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# **The Return of Edwin Drood**

By

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# **The Return of Edwin Drood**

## **CHARACTERS**

**EDWIN DROOD:** Returns home 10 years after being presumed dead.

**ROSA TARTAR:** Widow of Mr. Tartar. Formerly Rosa Bud, once betrothed to Edwin.

**JOHN (JACK) JASPER:** Edwin's uncle.

**HIRAM GREWGIOUS:** Rosa's former guardian now serving as Edwin's solicitor.

**INSPECTOR WICK:** An investigator for Scotland Yard.

**HELENA CRISPARKLE:** Rosa's best friend and wife of Reverend Crisparkle.

**NEVILLE LANDLESS:** Brother of Helena.

**PRINCESS PUFFER:** Proprietress of a London opium den.

**CLARA:** Edwin's cook.

**JULES:** Edwin's housekeeper.

**MADAME ROBERT:** A spiritualist.

**MAGISTRATE:** Chief official of the court.

**PROSECUTOR:** Prosecutor for the crown.

**DR. HAMPTON:** A witness.

**MATRON WEIRLY:** A witness.

Voice of **SAMUEL DROOD.**

## **CASTING**

With appropriate textual changes, Dr. Hampton may be played as Nurse Hampton. Matron Weirly may be played as Mr. Weirly, a male orderly. Jules and Clara may be played as

a butler and chef. The name Jules would remain; Clara would become Carl.

The following roles may be doubled: Magistrate, Prosecutor, Dr. Hampton, Matron Weirly, Princess Puffer and the nonspeaking role of Constable Evans.

## SCENES

Time: 1880

### Act I

Scene 1: Cloisterham Wood, 10 years earlier. Night.

Scene 2: Cloisterham Gardens

Scene 3: A London courtroom

Scene 4: A London street

Scene 5: Edwin's London apartment

Scene 6: Edwin's London apartment

Scene 7: Edwin's Cloisterham estate

Scene 8: Edwin's Cloisterham estate

### Act II

Scene: Edwin's Cloisterham estate

Scene 2: Inspector Wick's office at Scotland Yard

Scene 3: Cloisterham Gardens

Scene 4: Edwin's Cloisterham estate

Scene 5: Edwin's Cloisterham estate

Scene 6: Edwin's Cloisterham estate

\*Scene 7: Cloisterham Wood, 10 years earlier. Night.

\*If scenes are included as a feature of the performance program, Scene 7 should be omitted in order to avoid anticipation of the surprise ending.

## SET

The set represents locations in London and Cloisterham. The forestage will represent the street in London and Cloisterham Gardens. The main stage represents the courtroom, Edwin's London apartment, Edwin's Cloisterham estate and Inspector Wick's office at Scotland Yard. For most productions, major shifts in scenery are both impractical and time consuming. Set pieces should serve multiple functions. For example, the tables the London prosecutor and Mr. Grewgious stand behind can be connected to create the longer table required for Madame Robert. Jules and Clara may bring on additional props or move set pieces as needed. However accomplished, scene changes should be smooth and quick. Nothing grinds a production to a standstill like long blackouts and awkward set changes. Crew members dressed in costume can minimize the distraction of set changes by appearing as staff or other employees.

## THE ILLUSIONS

The medallion on the table illusion may be accomplished exactly as described by Inspector Wick. A magnet under the table can easily move a metal medallion.

The knocks are accomplished by knocking on the table or stage floor. A crewmember may be placed under the table to create the effects thereby freeing the character of Madame Robert to concentrate on the lines and action. Rustling curtains and lighting that flickers will enhance the supernatural atmosphere.

The two spirit images may be accomplished by means of projection. In the story, Madame Robert uses a Magic Lantern, a crude device that projects images onto a translucent surface. This can actually be a projector that projects still images from

the front, or it may be a rear screen projection. The actual Magic Lantern was a device akin to drawing images on the pages of a book and then quickly flipping the pages to create the illusion of movement. Madame Robert's device is more sophisticated. It uses a series of photographic stills. If actual image movement is utilized, it should be very slow. Or a photographic still may be projected onto a window covered with a thin translucent curtain. If the curtain is manipulated to move, the image will also appear to move. Keep in mind the spirit illusions are less about movement than seeing the actual faces that Madame Robert conjures in front of her amazed audience.

## PRODUCTION NOTES

More than a century after its publication, Charles Dickens' last novel *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* remains a literary conundrum. Unfinished at the time of his death, Dickens' novel left readers with the inexplicable disappearance and probable death of the title character. Motive and clues are liberally sprinkled throughout the novel pointing to Drood's jealous and opium-addicted uncle, John Jasper, as the prime suspect. However, the clues pointing to Jasper are so obvious that they beg the question of whether or not the story is actually a mystery. As the novel was only halfway finished when Dickens died, speculation suggests the author may have intended to introduce new characters or a series of plot twists that would turn the story into the mystery readers had anticipated. According to Dickens' friend and biographer John Forster, the author wrote two letters and an outline addressing aspects of the novel's plot, but nothing that revealed the details of the disappearance and likely murder of Edwin Drood. *The Return of Edwin Drood* incorporates some of the material



provided by John Forster. The play picks up 10 years after the novel leaves off. Not all of Dickens' characters are used; some characters are newly minted.

The character of Madame Robert is fictional. There was, however, a real Étienne-Gaspard Robert (1763–1837). He was a well-known illusionist who used the stage name Robertson. It is not known if he had a niece.

Additional notes on props, costumes and suggested seating arrangements for the illusion scenes can be found at the back of the playbook.

# The Return of Edwin Drood

## ACT I

### Scene 1

*(The year is 1870. Cloisterham Wood, night.*

*The forestage. Thunder rumbles. Lightning flashes. The weather is unforgiving. In brief glimpses, we see the silhouette of a man walking. Suddenly and savagely he is attacked from behind. The victim puts up a valiant struggle, but he is beaten to the ground. The attacker lifts a spade and begins to dig the earth as the lights and silhouettes fade away. The sounds of wind and thunder will continue and then slowly transition into the sounds of a beautiful spring day.)*

### Scene 2

*(Ten years later. Cloisterham Gardens.*

*As the lights fade up, it is a bright and beautiful spring day. ROSA TARTAR and NEVILLE LANDLESS are seated together on one of the benches engaged in conversation. ROSA laughs at something LANDLESS has said.)*

LANDLESS. I am quite serious, Rosa. You really ought to consider attending. I think it will be great fun. Jasper has gone to a good deal of trouble to engage Madame Robert for an evening's entertainment.

ROSA. As mayor of Cloisterham, I know John likes to play the role of impresario, but really, spiritualism? Neville, you don't believe in that sort of thing, do you?

LANDLESS. Not in the least, but Madame Robert is all the rage on the continent these days. You really should get out more, Rosa. You are quite the stick in the mud. You do realize that, don't you?

ROSA. I am just thankful I have friends who remind me of my shortcomings.

LANDLESS. Please, say you will come.

ROSA. Ask me in a fortnight.

LANDLESS. You must know I will not give up.

ROSA. I will consider attending if Helena consents to attend.

LANDLESS. I am afraid that is akin to pulling teeth. You know what a dim view Helena has of Jasper.

ROSA. I believe in letting bygones be bygones. If I am able to forgive the man, surely Helena can.

LANDLESS. Have you really forgiven Jasper?

ROSA. Perhaps forgiveness is not the correct word. Is forgiveness really ours to give? I bear John Jasper no ill will.

*(JOHN JASPER enters.)*

LANDLESS. Speak of the devil.

ROSA. Hush, Neville! Be polite. Good morning, John.

*(JASPER crosses to ROSA and LANDLESS. He tips his hat.)*

JASPER. Hello, Rosa.

LANDLESS. Mr. Mayor.

JASPER. Mr. Landless.

ROSA. Your ears must have been burning. Neville was just speaking of you.

*(LANDLESS casts a glance at ROSA.)*

JASPER. Good things I hope.

LANDLESS. I am trying to convince Rosa to attend your soirée for Madame Robert.

JASPER. You really must come. If everything I have heard about Madame Robert is true, I believe the evening will prove most entertaining. She has taken Europe by storm. I feel most fortunate she has agreed to appear in Cloisterham.

LANDLESS. I look forward to the occasion. Rosa is being terribly indecisive.

JASPER. Madame Robert is scheduled to arrive in two weeks. I hope by that time Mr. Landless will have proved persuasive.

ROSA. We shall see.

JASPER. I am on my way to the teashop. I should be delighted if you would join me.

ROSA. That's very kind of you, John, but we are waiting for Helena. We have a morning stroll planned before Neville returns to London.

LANDLESS. Duty calls, I am afraid. I received a cable from Mr. Grewgious informing me that my services are needed in London immediately.

JASPER. Nothing serious, I hope.

LANDLESS. I wouldn't imagine.

JASPER. Give my regards to that wonderful city and to Mr. Grewgious.

LANDLESS. I will, thank you.

JASPER. Enjoy your stroll. It will be a lovely day. (*To ROSA.*) Before I take my leave, Rosa, I should be remiss if I did not tell you how magnificently you sang in the cathedral on Sunday. Mr. Tartar would have been proud.

ROSA. That is very kind of you, John. Were my late husband here now, I believe he would insist on taking all the credit for encouraging me to resume my lessons.

JASPER. He is no doubt among the angels, and they are most assuredly envious.

ROSA. Please, that's much too much. But thank you again.

JASPER. Enjoy your stroll.

*(As JASPER turns away, HELENA CRISPARKLE enters excitedly. She is carrying a newspaper.)*

HELENA. Rosa, Neville!

*(JASPER turns to see the commotion. HELENA sees JASPER and draws up short.)*

HELENA *(cont'd)*. Oh, Mr. Jasper!

JASPER. Mrs. Crisparkle.

*(Sensing JASPER must have been speaking with ROSA and NEVILLE, HELENA directs her comments to all three.)*

ROSA. My goodness, Helena! Why all the excitement?

HELENA. Have you seen today's *London Times*?

ROSA. I usually don't read the newspaper until evening.

LANDLESS. Judging from your breathless demeanor, I gather there is something of interest.

HELENA. Is there? I should say so. You, of all people, I should think would know.

LANDLESS. Sister, dear, I am at a complete loss.

HELENA. It is the most remarkable thing. I can hardly believe it. After all these years it seems impossible. Who would have thought? It must surely be a miracle.

LANDLESS. Helena, calm down. Sit. You have told us nothing.

HELENA. That man, Matthew Croydon. You know the man I am speaking of?

JASPER. I don't believe I do.

ROSA. The name sounds familiar; I cannot place him.

HELENA. He came to Cloisterham a few months ago. He has the small cottage up the hill with the stone fence.

LANDLESS. A shaggy haired fellow with a beard.

HELENA. That's him.

JASPER. I still can't place him.

LANDLESS. He's the wheelwright.

JASPER. I'm with you now.

LANDLESS. So I have been told, he's a bit of a nosy fellow.

JASPER. How so?

LANDLESS. He seems to spend more time lurking about asking questions than making repairs.

HELENA. Good lord! Lurking about?

ROSA. You have spoken with him?

LANDLESS. Other than the usual good morning or good day, no!

HELENA. Yes, that is the fellow. (*Waving the newspaper.*) Now, do you wish to know?

LANDLESS. Please, enlighten us.

HELENA. The man you are speaking of, this Matthew Croydon, he is on trial in London for murder.

ROSA. Murder? A murder committed here in Cloisterham?

HELENA. You remember last week several policemen from London were scouring the woods near the river?

ROSA. I heard something of it, but I didn't pay attention.

LANDLESS. Something about a lost child, wasn't it?

JASPER. I heard it was an infirmed elder who had wandered from home.

HELENA. Apparently those were stories to conceal their real purpose. They were looking for a grave.

JASPER. A grave?

LANDLESS. What grave?

HELENA. It says so here. *(Indicating the newspaper.)*

ROSA. Is Croydon suspected of murdering someone and then burying him in the wood?

HELENA. This is the part you won't believe. I don't know what to think. It is simply beyond comprehension.

LANDLESS. Helena, enough suspense! Tell us!

HELENA. It's right here in the headline. Look! *(Turns the paper toward them.)* The mystery of Edwin Drood solved!

*(For a moment ROSA is speechless, as if all the air has escaped her lungs. JASPER and LANDLESS each ponder the implications of the news.)*

ROSA. Edwin! They've found Edwin's grave?

JASPER. May I see the newspaper please, Mrs. Crisparkle?

HELENA. Certainly.

*(HELENA hands the paper to JASPER. He quickly scans the article.)*

ROSA. What does it say, John? Is it Edwin? Is it true?

JASPER. Croydon turned himself in to the police and then voluntarily led them to a makeshift grave.

LANDLESS. Is Croydon charged with Drood's murder?

JASPER. No, at least not yet. Actually, he is not on trial. A hearing is scheduled the day after tomorrow to determine whether or not sufficient evidence exists to bring charges against him.

HELENA. If Croydon led the police to the grave, that surely means he is guilty.

ROSA. Has he confessed to the murder?

JASPER. No.

ROSA. This is very confusing.

HELENA. To think, a murderer has been living among us all this time, lurking about. It is positively scandalous. One wonders if it is safe to walk the streets.

LANDLESS. I am sure you have nothing to worry about.

JASPER. Hmmm! (*Looking up from the newspaper.*) This is interesting. Mr. Croydon is being represented by Hiram Grewgious.

ROSA. Mr. Grewgious!

HELENA (*to LANDLESS*). Neville, you don't know anything about this? You work for the man.

LANDLESS. If I did know, I would not be able to discuss the matter with you. But as I don't know any more than what is in the newspaper, I still cannot discuss it. No doubt it is the reason Mr. Grewgious has cut short my holiday and ordered me back to London.

ROSA. Mr. Grewgious representing this man. It doesn't make sense.

HELENA. Why is that so unusual?

JASPER. You probably don't recall, Mrs. Crisparkle, Mr. Grewgious was Edwin's solicitor at the time of his disappearance.

LANDLESS. That does seem odd.



HELENA. Is there some connection between Mr. Croydon and Edwin?

LANDLESS. I wonder. It is possible, but what would possess Croydon to turn up in Cloisterham all these years later?

HELENA. Rosa, had you ever heard the name Matthew Croydon before he came to Cloisterham?

ROSA. No. It is not a name familiar to me.

*(HELENA looks to JASPER.)*

JASPER. He is not known to me.

HELENA. It is quite the mystery, don't you think?

LANDLESS. Perhaps not. I am sure all will come out in court.

HELENA *(to ROSA)*. Rosa, will you go to London? I'll go with you. I'm sure Septimus wouldn't mind.

ROSA. That's very kind of you, Helena, but I don't see how I can. The thought of reliving those horrible days again, I couldn't bear it. What about you, John? Will you go?

JASPER. I think I must. Edwin is my nephew. If there is some new development in the case after all these years, how can I not go? Are you sure you won't come? I will be happy to accompany you, to offer what support I could.

ROSA. I can't bring myself to. You will tell me everything you find out.

JASPER. Of course.

LANDLESS. If new light is shed on the disappearance of Edwin Drood, I will be most happy to be in court. Thanks to you, Mr. Jasper, I have lived under a cloud of suspicion far too long.

JASPER. Those were difficult days, Landless. We were all grasping at straws trying to understand what happened. Disappearing like that without a trace. The police were

merciless in their questioning. Everyone who came in contact with Edwin that last night was suspect.

LANDLESS. Those days were more difficult for some than others, Mr. Jasper.

JASPER. When clearer heads prevailed, I think everyone agreed you had no hand in Edwin's disappearance. It was wrong of me not to have given a more vigorous account of your reconciliation with Edwin. I told the police as much on several occasions, but they seemed so focused on your argument with Edwin that night. I am just thankful it is all behind us.

HELENA. Don't be silly, Neville. After all these years, nobody suspects you. You surely can't think there are those who still believe you took revenge on Edwin for an insult.

LANDLESS. You don't see the looks. I do. I see the wide berth some people give me when I walk by. There are still those in Cloisterham who think I was involved. So, yes, I have a personal interest in hearing Croydon's testimony.

JASPER. Mr. Landless, I sincerely hope you no longer bear any ill will toward me.

LANDLESS. Time has a way of mending things. No, Mr. Jasper, I do not.

JASPER. You are a gentleman, sir. If I may be excused, I will bid you good morning. There is much to be arranged. (*Tipping his hat.*) So much to think about. (*Exits.*)

HELENA. I know he is not the man he used to be, but there is still something about him that I do not trust.

LANDLESS. Jasper is lucky I didn't try to kill him.

HELENA. Neville, what a horrible thing to say! You just told him you didn't bear him any ill will.

LANDLESS. I am talking about the days surrounding Edwin's disappearance. I was much the hothead during those days.

HELENA. Luckily that hotheaded youth of yesterday found religion, thanks to my wonderful husband and the mentorship of Mr. Grewgious. I do hope you never forget that.

LANDLESS. How could I, with you to remind me whenever I seem to go astray?

HELENA. For my money, Mr. Jasper is still an odd bird. I try to avoid him whenever I can.

ROSA. Except for those days spent in London with Miss Twinkleton, I can hardly recall a time when John wasn't present in my life. As Edwin's guardian, he was a continual presence. One gets used to one, don't they?

HELENA. For as long as I can remember I have had mice in my house, but I still haven't gotten used to them.

ROSA. It costs me nothing to be civil.

HELENA. Well, I certainly wouldn't encourage him. He hovers around you like a bee.

LANDLESS. Being civil toward someone is hardly encouraging them.

HELENA. One moment you want to kill the man and the next you defend him.

LANDLESS. I am not defending Jasper. I am saying one does not have to like a man to treat him with respect.

HELENA. Rosa doesn't really like Jasper, not really. Do you?

ROSA. It is not a matter of disliking him. You know I have never been comfortable around John. We spoke of it often enough during our years at the Nun's House. I don't think a young woman is ever prepared for the attentions of an older man for whom she has no interest. He frightened me.

HELENA. Threatened, you mean.

ROSA. Edwin's disappearance was difficult for both of us. John and I were linked by a common loss. After Mr. Tartar and I married, I assumed John had lost interest in me.

LANDLESS. He has not lost interest, be assured of that. (*As if referring to himself.*) You cannot blame a man for being appreciative of an attractive woman.

HELENA. You are far more forgiving than I.

ROSA. Life is too precious to waste on old wounds. As Neville has, I have learned to reconcile my feelings about John. He and I are friends, nothing more.

LANDLESS. Thinking of John as a friend is too much of a stretch for me. But I do agree he is much changed over the years.

ROSA. Shall we take our stroll now? I should like to talk about matters more pleasant.

LANDLESS. As you wish. Come ladies.

*(The three exit as the lights fade.)*