national treasures – not caring enough.....accusing fingers, - shouting – crowds of people, but the silly thing is they're.....

ROS: (*interrupting*).....Andrew, you know that's not true, you love these pieces, no one could be more dedicated to this work and certainly no one knows the period of the monastery better than you.

AND: Well, I hope so - look, I'm very worried about the financials – Good heavens why does it always have to be so difficult - The Met. has to happen, they know my collection is one of the finest in private hands but they'll pull the exhibition unless we can come up with a sponsor pretty soon. Think of the damage that will do to my reputation.

ROS: Well, there might be better news on funding,

AND: Really?

ROS: Do you remember Martin from our uni days ? - shared a flat with France's crowd - sporty – good at everything.

AND: Oh him – Martin Palmer. Didn't he write that book about Street Children in Brazil - What about him?

ROS: Colombia actually – yes that's him. He's got the Midas touch, can't help making money – a stroke of luck.....

AND: (*interrupting and teasing Ros*) Oh I remember now – wasn't he an old flame.....

ROS: (*embarrassed, protesting*) Now Andrew you.....

AND: (*continuing*) Oh I see - found a long lost boyfriend and.....

ROS: Andrew stop it – yes he was a boyfriend – well, for a few months. - He was every girl's boyfriend, we all wanted him. When I think how we were all falling over each other for him and he.... Well, he was even making money then – turned up in an E type Jag. while we were still in halls – he certainly got what he wanted.

AND: (*continuing lasciviously*)and what exactly was that may I enquire...

ROS: (*embarrassed again*) Andrew. Stop it! – Really! – That was a long time agoAs I was saying before you started teasing me, a stroke of luck, I was researching collectors at the New York Met and they said he has a Tang dynasty collection himself but he's impossible to get hold of. It seems that after writing that book he's devoted his life to an orphanage and saving the children so ...(*pauses for drama*).....so I sent a proposal to his office in Bogotá asking them to mail me back if they are interested.

AND: (*Chuckles then begins asthma attack*) What? A potential backer at last, Good – good – ah! (*breathing diffi- cultly*) Uuuuuuh - Uuuuuh

ROS: You alright? – sit down, where's your nebuliser?.... (*tends to him*).....(*then motherly*)..You see, that is your punishment for teasing me.

(*MH enters– MH is subservient to Andrew*)

MH: (*shouts as he enters*) JonJon! – JonJon another glass!.....(*sees Andrew*) ...Are you not well Andrew, you look tired? – you must let me take more of your work – you have enough with the exhibition coming. (*JonJon enters with glass, serves Min Hua a drink*)

AND: I am well enough, its this humidity – no matter – your government brought me in to this excavation because of my expertise, it wouldn't do for others to do my work - even such a senior member of your Culture Ministry as yourself.

MH: *(not really listening to Andrew, he takes glass from JonJon while Andrew is speaking, and dismisses him with a hand gesture, JonJon then moves to look again at the catalogue) ... (to Andrew) ... As you wish.*

AND: *(addressing MH)* Are you satisfied the Kuan Yin is secure now?

MH: Absolutely. The strong room is completely sealed now, she and the other relics are safe and well.....

JJ: *(curiously points to items in the catalogue)*.. Ros look! They are like the toys in our Museum.

ROS: What!..*(looking at catalogue)*

AND: No.....impossible – this cannot be - no you are mistaken...there are small animal figures in the museum but not like the pottery toys we found in the great tomb.....

MH: *(sharply to JonJon)* Come here. Must I tell you again not to interfere with Mr. Andrew's important work. Get out and get on with your work!

ROS: Don't be so harsh, he was only showing an interest.

AND: Enough – enough. Let – let – let us all get on with our work, time is running out on us.

ROS: Come on JonJon. Go and see if the post has managed to get through while I check my emails.

Exit Ros and JonJon. MH and Andrew change demeanour.

MH: The boy is an uneducated fool – he was dragged from the slums and knows nothing of antiquities These people.....*(disgust)*

AND: *(looking at catalogue)* What did he see..... call him back....I want to know what he was looking at..

MH: It is not necessary – the fool cannot get a tray of drinks without making a mistake – you will be wasting your time.

AND: No – no, I would like to hear what he thought.

MH: Very well, I will see if he is there. *(goes to the door behind AND, looks out but makes no effort to call JonJon)* ..I am afraid he has disappeared for the moment.

AND: he thought he saw..... he said toys...

MH: Andrew, listen – look stop worrying – you've got a lot on now. Tell me - how is the search for a backer going, have you been successful?.....*(no reply from AND, MH tries unsuccessfully to take catalogue away)*... Andrew, leave it to me.....*(walks away from sofa)*

AND: *(AND interrupts getting tense)*....You!..... you haven't.....*(looks at catalogue again)*

MH: Steady Andrew....

AND: is there another.....*(standing, angry)* you wretched.....

MH: *(to Andrew in a condescending way)* You must be more careful Andrew – you must control yourself, remember if I fall, you will fall farther.

AND: *(angrily)* Don't tell me how to behave you despicable...*(searches for the word)* –

MH: *(cruelly)* despicable – despicable is it, Ha! – you Colonialist playing lords in your....

AND: *(angrily waving catalogue in MH face)*everything in my collection is legitimate.

MH: Unhappily for you, that will not save you if you lose your good name.

AND: You've held that over my head long enough. You had better not start your crooked trade again or

MH: ...or what? - what will you do – hey? – Ha! – You will tell the world?...you will ...*(AND pathetically grabs MH jacket, they struggle but MH easily pushes him off)*

AND: *(furious)* You've driven me to the end of the road.....My God you've pushed me far enough.....you will pay.....for every... *(JonJon and Ros enter with mail, MH and AND separate to hide their aggression)*

ROS: *(Ros puzzled by demeanour of Andrew and MH. Andrew moves to appear calm)* Areyou two OK.. only I thought I.....?

MH: *(brightly)* Of course - Andrew and I were just discussing the finances.

ROS: *(sensing the tension uncertain whether to leave or stay)* Shall I.....do you want me to.....

AND: *(weakly distracted)* What?...what was it?

MH: No, no....Andrew and I have finished....go on.....what were you going to say?
(JonJon picks up catalogue again and browses)

ROS: An email.....there's a mail from Martin's office....they've come back..

AND: *(more focussed)* Martin – what? *(impatiently)* what have they said....can they..

ROS: It's looking good, they sound interested in the exhibition, they might share the funding....

AND: Oh wonderful – Ros, that's wonderful.

ROS:and Martin wants to fly out next week to see the monastery.

MH: Is this a backer for the exhibition..?

ROS: Yes, an old friend who also happens to be very wealthy and a Tang collector.

MH: *(slaps Andrew on shoulder)* But that's wonderful, let him come, we will impress him with the tombs and our fine museum. – Andrew, Frances must come, you must ring her, we must have a celebration.

JJ: *(trying unsuccessfully to show catalogue to Ros)* They are the.....

MH: *(hastily cutting JonJon off)* Andrew you must call your good wife, she must come. Ros, the flights will be full I think, you should book them at once. *(abruptly indicates to JonJon to clear the table)*

AND: Well, let's not celebrate until we're sure Martin wants to back us, but yes, getting Frances out here would be nice – she's wanted to see the monastery again and how we're getting on – Ros can you look up flights please. *(looking at watch)* What time is it, is it too early to phone her – do you think she will be up yet?

ROS: *(checks watch)* Should be ok, leave it any later and she'll be gardening, then you'll never get her. *(ROS exits as AND answers)*

AND: Right – yes – yes of course. JonJon – you can clear up here please. *(Andrew exits while speaking)*

JJ: Yes sir.....

MH: *(MH attacks JonJon, gets him by the throat against the wall, JonJon drops tray noisily)* Listen very carefully, If you say one more word to anyone about what is in the exhibition I will cut your tongue out. *(MH quickly Releases him as Ros returns with the noise, JonJon has dropped to the floor before Ros enters)*

ROS: What happened, what's going on here?

JJ: *(Stammering, terrified)* An accident Miss Ros... I slipped and dropped the tray, Min Hua helped me.... It was nothing. *(JonJon runs out, Ros watches JonJon as he runs away, then she turns to face MH, he confidently meets her questioning gaze until she can no longer hold it and looks away uncertainly.)*

Lights down

Act 2 Scene 1

A week later

A lounge at the monastery

Ros is sat going through paperwork.

Enter MH carrying a copy of Martins' book.

MH: Oh, there you are – *(handing book back to Ros)* a remarkable book, thank you..

ROS: Yes, isn't it? Martin got a prize for it – his writing style makes it easy reading but his passion for the tragedy of those street children just leaps off the page.

MH: Have you seen him – Martin - today?

ROS: Not since last night – I thought he was going down to the city... to the National Museum.

MH: Yes he was but he should be back by now, the museum closes at four...

ROS: ...He seemed bowled over at the tombs yesterday – I think this may be just the subject he's been looking for – He's got another book on the boil and luckily for us the monastery and citadel here could have been made for him.

MH: Another book? – how does he make money out of that?

ROS: He's a man of many talents, Colombia is lucky to have him – he's full of ideas which usually make lots of money, books are just a tip of the iceberg.

MH: So icebergs are that far South now – Global warming must be having more of an effect that we thought.

ROS: Oh, Colombia – no I

MH: No, no Ros, I'm not serious – I am not ignorant of it's equatorial latitude.

ROS: Well that's where his life is now. Funny how life takes unexpected turns, he was researching the street children of Bogota for that book and was so effected by their plight that he couldn't just walk away – so when it sold well he put it all back into an orphanage and the thing grew from there.

MH: ..Yes – *(looking at fly leaf of book)* and he has dedicated the book to you? – “I dedicate this book to ROS” – this is you?

ROS: *(rather too hastily)* That! – No – that's not me – I wish! – no, ROS are the initials of his orphanage, Ros-ilia Orphanage Sociedad – a wonderful thing to do..

MH: *(teasing)* ..and do I detect a trace of admiration for our hero?

ROS: *(flustered)* Now don't you start, I've got Andrew trying to pair me off – I've got enough to worry about with the exhibition without....

MH: *(waving white scarf like a flag in jest)* Alright, alright – I surrender, I give in.... – so why are our tombs what he is looking for?

ROS: His new book is about children in war torn countries, how the circumstances of war changes them, how the children have an impact on society – presumably a natural extension from his first book – and this country has had more than it's fair share of wars over the years – when he saw the tomb of the child king yesterday I could see it all slotting into place in his mind, Tang dynasty perfect starting point for him – a child ruler who becomes a child divinity, the ravages of war providing thousands of child victims and now the horror of child soldiers wandering around with rifles bigger than themselves. Surely there's enough for him to get his teeth into, let's hope I'm right.

MH: *(looking out of window)* that could be him now...
(Martin enters having come from National Museum)

MAR: Hi you guys – what a day, what a day - I – have – had. Wow! - that museum is something else – thank God for digital cameras....

ROS: You must convince Andrew, he's still in the world of roll film – takes him for ever to get his prints done but he insists they're better.

MAR:there was much more than I expected – too much for one day, I'll have to go back, I need a lot more on the "divine one." ..but who was he - why here - how come a child?

MH: We only found *his* tomb last month, so there's not a lot at the National.....When Buddhism came through here from India about 200 a.d. they built the monastery right up here not only for protection but to be near the Gods – they let the deities choose their divine rulers – (*humorously*) you might consider that system in the West one day, you could do worse – so about 1500 years ago they found this 6 year old boy who was so wise they believed he must be the chosen one - and so it was – he ruled for about ten glorious years – in a period of wealth and refined art as you saw in the tomb...

MAR: ...but they would have realised there was a monastery here when they built the citadel on top of it surely?

MH: Perhaps but nobody cared - Buddhism was in decline – the country was under threat and modern defences were more important than old ruins I imagine.....It happened to be a good place for a citadel, it looks down over the old town, it was easy to defend, it had water and you can live off the forest – nearly all the same reasons why there was a monastery here first –

MAR: This gets better by the day – do we know the name of the boy king – can you....

Enter Andrew having come from the dig, carrying a film camera and day book.

MAR:Andrew, my man - what have you found today, (*ribbing*) not unearthed a mummified financial backer by any chance?

MH: Excuse me, I must go to site, please forgive me for leaving you – (*charming nod to Ros*) – Ros - gentlemen. (*MH leaves for site*)

AND: Martin, you don't know what this exhibition means to me - it's my life's work, everything I have, for the world to see – the Met say they can't keep.....

MAR: Andrew, stop worrying, I'm interested – OK – If it's in my power I will do what I can to.....

AND: ..you whatyou will.....you'll back me?

ROS: Martin, that's terrific..

MAR: Now hang on – yes, I'm minded to back you but I *will* need to have control – no liability without authority, I've learnt that the hard way. Ros, can you give me details, contracts, financials, publicity whatever you've got and I promise to go through them, but yes your on the road Andrew.

AND: (*near to tears*) Thank you,..... thank you....

ROS: Lets have champagne – lets celebrate.. (*gets champagne and pours while Martin gives book*)

MAR: and Andrew, I'd like you to have this copy of my book - I've signed it inside..

AND: (*opens book and reads*) "To Andrew – an inspirational friend, best wishes" –Thank you Martin – thank you very much - Frances and I'll both enjoy reading it – Have I really provided inspiration for the new book? I feel so honoured – it's a rare thing for someone to find me inspiring.

MAR: Nonsense...

ROS: To the new book, to the exhibition... (*they toast*)

MAR: (*scanning through the exhibition catalogue*)Nice catalogue, good artwork – a wonderful collection Andrew....you must be very proud.. When you see these things the past means so much more, you begin to understand that these were living people once with quite and advance culture.....Look, let me show you these photos I took at the national - so inspirational - just what I need for the book (*shows Ros and Andrew the camera screen*) - make the past come to life – there are these tiny pottery ox carts and cattle - children's toys from here, imagine that toys from 1500 years ago...(*Andrew is shocked, spills drink, ROS does not react*)

ROS: I thought you would be intrigued Martin – this place seems to have a magical power over people – perhaps we are near the Gods here. Have you seen the Orchid Garden, that's where I feel nearest to my God. - it's worth seeing, Frances loves it, she would love to move her garden out here but I've always found that gardening is fifty weeks of hard work followed by two weeks of disappointment! Come on, I'll show you. (*AND & ROS move to leave*)

AND: *(deflated - withdrawn)* Ros, can you stay a second - go on Martin, Ros will catch you up, I need to check something..

MAR: Are you OK Andrew, you look like you've seen a ghost?

AND: No – Yes – I'm fine – just my asthma, you go, I'll be OK in a minute –go on, go and see the garden *(Martin exits leaving his camera)*

AND: *(worried)* Get me my day book. *(fiddling with Martin's camera)*

ROS: *(getting book from the papers she was working on)* What's happened, you look terrible...

AND: How do you do this wretched thing..... I want to see his pictures.. that ox cart.

ROS: *(takes camera while Andrew looks through day book)* Let me do that....I think this is on....yes, then preview isno.....no.....yes, this is it, then arrow back or forward)

AND: *(shows ROS page in day book)*.. as I thought, look....look at that...

ROS: Oh..... the ox cart..... have we made a mistake, we've got it in the catalogue, it's supposed to be in the exhibition ...*(gets exhibition catalogue and compares image)*..... it was photographed in New York..... how can it still be in the museumbut Andrew, look, *(points to an entry in the day book)* you bought it almost a year ago.... What's going on here?

AND: *(furious)* Get MH back here now,I need him to sort this out *(exit ROS)*....it's another.....its got to beand then you had better go and find Martin in the garden – he'll think you've got lost

(exit Ros)*(Andrew puts the day book away, goes through more camera images and compares them with the catalogue)*

MH: Andrew, you wanted to see me?

AND: *(shaking with rage)* What have you done – you fool.....you..

MH:now just hang on a minute, what are you.....

AND: ...you've made another fake – it's in the museum and in my exhibition – look *(pushes catalogue into MH face)*.....you said....you bloody well..

MH: ...calm down Andrew... no.....no.... not a copy.....maybe similar...

AND:do you take me for a tourist.....can't tell a Tang piece from a Woolworth teapot?Martin saw it in the museum and photographed it – I bought the real thing – it's in New York.....

MH:be careful what you say Andrew...

AND:and you have populated your museum with a copy and kept the money...My God...you....

MH: *(more threatening)*Andrew, shut up and listen to me....

AND: ...I'm going to end this....I'm going to expose you for the cheating....

MH:you won't do any such thing.... ..list....list....listen.... listen to me.....this was a mistake – OK? - There were no more copies made after last year – it must have been right at the end.....but you are in the same position – you remain trapped. Unhappily for you the museum has a certificate of authenticity for every piece – even the dozens of copies – and they are all signed by you....

AND:and you have made me pay dearly for that mistake, I should have known better than to trust you with those certificatesyou've bled me dry of every penny.....I paid you.....you promised to....you said no more fakes if I

MH: Listen Andrew...your not listening....there are no more copies any more.....Look, what about this, here is my way out for you...a gift from me to you...

AND: ...I would rather take a gift from a cobra...

MH:I give you the Kuan Yin figure to sell on the open market, you keep half and I keep half... *(AND is stunned)*

AND: ..are you mad?...the Kuan Yin is priceless....

MH:only we know of its existence, it is in the strong roomI have not registered it with the museum yet...

AND:my God you are evil....you care nothing about.....and how do you suppose I can sell a treasure like that....

MH: that is your problem my friend, I'm sure you have influential friends who would pay anything to have it – and not ask many questions.... then I will tell you how to transfer the funds to my account, in the meantime you have until the end of the day to make up your mind...give me 50,000 dollars as, shall we say a down payment and it is yours, then I will release you – either that or I will bring you and your reputation down.

AND:but I don't have that..... all my money is needed for the exhib.....

MH:the end of the day....and you will be finished one way or another, the choice is yours. *(exit MH)*

Lights down

Act 2 Scene 2

2 hours later

Andrew is seated with head in hands.

Enter Ros

ROS: Did you sort out things out with MH, I saw him just now, he looked right through me.

AND: *(Weakly trying to cover up)* I made a mistake....he...

ROS: ...the ox cart Andrew, what did he say about the ox cart....

AND: ...it's not the same...its...not...

ROS: Are you sure? , ..I've known you since we were nineteen you don't make mistakes like that – you know all these pieces like your own children, there's something wrong isn't there –

AND: ..O.K.....O.K..... give me a minute.....*(pause)*.....MH got a copy made....of the ox cart.....he got the ministry to authorise the sale of the real one ...to me....I paid for it.....he tells the ministry the sale fell through.....he keeps the money and puts the fake in the museum...

ROS: When did he do that..... we must tell the police... let me

AND: No!.....no.....wait....the scandal, it will finish me, my name will be linked with his crime...in the same breath.....my reputation..

ROS: Andrew, you cannot let him get away with this....

AND:Martin will go....he will cut the funding...

ROS: What a time for this to happen - what a mess...*(pause)*..alright then what about this... you go home, go back to Frances now, say your asthma has got worse with the heat, I will stay here and look after Martin.....you go home and quietly withdraw the ox cart from the exhibition listing ... say it is doubtful or something to reinforce your expertise....When the dust has settled, bring it back here and put it in the museum...swap it for the fake.....after that MH can go to hell.

AND: ...let me think.....I need to think it through...you might be right...let me....let me think.....yes, I will check the catalogue against the museum listing – I can get a copy of that

ROS: do you think there is a problem with anything else in the exhibition?

AND: no.....no....I don't think so. Ros, you must promise me that you will never tell anyone about this – it would ruin me – not even Frances.

ROS: but Andrew, this is not right..

AND: Swear it – please.

ROS: Andrew I can't, you are asking me.....

AND: Please ROS, for me, I beg you...it would kill me.

ROS: Very well, I promise for you. Sit down Andrew you look terrible. *(she helps him sit)* Now, if your alright, I'll go and look up flights - see when you can go....have a rest for a while.

(exit Ros. Andrew sits and thinks for a while, takes a cheque book and writes a cheque to MH who enters a moment after)

MH: Well? – I saw Ros leaving - have you had time to consider which you prefer, jumping or being pushed?

AND: I am leaving, think what you want about that – here take this *(hands a cheque to MH)* - 15,000 dollars, its all I can raise now, you've had everything..but I want more from you..

MH: Oh?.....you are in no position to make demands.

AND: I risk being ruined, you must see that, you have to make it worth my while – if you force me to sell my soul to the devil I want a lot more.....I want you to make me a copy of the Kuan Yin, then I can sell both and recoup some of the blood money I've paid you.

MH: *(apparently warmly)* Well, well, well.....underneath that stuffy imperialist front there is a scheming twister after all.....who would have thought you had a criminal mind hidden behind that façade.....let me consider your proposal.....interesting.....would you really cheat your fellow man?.....would you?...*(violently)* No!.....no you would not!...I know you too well....you are trying to trap me.....a copyHa! Do you take me for a fool – the Kuan Yin is unique – no one would ever believe there could be two....I see through youI make a copy and you give them both to your embassy to finish me off...*(MH pushes him to the sofa, Andrew slumps with asthma attack)* well that will not....you will pay....you will...

AND: *(gasping for air)*...coat...coat...nebulise....

MH: *(MH goes to jacket but stops, removes his scarf and twists it around Andrews neck strangling him on the sofa – he then fetches the nebuliser and throws it beside A, he goes to door and shouts)* – Ros!... Ros!, Martin! – Quick, Quickly, Andrew has collapsed..... his asthma.....quickly please, help.

Curtain down

Act 3

One year later

At The Paragon in Bristol

The scene is a balconied veranda of a smart restaurant towering over the Avon Gorge and the Bristol suspension bridge. The Georgian town is spread out below. There is a table and chairs set for tea.

FRA & ROS look over the balcony. A waiter sets table for tea

ROS: *(Moves to table and looks at tab)* My God, how this place has changed since we were at University, you could get a four sherries and spag boll for a pound. Now you almost have to be invited to get in here.

FRA: *(dreamily)* Yes, they were carefree days weren't they – the view hasn't changed much but the haze makes the Bath stone look cold now, everything seems distant and grey, it seemed to be perpetual Summer then – youthful optimism I suppose.....odd, the things you forget.....I mean - they are there tucked away in your mind but don't surface until their triggered...

ROS: What, you mean like in Proust?....the taste of the Madeleine cakes? – bringing back pages of memories?

FRA: I suppose so....A memory suddenly came back that you used to be able to see cherry blossom trees at this time of the year. I've stood on this very spot with Andrew many times looking across.....looking towards the future I suppose – but the haze.....I can't.....I....

ROS: What?.....

FRA: Oh nothing.....lets have tea. (*FRA sits down*)It was kind of you to invite me, I don't go out much since Andrew.... well you know - it's nice to have a break..... Where are you working now?

ROS: Oh, you know out of the frying pan.... I'm at Mallard and Drake Oriental Fine Art in Bond Street (*laughs*), brilliant isn't, you couldn't dream up a name like that if you tried, very smart but more ornamental than oriental for my liking. Lets not talk about me, how are you managing after everything that's happened - I have a reason for asking.

FRA: Life goes on.....after a fashion.....Ros I still miss Andrew so much you will never know, I took one of his jerseys to bed for a long time – it was his masculine smell, I couldn't let go. Its like being in a black hole and you struggle up the sides each day, then slip down every night - What can you do – you put up with it..... I've just got rid of his shoes...after a year..it was like him walking away.

ROS: Oh Frances I'm so sorry.

FRA: (*pause*) That's not all, Andrew was broke, I've had to sell the house to live.

ROS: What! – but his collection – it was priceless - his business?

FRA: Yes, that's what I thought, but he'd gifted his collection to the Metropolitan and his business was cashless, hardly a penny left so far as I can see.

ROS: How can that be, the exhibition went very well – it was a great success even though we had to withdraw one piece at the last moment, where did all the money go?

FRA: I don't know, I cant work it out – all that's left is a handful of pieces he didn't put in the exhibition, I suppose they should have gone with the collection really but they've just stayed at the house.

ROS: So how are you managing to live, have you got anything coming in?

FRA: I've got a bit of capital from selling the house and I help out at a charity shop as a kind of manager, it just about pays the rent and its good to meet other people.

ROS: Look, I've got a suggestion, I told you I had a reason for asking you here, there is someone I want you to meet – coming here. It was just for old time's sake but I think he might be able to help.

FRA: Who is it - who are you talking about ?

ROS: Martin.... Martin Palmer.....you know "etyp" Martin who had a flat in your house in Redland Road.

FRA: Goodness, you do keep a long little black book, I didn't realise old time sake could go that far back, that was ages ago.

ROS: Yes but I've been in touch for a year or so because he sponsored Andrew's Exhibition.

FRA: *That* was him? What's he doing here, I thought he lived in Colombia?

ROS: He does but he's here for his book launch – did you read his first book?

FRA: "The Street Children"?

ROS: Yes

FRA: No – well - Andrew had a copy which Martin gave him, it came back with Andrews things, I started it, read the first few chapters but needed something lighter...not reading much latelyyou know... What's the new one called?

ROS: "Suffer The Little Children" - you know – from the bible - suffer the little children to come unto me..

FRA: Mark

ROS: Is It? Never very good on the Saints.

FRA: I remember that party at your flat, you were going out with him and I knew that he would be there. We all thought he was Mister Wonderful then, I had big plans for both of us, but obviously my star wasn't shining – he was all over you and fete pushed Andrew in front of me instead. You did very well for yourself.

ROS: Only for a couple of terms, then he was off on one of his adventures, how did he get away with it and get a First?

FRA: I thought you would marry him, you two were meant for each other But he dedicated that book to you!
Enter Martin carrying a bouquet for ROS and interrupting any answer ROS was about to make.
He shows surprise at seeing Frances, kisses Ros and shakes hands with Frances

ROS: Martin! How lovely to see you again, let me introduce..

MAR: Frances! ... Of course, Frances - how could I ever forget you, my word, how many years has it been, I had no idea you would be here, really....*calls for the waiter and orders a rose for Frances, pays the waiter well.....*Frances, I'm so sorry for you, it was such a tragedy for Andrew to go like that at the top of his career – I think he would have been proud to see his exhibition.

ROS: Martin, I had asked you here just to see old friends but there is something else. Things are not what they seem, Frances is in desperate need of help – something has gone wrong with Andrew's business, he was broke – you've got a head for figures – I mean financial not female – is there anything you can do? - there must be something wrong, the exhibition was a success for starters.

MAR: Have the accountants looked at the books?

FRA: Yes – they say that over the final year Andrew went deeper and deeper into debt with a lot of cash going out.

MAR: Did they say where it went?

FRA: They had problems – Andrew was meticulous with things he bought and sold but they said there were problems with some cash transactions, he seemed to be paying a lot of money for something over a long period of time but they couldn't trace what he was buying – I can't face it – it's a mess.

MAR: Do you suspect something, fraud? Corruption?

FRA: I just don't know what to think – I don't know where to start.

ROS: There is something – no – no, it doesn't matter it might not be important.

MAR: What? – what were you going to say.

ROS: I made a promise to Andrew....

FRA: What – what about...Ros, you can't just start then stop.

MAR: Ros, if there is something that might help say so. - Would Andrew still want you to remain faithful to your promise.

ROS: This is difficult for me but one of the last things Andrew did was insist that we withdraw a small tomb offering from the exhibition. - He suspected that some of the locals had made copies to sell to the tourists - he was terrified it would prejudice his reputation.

MAR: It wouldn't be the first time that happened at a historic dig - freshly made relics passed off as the real thing – one of the perks for the locals and one of the hazards for the experts. Even the great Arthur Evans fell for a number of fakes from the Minoan excavations and they went to some of the worlds most illustrious museums – it doesn't amount to very much in the great scheme of things. *(teasingly and relaxing the tension) Mmmm, maybe I shouldn't get involved after all – you know the sort of things that go on in the East.*

ROS: What do you mean?

MAR: Well, there is the story of the British Ambassador out there who was asked by the local broadcasting company what he wanted for Christmas – he suspected a bribery sting so said that all he wanted was carpet slippers and after-shave. The next day he heard on the radio that all the Embassies had been asked the same question, the US had wished for an end to Famine and a cure for AIDS, France had wished for World peace and an end to all wars and the British Embassy wished for carpet slippers and.....*(ROS and FRA laugh)*....Of course I would be pleased to do what I can.

ROS: Oh Martin, you're so kind. Can I give you Andrew's day book *(turns to FRA)* is that alright Frances, I brought it to return to you but it might help Martin, it catalogues everything Andrew did, he was so careful, I can't believe he lost money. It shows day by day what was found, what went in and out, every detail imaginable.
Waiter enters with rose which MAR gives to FRA, their hands touch fleetingly, she withdraws.

FRA: but, Martin, I can't ask you – you must have so many other important things to do.
(*Frances moves to the balcony with her back to the others*)

ROS: I'm going to leave you two to sort it out while I go and settle the bill. (*she exits*)
(*Martin stays seated looking at the day book for a while*)

FRA: (*pensively*) This is like looking out at my life - into a void, I'm afraid of falling – everything is hazy and the bridge ...its like a bridge that crosses to an uncertain future.
Martin has moved up behind her, takes her shoulders

MAR: I have spent my life helping people who thought they had nothing to live for – you need help now - let me help you. We shall fly to the Monastery and start there, (*Frances confused, turns to him, raises a hand to respond but hesitates*)

FRA: (*afraid to hope*) Martin, I can't.....my shop.....I... (*ROS enters – FRA guiltily pulls herself away from Martin and returns to the table*) ...we were admiring the view, looking at the bridge, I think the haze is lifting.

MAR: (*decisively*) Its agreed, were flying to the monastery tomorrow, and you must come too Ros.

ROS: (*surprised at the speed*) but your book signing – you came here to do a book signing... Oh Martin you really are incorrigible - now your off to the other end of the world, just my luck. (*ROS hugs and kisses him*) Well thanks I suppose for helping Frances – are you sure you want me along as well.
(*Waiter enters*)

W: Your driver is waiting at the door for you sir, what shall I tell him.

MAR: Thank you, I'll be one minute. I must go – I'll call ROS with the travel details this evening some time, I hope that's alright. (*he kisses ROS and stops at Frances, takes both her hands*) Until tomorrow then – goodbye. (*MAR and the waiter exit, Frances moves back to the balcony*)

ROS: I shan't be able to get out to the monastery for a couple of days with work the way it is but he will sort that out no doubt, nothing can stop that man it seems.

FRA: (*looking over the gorge*) – it has all changed - the sun is shining along the crescent - the haze has lifted - I can see right across to your old flat where we all first met. It looks so beautiful. And you can see the blossom now, just coming out -- it is it's time I suppose.

Curtain down

Act 4 Scene 1

Two days later

A lounge at the Monastery

Martin running through Andrews day book and papers on the sofa, FRA looks out of window, she is thoughtful and trying not to show she is near to tears.

FRA: Isn't it ironic ..

MAR: What?

FRA: This...this paradise up here, all this beauty, the flowers, the butterflies, the climate, colour, light, all you could wish for but Andrew wouldn't have noticed, he would only have had eyes for the antiquities he found. Was it paradise for him do you think - do you think he died a happy man?I used to think he was ordinary and dusty like his relics but I was proud of what he did – he was a good man – dull but safe like me.

MAR: (*kindly*) What you had was good, never let go of the good memories and you were never dull, you were the leader of the pack – a rebel with a cause.

FRA: ...a long time ago.

MAR: you ran the student's union. (*She does not reply, there is a pause*).....are you alright? (*He rises to move behind her.*)

FRA: *(smiling a little)* Yes – yes – its only.....it's the Frangipani, it brought back a flood of those good memories - the scent in the air. *(MAR holds her shoulders from behind, holding her for the first time, she reacts but does not resist)*

FRA:how clever of you to remember that – the student's union thing.

MAR: Oh I remember you very well *and* followed Andrew's progress from press reports – I very much admired your get up and go. *(She turns and faces him, looking at each other for a short while, she nervously breaks the spell moving back to the table.)*

FRA: Well it got up and went after I got married. *(Flustered)* ... What were you doing with that *(paperwork)*.. are you getting anywhere?

MAR: *(he shows some papers to FRA)* ... Look, I may have found something, Andrew made a payment of \$15,000 to "K.Y." just before he died, that is a lot of money by any standards, have you any idea what that was for and there are four pieces he never sold, they could still be here, it might help you short term.

FRA: Short term is all I can manage right now - I live from day to day. *(F sitting beside him -distracted)*

MAR: *(M takes her hands)* Give yourself a purpose – then you can start dreaming again.....You know - they say that the great sadness in life is the delusion that we only love one person in our lifetime.....start a new life *(FRA goes to reply, pulls away and rises but does not speak.)* Come with me – come to Colombia *(F reacts but cannot reply)* No, don't speak, let me tell you about one of my street children, the one that changed my life – The "Throwaway Children" they are called, His name's Pablo, he's aged 12, his father would beat him up, his mother is dead, he hangs out around the fruit market where he can live off spoilt fruit, he sniffs glue to dull the cold and hunger, he sells drugs to get money, he will tell you he needs it for his education but the truth is he needs medicine because he is slowly going blind. He joined a street gang with hundreds of others for protection. Their presence upset the tourists so some traders organised death squads to cleanse the streets – killing children – think of it. Frances, Your energy could change your life and the lives of those children. Let your life blossom. *(F wants to but cannot take the step, she turns to respond as MH enters, F moves away from M flustered)*
MH enters

MH: My friends! You are refreshed after your journey I hope.

MAR: Thank you yes. We're very grateful to you for sparing the time to help, us you must have far more important things to do.

MH: Not at all, it is the least I can do – I was very close to Andrew, our work together was a pleasure, it was such a shock to lose him – a gentleman.

FRA: That's kind of you, I know how much he depended on you. This excavation was so important to him.

MH: Yes, he was a great authority - an example to us all in the way he worked so hard, sadly his health suffered though, and now we can find no-one to replace him.

FRA: Are you still working on the excavation?

MH: No, not at all – at the moment my government believe it is safer to close the site until we can find someone of equal eminence to carry on the work, after all, the monastery has been untouched for centuries, a few more years will make no difference.

MAR: Then we're even more grateful for you coming up here to help us – we simply want to clear everything up as quickly as possible, we don't want to stay any longer than necessary

MH: I'll be glad to help, what are you hoping to find?

MAR: Any of Andrew's papers – bits and pieces he may have left, anything would be a help- it seems Andrew's finances were not in a good state to put it mildly, I just want to be sure nothing has been overlooked here. Perhaps JonJon could scout around for us?

MH: Ah, JonJon – he ahI'm afraid there was a terrible accident..

FRA: Oh no! - Is he alright?

MH: I'm sorry, I'm afraid he was killed in a fall.

FRA: Oh poor lad.

MH: It was at the time you (*indicating Martin*) left to return to England. It is a mystery, he was found at the foot of the citadel wall, it seems he must have been walking along the parapet and slipped. Our police held a most thorough investigation but they could not say why he had been up there. I questioned all of my staff myself but learnt nothing, unfortunately I was not here at the time of the accident – I had left earlier to drive to the city – they called my mobile and I returned at once to take charge of the situation. A complete mystery. - There was foolish talk among my local staff of a curse - like Tutankhamen – one or two of them were frightened and left but they are simple people and still believe in such things. Clearly it was an accident.

MAR: I'm really sorry to hear that, he was such a helpful and obliging young man.

MH: Yes a sad loss but the world goes on all the same..

MAR: Mingh, when we were with Ros, she mentioned a mix up over a tomb offering which was withdrawn from the exhibition at the last moment, the records show that Andrew bought it but I don't understand why he wanted it withdrawn from the exhibition, can you throw any light on that?

MH: A tomb offering? No, I am sorry, I really cannot say, where is it now, do you have it?

MAR: No. It stayed with the rest of the collection in New York.

MH: Then I cannot help you.

MAR: Are there any papers likely to be left here – we have so little to go on, only Andrew's day book and that.....

MH: (*shocked, not smiling now*) You have his day book - here?

MAR: Yes, it's the only thing of any use – that shows a few pieces we can't account for but....

MH: Martin, why don't you let me have the day book – it will be easier for me to tie any loose ends. You know I worked closely with Andrew, I would be able to see if there was anything out of order.

FRA: Andrew made payments, a lot of payments over the last two years, in fact most of them are not in the day book but there is one for \$15,000 to someone with the initials K.Y. Those initials mean nothing to either of us - do you know who that was?

MH: (*uncomfortable but controlled, appearing to think*) ...no...K.Y? ... Andrew dealt with the British Legation, someone there perhaps – for licences? – It is a fact of life the British find difficult to grasp that business in the East often runs smoother if the wheels of commerce are oiled if you understand my meaning. I think Ros cleared most of Andrew's things when she left, but it was a chaotic time as you know. You have been most thorough Martin, that is good, give me a while - I will look myself and make sure nothing is left but you must tell me at once if you have any other matters which trouble you. (*Leaving*) . I will let you know as soon as I find anything..... (*MH exits*)

FRA: Was it my imagination or was he less than forthcoming? – he almost jumped when you said we had the day book – and why was he so keen to get his hands on it?

MAR: Who knows, but we'll see if he finds anything (*pointing to page in the day book*) . Look, here's something - this dish, look, this one,

FRA: Oh yes, its lovely isn't it, you could take it for a real leaf its so delicate – its my favourite.

MAR: What do you mean?

FRA: The silver dish - Its my favourite thing – of the pieces Andrew left at the house.

MAR: What, are you saying you've got one?

FRA: Yes, why what's wrong?

MAR: Hang on a minute, what else did Andrew leave at the house which didn't go to the exhibition?

FRA: Um – there are about seven or eight pieces, mostly pottery – oh, one glass and the silver dish.

MAR: Where are they now?

FRA: In my flat in the sitting room. Why, what's wrong with the dish?

MAR: Well, for starters this is eighth century Tang artistry at its height, Andrew bought it and it should have been in his exhibition, but it wasn't, I wouldn't forget an item as beautiful as that, but what really worries me is I saw it here in the National Museum, I'm sure.

FRA: But that's not possible, you were only here a day or two before Andrew died. That dish has been at home for – oh, I don't know – two years I should think.

MAR: Exactly - look at the date, he bought it over a year before he died – so how could I have seen it here in the museum? - maybe the mistake is mine but I don't think so, let me check the photos I took at the museum, they're on my laptop and I'll give Ros a call to see if she knows more about these items and who KY could have been?

(MAR exits leaving his jacket on the sofa, FRA follows him to the door and looks after him – longingly. She returns to the sofa, picks up M's jacket to tidy, then raises it to her face – MH enters carrying a box, she guiltily lays the jacket aside.)

MH: I have brought the last few things of Andrew from the strong-room, they are not important but if you wish I can have them sold for you As I thought, Ros had done a thorough job clearing the paperwork, not a scrap is left. Have you found anything else you are concerned about?

FRA: *(concealing the truth)* No, nothing – Martin has gone to see if he can reach Ros to ask about the tomb offering.

MH: Very good – I will leave you with these things, please let me know if you want me to dispose of them for you.

FRA: Oh that's very kind of you, we'll let you know before we leave. *(MH exits, FRA begins unpacking the items , four small figures, then the last being the Kuan Yin- she admires it but does not know its significance – she places in the centre of the table.)*

Lights down

Act 4 Scene 2

60 minutes later

The Kuan Yin has been replaced out of sight in the box.

Enter FRA and MAR talking and carrying day book and papers.

FRA: Was it too late for her, what did she say?

MAR: Oh, before I forget, she will call you on your mobile, she wants to get into your flat to see the pieces in your sitting roombut no, she was still up and she's got me very worried, firstly Ros said the withdrawn piece from the exhibition was a pottery ox cart and it was exactly that item which caused Andrew to get really worked up when I was here with him. Sit down - there's more *(they sit)* Secondly, she is sure KY means Kuan Yin one of the last pieces found here - a very rare jade figure and not a person at all. She said it would be in the National Museum by now but \$15000 is a fraction of what it would be worth so that doesn't make any sense at all. After speaking to Ros I checked the day book and found a description of a jade Kuan Yin , one of the last entries, but no photo – too late I guess.

FRA: Oh that would have been his old film camera! He insisted the buttons on the digital cameras were too small for his fingers but it always took him a week to get prints.

MAR: I also checked the day book against my photos and found nine identical pieces were both here in the National Museum and in New York at the same time – this is impossible, no two pieces are identical – I think.....I'm afraid we're digging up a massive fraud here and I've no idea if Andrew was involved or not but he certainly knew about the ox cart fake.

FRA: But he wouldn't – he couldn't have - it was his life. Oh Martin what a dreadful mess all this is.

MAR: Let's not jump to conclusions but right now it's not looking good.

FRA: Is it really possible he was mixed up in something big? Making fakes and saying they were real?

MAR: I think we can presume he was in some sort of trouble because of the way all his capital disappeared over the last couple of years, that was out of character – and he did swear Ros to secrecy didn't he.

FRA: Martin, I can't take any more of this, I want to go home, let's stop now and go home, what's done is done. You said hang on to the good memories, I don't want to lose the little I've got.

MAR: I'm not sure that's a good idea for you - or for Andrew's memory.

FRA: Why? – Why do you say that?

MAR: You said it yourself – “what's done is done” – whatever Andrew was or was not involved in is in the past, you need to know – or for the rest of your life you will never be able to think of him without those questions eating away at you – have you misjudged him or did he deceive you? The damage is done, we have to stay.

FRA: I can't decide - I know what you say but I can't decide. You do it, you decide.

MAR: Very well, we stay. Let's get on, has MH come up with anything yet?

FRA: Yes. No paperwork but a few things – here (*gets box of items*) There are these ..(*unwraps two small pottery items*) and this jade figure (*unwraps the Kuan Yin. MAR is astonished, he takes it carefully and examines it.*)

MAR: (*incredulously*) My God Francis - MH gave you this?..... Do you know what this is?

FRA: Yes, they're Andrew's bits left over, he said the pieces weren't important and he would buy them all if we wanted, that might raise some cash.

MAR: I bet he did – God in Heaven above – this is a jade Kuan Yin.

FRA: Is it good?

MAR: She is perfect....this has to be the Kuan Yin Ros was talking about, I've never dreamt I would hold something so wonderful. Andrew spent a lifetime hoping to make a find like this. - But that was a year ago and it's still up here and the Minister for Culture knew about it. - MH is a home grown expert in Tang dynasty, yet he hands you this masterpiece as an unimportant figure – why on earth would he do that unless he is trying to cover something up somehow? He has to be involved in some way. Were the two of them working together?

FRA: But what if Andrew was involved.....I can't see how we.....

MAR: Wait a moment, take a step back...think about it.....If Andrew was dishonest and operating a scam, why would he have no money, why would he withdraw a duplicate item from his exhibition and leave in nine others – no, let's assume that he was honest and stumbled across the fraud himself – that would have been enough to affect his health.

FRA: But what was the \$15000 for if it wouldn't have bought the Kuan Yin?

MAR: My hunch is that this is the key to why his business haemorrhaged so rapidly, He was paying out large sums of money to someone who can't be identified and getting what in return? – apparently nothing. What does that sound like?

FRA: Not blackmail surely?.....

MAR: Possibly ... but if it was blackmail, what was Andrew afraid of – what leverage did the blackmailer have over him?

FRA: His reputation – his standing – it was the only thing that mattered to him – is that why he made Ros keep quiet about withdrawing the tomb offering?

MAR: If the answer to that is yes, then we will know Andrew was not a part of a scam. We need to clear that up if nothing else – once we know we can clear out and you can make a start on a new life.

FRA: (*hesitating*) I'm not sure if I'm ready, - Martin, there is you and there is – well Ros means so much to you....

MAR: Ros - Why do you say that?

FRA: But you've always loved her – and your first book, the dedication to Ros.

MAR: That Ros! (*laughing*) My dedication to ROS is to my Society, my orphanage in Bogotá, they get all the royalties – Rosilia Orphanage Sociedad - yes I love the work we do but it is not another woman. (*FRA almost speechless with relief and embarrassment*)

FRA: Forgive me for making assumptions, I feel such a foolbut give me more time.....

MAR: Lets be absolutely certain of our facts before we make any accusations, if we're right we are walking across a minefield, MH is a very powerful man in this country, we need to tread very carefully. Help me run through the chain of command and who stood to gain along the line.

FRA: (*regaining her composure*) On the times I stayed here, Andrew always directed how things were to be done and stood over everything himself during excavations. He made detailed records and took photos before anything was moved. I watched him do it. He reported directly to MH and they both worked together when any items were moved to the strong room.

MAR: Could items have been switched during the move?

FRA: I don't see how, and wouldn't they need time to make a fake to replace it with? – It would have been possible for one of the locals to take a fake article into the dig and then "discover" it but then there would be only one piece - not duplicates.

MAR: Do you know if Andrew had the certificates for the pieces he bought?

FRA: Andrew gave a certificate of authenticity to MH for each piece as it went into the strong room. After that, MH was responsible for the items and the certificates. I can't be sure he got any of the certificates back.....I don't think he bothered because having found the items himself he knew they were genuine – he didn't need a piece of paper from himself to say they were real.

MAR: That makes a kind of sense. Who had access to the strong room?

FRA: Andrew was particular about that, he said that the treasures were National property so insisted that MH held the key – even Andrew couldn't get in there without going with MH.

MAR: So the forgeries were made after the items were under lock and key and after MH had decided which pieces were going to the National and which pieces Andrew could buy – very convenient.

FRA: Of course, there would be no point making forgeries unless you could sell the real thing – and MH held Andrew's certificates to help move the fakes along the way – it has to be his scam. – But what about the Kuan Yin, I don't understand why MH didn't move it to the museum but instead gave it to us as a trinket almost?

MAR: No, nor do I, but it's the biggest prize they ever found here – it must be that he had other plans for it but Andrew's death interfered in some way, then it would have raised suspicions if he had produced such an important thing weeks after Andrew had dated the certificate and weeks after Andrew's death...and there's something nagging me about Andrew's death – its almost too ironic that his life should end precisely when he made the discovery of his lifetime.

FRA: Martin, I'm afraid, lets get out of here.

MAR: No we have to prove Andrew's innocence – Luckily MH doesn't know if we know what he knows..

FRA: Say that again....I didn't get....

MAR: I mean, MH might suspect we are on to something but he won't react until he is sure, so he sends us the Kuan Yin as bait to draw us out – see how we react.

FRA: Then we must go – right now.

MAR: No, exactly the opposite, if we run, he will know we have tumbled him, if we stay he won't act and how would we get away? there is only his car, he will have us stopped if we try to leave without him. Hide the Kuan Yin, he'll worry if he can't see it and put the other things away to, (*indicating artefacts*) I'm going to turn the tables on him and press him for answers on the duplicates in his own museum – he can't deny responsibility for that. (*FRA wraps the Kuan Yin again*)

FRA: Martin I'm terrified, for goodness sake be careful..

MAR: (*holding her reassuringly*) You have every right to be – this is a dreadful business – look leave this to me, its best if you stay out of this, go to your room and stay there, phone him and tell him I may have uncovered a very serious matter. That should wind him up and make him come running.

(*Exit FRA. MAR spends some time tidying papers, checking the room, pouring drink etc. a minute later MH enters*)

MH: Ah Martin, did Frances.....

MAR: Earlier I asked you about an item Andrew withdrew from his exhibition...

MH: Sure ..sure..

MAR: It was a duplicate, a fake had been made of the original piece..

MH: Impossible, this is preposterous..

MAR: Not at all, I have the evidence in my possession, Andrew's day book details the original finds which he paid for and sent to the States and you have identical figure in your National Museum which I photographed last year.

MH: With due respect to you, it is easy to confuse two similar.....

MAR: Don't give me that bullshit, I've spent years surrounding myself with these objects...

MH: If this is true, I will find the culprit and he will suffer the severest punishment. You must let me have all the evidence you.....

MAR: ..but you were the only person with access to the original under lock and key, you had the opportunity and....

MH: (*more heatedly*)..be careful what you are saying, your accusations.....(*more threateningly*) you will bring down Andrew's reputation if you persist with.....

MAR: There is no evidence that Andrew was involvednone whatsoever.... Andrew's records are in order.....you are the person with fakes in his museum.

MH: I'm warning you... get out, leave, leave now...

MAR: Not until I've got to the bottom of this – I've not finished yet but so far I have you down for nine duplicates, a nice little racket..

MH: (*icily*) you know nothing...you are nothing...

MAR: ..You have Andrew's money - you took his money and made fakes ...

MH: (*out of control, reaching for his scarf*)...I will destroy you like I kill... (*stops himself just in time, changes character instantly*)... Martin...Martin my friend.... Look, I am sorry, we have had a hard day, let us work this out....there may have been a misunderstanding over some pieces but....(*enter FRA*)

FRA: what was the shouting, I thought I...

MH: No, no....our discussion got heated that is all, nothing for you to worry about dear lady.

MAR: MH has remembered he may have some of Andrew's money.....

MH: Yes – yes, (*thinking on the hoof*) I had overlooked some business I was arranging when Andrew.... Let us finalise this.... Give me Andrew's day book so that I can make sure there are no other matters outstanding and let me take back the box of items I gave you Frances, then everything can be resolved and you can return home knowing all is well.

MAR: Very well, but they are not here (*lying*), I will have to fetch them for you..

MH: Excellent, - (*pause for thought*) I will be at the strong room, bring them there, then we can agree a fair price and arrange your return home. (*exit MH*)

FRA: (*FRA and MAR rush to each other*) what happened, what did he say?..

MAR: He tried to bluff his way out but couldn't make any defence for the forgeries apart from a huge smoke screenI pushed him over the edge once he was riled...he went berserk and threatened to kill me.....

FRA: He what?

MAR: He threatened to kill me – he said he would destroy me and started to say he would kill me like.....something, but he stopped himself from saying any more but his eyes were wild, he meant it for sure, he convinced me he could kill.....could he have killed JonJon – or Andrew even?

FRA: *(collapses on sofa) Oh God no....Andrew....no....be careful, oh Martin be careful he's a mad man.*

MAR: Don't I know it, but he is trapped don't you see – we give him back the Kuan Yin then tip off the police about his little scheme, even if he tries to drag Andrew's name into it, it can't hurt Andrew now. I'll take him the Kuan Yin now and offer the day book later - see how much money he is prepared to pay for them. Keep the other figures here for the moment we don't want to give him everything. *(FRA unwraps the Kuan Yin and gives it to MAR who leaves, FRA pours herself a drink to calm down, unwraps the other figures for a second look when her mobile rings - it is Ros)*

FRA: Yes? – Ros, good heavens whatever time is it there!Yes, I'm alright, I've had a bit of a shock that's all, I'll tell you about it later.....No, there have just been a few surprises here that's all.....Oh I am sorry to put you to all this, they are all in a display cabinet in the sitting room..... Yes – yes you can, have you got a pen?.....There's a key with the shop down below - 34 Queens Road - Robert Howard the gentlemen's outfitter yes that's it – yes, queer as a plaid rabbit but he's nice enough – tell him I'm expecting to be home around Thursday or Friday – OK - OK - thanks.....byee. *(She then gets travel papers together ready for leaving.. A few moments later MAR enters dishevelled, in a hurry and holding his throat. He does not have the Kuan Yin)*

MAR: He tried to strangle me...

FRA: What..

MAR: He tried to strangle me – I got to the strong room and he was there.....we've got to get out quick..

FRA: Where is hewhere is he now..

MAR: In the strong room, I shut him in..

FRA: What happened?

MAR: It was dark in there - like a cell - not big – he said look at this, showing me something on the shelf, the next thing I know I was gasping for breath, he had that scarf around my neck and I was seeing stars..

FRA: how....how did you..

MAR: I crashed him back into the racks on the other side of the room and swung as hard as I could with the Kuan Yin, I must have hit his head – we both dropped to the ground and I got up first – I got out and slammed the door. Lets go – lets get out of this place.

FRA: Can he get out?

MAR: I don't know – no, I don't think so, he was hammering like mad on the door.

FRA: His car! - can you start his car?

MAR: I hope so for our sakes, come on – get your papers and go....*(exit MAR and FRA)*

Lights down

Act 5

1 week later

A table at The Paragon in Bristol

A mirror of the scene in act 3 FRA looks out over the balcony, a waiter brings in tea with ROS at the table – speaks to the waiter.

ROS: Thank you – no just leave it, that's fine - we're waiting for someone. *(sorts tea things)*

FRA: The last time I was here I said things didn't change – how wrong can you be.

ROS: What – the place, the view, you – what?

FRA: Life – and me I suppose.

ROS: Oooh – that's deep.

FRA: Is it?

ROS: Well – you know – a bit “Ingmar Bergman” darling – I avoid thinking about my life too much, it doesn't do my self esteem any good and just when I think I've got it sorted I hit a stone in the road and fly off in a completely different direction. *(pause)*

(FRA & ROS speak at the same instant...)

FRA: Is Martin.....

ROS: What time do you... sorry you go

FRA: No you.

ROS: I was wondering if Martin was held up at the.....*(thinking)*

FRA: What?

ROS: Oh nothing.....what did happen at the dig? I read the paper but it just said the Minister for Culture had been found dead in the strong room – what happened, can you talk about it. I can't say I was heartbroken, I always felt uneasy when he was around, the man was a snake.

FRA: He tried to kill Martin.

ROS: He what!

FRA: He tried to strangle him.

ROS: Why – why did he do that?

FRA: We suspected he was blackmailing Andrew – he had stitched him up by placing fake artefacts in the National Museum and selling the real thing to Andrew – of course he kept the Certificate of Authenticity along with the fakes which implicated Andrew. God knows how long it went on but that would have been enough to ruin Andrew – his word and name were as important to him as his life – well – there – he bled Andrew dry just to keep quiet. We think Andrew was entirely innocent but wasn't prepared to be linked with forgeries which was why he kept pieces out of the exhibition - like those in my flat – their duplicates are also in MH's National Museum, Andrew must have found out at the last moment.

ROS: Frances, I had no idea But what about, Martin?

FRA: Oh yes, I was saying..... well Martin confronted MH with the facts – well some facts, some suspicions really but he insisted on pushing his luck with him – see how far he could go – you know Martin – his strong point seeing how far he can go...

ROS: *(rhetorical)* Tell me about it!

FRA: So MH lost his cool, tried to bluff then got aggressive, I heard the shouting and came running – MH calmed down and made a deal - an offer of a deal and Martin was to go and see him which he did – in the strong room – I can tell you I was all for getting out there and then but there was no way back down the mountain without MH and.....*(enter MAR)*

ROS: Martin you're late you bad boy, your tea is stone cold *(FRA & ROS kiss him)*

MAR: I'm so sorry, bloody publisher, still upset about the book signing so I had to give him some “quality time” to make up for it – he acts the injured party but would sell his own Grandmother if it would get him the rights to my next book – he does pretty well for himself so I make him lose sleep now and then to make him earn his keep – enough – enough of the hurly burly of the literary world – when I've got you two enchantresses to myself.

ROS: Only two today? Martin you must be ageing.....

MAR: Sadly, we are all ageing – “I live in regret for what I have not done”

ROS: Shakespeare..

MAR: Nope – Henri Duparc – French composer, didn’t write a lot but the songs he did write are sublime. He warns us to get on with our lives, time runs out for everyone in the end – do what you have to do and don’t look back with regret.

FRA: But he didn’t heed his own advice.....

MAR: Who does? That’s why the world is full of consultants, because we prefer to pay someone else to tell us what we already know - then if it goes wrong we can blame them.
(to FRA) But what about you, would you listen to me if I told you what to do?

FRA: You now that.....

ROS: Frances was telling me about you and MH – he wrapped his scarf around your throat?

MAR: Absolutely – exactly how it happened I don’t recall – I took him the Kuan Yin as part of the deal half expecting him to try something - it was so quick, he was behind me and I was going down fast. I must have fallen back against the metal shelves, I could feel his face against mine so I hit it with the Kuan Yin, we both ended up on the floor, he was holding his head and started to get up – I ran over him and slammed the door behind me. I stopped outside and was sick – he was making a hell of a noise but couldn’t get out, he must have had the key but I suppose there was no way of getting out from inside – why would there be – it was supposed to be a strong room.

ROS: Its airtight...

MAR: What?

ROS: Its airtight – the strong room – Andrew had it made airtight to keep the dust out and the humidity under control – he wouldn’t have been able to breathe. *(pause while they all think of the implications)* Justice.. He was a killer but his greed killed him – how very apt – you hit him with the Kuan Yin, Andrew said she dealt out justice but I don’t think he imagined it would be like thatgo on Martin

MAR: I ran to Frances and got her to pick up my money and papers while I hot wired MH’s car...

ROS: How did you know how to do that..

MAR: When you’ve spent as long as I have with the underclass of a large South American city, hot wiring a car is tame compared with some of the tricks I could show you. We drove down the mountain...

FRA: I will never forget *that* drive – we were going sideways most of the time – that dirt road – trees and rocks over the road at every bend – I couldn’t stop myself looking down, the sheer drop – it draws you like a magnet...

MAR: But we made it – we drove to the airport and met no resistance so assumed MH had not got out to alert any of his henchmen. There was a long delay at the airport but we took the first flight out – to Singapore as it happened but we phoned the British Embassy and told them the story – can you believe it, they wanted us to come in and file an official complaint in writing – over tea we declined gracefully and caught the flight. They might want to talk to me but South America is a long way away. So that was it, until we saw the newspaper report that he had died, they seem very blasé about it, they may be too embarrassed to go public and prefer to let sleeping dogs lie.

ROS: How you can take it so calmly I just don’t know.

MAR: Believe me, I was far from calm when it was happening – but now – well, there’s work to be done – my book to finish and Colombia is calling. How about you?

ROS: Yes, back to town, in fact I must dash or I’ll be late, were working out what to put in the Chelsea Ceramics Fair next month, then we can do the layout – its usually a last.....*(enter waiter to clear table)* Can you call me a cab please, I’ll be one minute.

WAI: Certainly madam, *(turning to FRA)* and will madam be wanting a cab as well?

FRA: Yes but not at the moment thank you. *(waiter acknowledges and exits)*

ROS: *(taking her leave)* I’m sorry to have to dash but - you know – parting is such lah di dah –

MAR: Then stay – do what your heart....

ROS: No, I have to – don't stop me or you'll have me in tears. (*they embrace then she hugs FRA*) It was wonderful seeing you all again, I hope things work out well... for both of you.....(*she hugs and embraces again then dashes off leaving them standing looking at each other. FRA turns to stand looking out over the balcony, back to MAR*)

MAR: And now Frances – it is your time – make the right decision – come with me.....(*pause*) think of what you could bring to those children, build yourself a new life (*pause*) earlier I said time is running out for all of us..... don't have regrets for what you did not do.....you had so many dreams when I first knew you – you deserve more than to have only memories left now – I can give you new dreamssomething to live for...come (*enter waiter, FRA turns to face him*)

WAI: Sir, your driver is outside, he asks if he should wait.....and madam shall I call your taxi now?

FRA: (*after a long pause*).... Tell Mr Palmer's driver he is coming right away.....and waiter – my taxi.....please cancel it, I shall be leaving with Mr Palmer.

Curtain down.

THE END