

Bleak House – Audition Piece**Sir Leicester Dedlock / Inspector Bucket**

SIR LEICESTER: Mr Bucket, I most solemnly declare that this crime must be discovered and in the course of justice, punished. This gentleman has devoted a large portion of his life to me, he has sat at my table and slept under my roof. It may even have been his association with this house, suggesting greater wealth than he in fact possessed, which has led to his death. This crime will be as a stain on my name while it remains unsolved. If my own brother had committed it, I would not spare him.

BUCKET: Sir Leicester, I have an idea who has done this. It wants but a little proof for me to lay that person by the heels.

SIR LEICESTER: Name the man, Mr Bucket. I shall ensure that the full rigour of the law ...

BUCKET: It was a woman, Sir Leicester.

SIR LEICESTER: Good Heavens!

BUCKET: Sir Leicester, it's my duty to prepare you for a train of circumstances that may, and I go so far as to say will, shock you. But Sir Leicester, you are a gentleman, and gentleman can bear a shock boldly and steadily. I suggest we walk in the garden. We can't be too private.

SIR LEICESTER: By all means.

Bucket and Sir Leicester walk down into the garden.

BUCKET: Be so good as to take a seat if you have no objection.

SIR LEICESTER: None at all.

BUCKET: Now, to come to the point. Lady Dedlock is universally admired ...

SIR LEICESTER: I would greatly prefer if my lady's name were entirely omitted from this discussion, officer.

BUCKET: So would I, Sir Leicester, but it's altogether impossible. She is the pivot it all turns on.

SIR LEICESTER: Do your duty, officer, but you bring my lady's name into this on your

own responsibility. My lady's name is not a name for common people to trifle with.

BUCKET: Sir Leicester, it becomes my duty to tell you that the deceased Mr Tulkinghorn entertained ... suspicions of Lady Dedlock.

SIR LEICESTER: If he had dared to breathe them to me, which he never did, I would have killed him myself!

BUCKET: I know, from his own lips, that Lady Dedlock discovered, through some handwriting on a legal document, the existence, in great poverty, of a certain person who had been her lover before you courted her, and ought to have been her husband. This person soon afterwards died, but Mr Tulkinghorn discovered that Lady Dedlock had visited his grave in secret disguised as her maid, her wearing a loose black mantle with a deep fringe to it. What passed between Tulkinghorn and your wife may never be known but tonight, just before the murder, Lady Dedlock, or one very like her, was spotted near his house, wearing just such a mantle.

SIR LEICESTER: *(Putting his head in his hands with shock)* Be so good as to pause a moment, officer.

BUCKET: Begging your pardon, sir, there's no time. I think you'll find that the deceased Mr Tulkinghorn had every intention of communicating her Ladyship's secret to you, and had so given her ladyship to understand.

The shouting has begun offstage, and is growing louder

BUCKET: But Sir Leicester, there was other parties to this secret. Now that Mr Tulkinghorn has been cut down, this unfortunate family affair has taken air, so to speak. The one chance to hush it up lies in dealing with the people now on their way to speak to you. When they arrive, would you mind sitting quiet, and throwing in a nod when I seem to ask you? That way we can reckon 'em up

SIR LEICESTER: Do the best you can, officer.