

## SCENE ONE

[Curtains open on a dimly-lit room in an inn, with one table and three empty chairs in the center and a frosty window in one wall. Two middle-aged gentlemen enter through a door on one side: Morris Holland (in a suit, with papers under his arm) and Alexander Lockwood (also sharply dressed, in late Victorian fashion).]

**Morris:** *[setting his papers on the table, sinking into one of the chairs, and staring up at his companion]* Well, Mr. Lockwood? I want an explanation.

**Lockwood:** *[firmly]* Sir, it has been four years since your brother passed away. His decision can't be undone.

**Morris:** That's not an explanation. I didn't even learn of his death until a month ago.

**Lockwood:** Precisely. It is too late to do anything about the matter.

**Morris:** *[angrily]* How could you let Charles rob me of my inheritance, Lockwood?

**Lockwood:** *[sitting down calmly]* Allow me to remind you, Mr. Holland, that your brother had not heard from you in twelve years when he made his will. How could he have found out where you were living, or whether you were still alive? How could we have reached you to tell you of your inheritance? He tried, let me assure you.

**Morris:** That's irrelevant, Lockwood! My father deeded his property to Charles, but, upon Charles's death, the estate was to pass to his younger brother, namely, Morris Holland *[gesturing to himself]*. Law is law.

**Lockwood:** But your brother was the trustee of your father's will, and he had full power over the dispensation of the property. When you hadn't been heard of for years, he had every right to hand down all the assets to his child.

**Morris:** But that was contrary to my father's wishes!

**Lockwood:** Your brother had no choice, Mr. Holland. Anyway, we could never disentangle the legal technicalities now. The inheritance passed to your brother's heir, and you cannot retrieve it, regardless of your father's intentions.

**Morris:** *[broods silently for several seconds, then looks up]* Where is the girl now?

**Lockwood:** Your brother's daughter?

**Morris:** Yes. She was just a child when I went abroad.

**Lockwood:** Miss Holland is now quite an independent young woman. She has made good use of her father's property.

**Morris:** No commentary, please, just facts. Where is she?

**Lockwood:** She still lives on the family estate, but she has converted it into a school, a little boarding school for girls.

**Morris:** *[surprised and disgusted]* Good use? To squander our family's fortune by bringing up a bunch of brats in our home?

**Lockwood:** *Her* home, not yours, Mr. Holland. Your niece can do what she likes with it. She is without parents, siblings, or a husband, so she has full freedom to open up her home to others. She only boards a few girls, and she has completely devoted herself to their upbringing.

**Morris:** *[under his breath]* It's a crying shame, to waste the property in that way. *[sits silent for a minute, thinking]*

**Lockwood:** Is there anything else you need to know? *[glancing at the window]* I would appreciate getting home before it gets any colder outside.

**Morris:** I suppose that's all for now. We'll be in touch.

**Lockwood:** *[standing up]* I don't think there's anything else I can do for you, Mr. Holland.

**Morris:** We'll see. *[standing]* You may still hear from me.

**Lockwood:** *[walks toward the door, and rapid footsteps are heard approaching from the other side]* I'm at the service of your family, sir. *[Suddenly Nicodemus and Bob (wearing rather shabby clothes, with caps, neckerchiefs, suspenders, etc.) tumble through the door, startling Lockwood.]*

**Nicodemus:** Here we are, boss!

**Bob:** Everything's been seen to!

**Morris:** Oh, yes, thank you, men. Um, Mr. Lockwood, allow me to introduce my...associates. This is *[gesturing to each in turn]* Nicodemus and...Bob. *[They each grin and nod at Lockwood.]*

**Lockwood:** *[a bit skeptical]* It's...my pleasure to meet you...gentlemen.

**Bob:** On the contrary, *[bowing]* the pleasure is all yours. *[stops, looking puzzled]*

**Nicodemus:** *[to Bob]* Ours.

**Bob:** Wait, no —

**Nicodemus:** Oh yeah, "yours," because we met him, or rather, *he met us.*

**Bob:** *[nodding, very satisfied]* Right.

**Lockwood:** *[hesitates, looking very confused]* Yes.... I should be on my way. Good evening, Mr. Holland. *[turns toward the door]*

**Morris:** Good night.

**Nicodemus:** Toodles!

**Bob:** Cheerios! *[as Lockwood exits]*

**Nicodemus:** *[turning to Morris]* Well, boss, we paid the innkeeper for rooms upstairs, just like you wanted.

**Morris:** Where are my bags?

**Nicodemus:** *[suddenly deflating]* Bags. *[at a loss]*

**Bob:** *[pondering, looks at Nicodemus]* Where did we put those?

**Morris:** Did you leave them in my room?

**Bob:** *[thinks for several seconds, silently going through a series of strange gestures as if attempting to mentally retrace his steps]* Nope.

**Nicodemus:** *[with a distant gaze]* Are they still at the train station?

**Morris:** You're not serious!

**Bob:** Oh, I know! I left them in the hall *outside* your room, sir. I knocked but you didn't answer, so I thought I shouldn't intrude.

**Morris:** You knew I was down here.

**Bob:** Did I? *[remembers]* Oh yeah, I did....

**Morris:** *[sighs]* Never mind. *[sitting down in the center chair]* Just sit down, we have some planning to do. *[Nicodemus and Bob sit on either side of the table.]* It will take me time to settle some matters of mine in town — probably a few months, actually — but we need to think ahead and decide what our mode of operation should be in future.

**Nicodemus:** Ooh, mode of operation. Sounds serious.

**Morris:** It is. Lockwood *[gesturing toward the door]*, the family attorney, is overwhelmingly unhelpful. He won't do anything to help my case — says I don't even *have* a case. So we have to come up with something ourselves.

**Bob:** This should be fun!

**Morris:** I think what I need will be found at Holland House, where my niece lives.

**Nicodemus:** *[rubs his hands]* You want Bob and I to pay her a visit?

**Morris:** No, no, not yet. I'll go myself, once I've arranged my affairs here. You two will have to come with me, maybe undercover.

**Bob:** Ooh, I'm liking the sound of this more and more.

**Nicodemus:** What do you hope to gain, boss, from going to the house?

**Morris:** *[speaking slowly, deliberately]* We need to find some evidence. Or, if that should prove impossible, we'll simply have to *create* some evidence. *[Morris ends with an evil chuckle. Nicodemus and Bob then burst into evil laughter]* Stop that! Cut it out.

**Nicodemus:** *[both of them stop short]* Sorry, we thought....

**Bob:** Wasn't that a cue...?

**Morris:** No! Well...yeah, sorta. Just, forget it. *[sighs, frustrated]* Look, we'll work out details in time, but we need to know our goal. In a few months, once I've settled things in town, we must go to Holland House and find, or create, evidence against my niece's claim to the estate.

**Nicodemus:** *[knowingly]* Ohh, so this is about the money.

**Morris:** Of course this is about the money! What else do you think I returned to America for, after sixteen years abroad? You ninnyes. *[sighs]* So for now, I want you two to be thinking about ways that we could question my niece's credibility, or her father's...or some way we could prove that my father's will overrules Charles's.

**Bob:** Wait...you want us to *think*? I thought you said that was your job, and we were just supposed to carry things and look tough.

**Morris:** *[looks at them for a second]* Yeah, you're right. I'll do the thinking. *[stands and moves toward the door]* I need to speak to the innkeeper for a moment, so you two run upstairs and put my bags in my room.

**Nicodemus:** Yes, sir! *[Morris exits.]*

**Bob:** *[holding the door for Nicodemus]* Come on, Nick, let's go move those bags and look tough.

**Nicodemus:** I like the sound of that. *[exits, following Bob out the door]*

**End of script preview.**