

## Calamity in the Cloisters, or Much Larking in Larchester

Narrator/ presenter.

Welcome speech and fire announcements and interval/quiz/prizes announcements, then present the characters

Dean Pringle

Canon Piper ,the Precentor

Miss Tyrell, the Virger

Miss Walker, headmistress of the Choir School ( could be MR Walker )

Miss Jenny McCoy, Matron of the Choir School

Mr John Crisp, the Organist of the Cathedral

Mr Salt, Clerk of Works and head stonemason

*SFX are in italics and in RED if recordings.*

Act 1 Scene 1:

Narrator : The action takes place on a late afternoon in summer in the precincts of Larchester Cathedral.

*SFX: birdsong pigeons throughout the scene and a croquet strike ( the croquet could be "live" )* A croquet match is taking place. The four players are: Miss Walker: Blue ball, The Dean: Yellow, Mr Crisp, Black, and Miss McCoy, Red. Miss Tyrell and the Canon are watching the play from the shade of an "immemorial elm"

TYRELL: Oh well done, Miss Walker, a splendid hit! You nearly got your ball all the way through the hoop, didn't she, Canon?

CANON: Unfortunately, Miss Tyrell, the Headmistress will be "knocked up by The Dean, whose turn it is next. ( hastily ) I mean, he will make contact: Miss Walker's is the blue, and yellow follows, so he will make contact, roquet her well away, and then croquet Mr Crisps' black ball even further off, and play his own to get as close to red as possible, so there is every opportunity for the red player, Miss McCoy, to destroy the position their opponents have been trying to build. Do not forget that Miss McCoy is a very skilful player: she was Ladies' Champion runner-up at the Hurlingham Cub in London before she came down here to be our Matron

TYRELL: Oh, I am sure she would not wish to be so unhelpful:perhaps she will put her own ball through the final hoop. ( *SFX Croquet strikes are heard occasionally throughout the rest of the dialogue until XX* )

CANON: Not a bit of it. Croquet is the most vicious game I can think of. Whole afternoons of careful strategy can be wrecked by a determined opponent, and she must be pretty ruthless: she has the choristers quite under her thumb- there's trouble if plimsolls are lost or kit goes missing, though boys are always "borrowing" cricket bats or football boots. They don't mean anything by it and they do sing so beautifully.

TYRELL: Well, I must agree that, since Matron arrived, the Choir has smartened up. Thier ruffs are always starched, their cassocks all fit, and surplices are washed. And the procession at Sunday morning Mattins is always most orderly. Mind you, that might be the influence of the Dean ( *SFX croquet strike* ) Oh well done again, our young organist, Mr Crisp, managed to deflect the Dean -did you see- by hitting one ball against another- a cannon shot, one might say. It will be up to Miss McCoy to rescue him.

CANON:The Dean looks most displeased, as well he might- he and Matron hardly- but we must not gossip. How are you finding the organist? he's rather a sporty-looking boy- straight from Oxford. Wonderful- to be so talented and young. I believe the boys call him "the Golden Wonder"- his blond locks you understand. (*SFX: 2 Croquet strikes* ) Oh. There they go. Matron has touched her partner's, the Dean's , ball and knocked it out against the peg, and now, see she will follow and win the match XX ( *SFX final strike and desultory clapping, including Tyrell and Canon* ).

TYRELL: Ah, Dean ( *in a less welcoming tone* ) and Matron. Would you like some lemonade? I'm sure you must be thirsty after such a long match.

DEAN: Thank you, Virger. (SFX *water poured*)

TYRELL: I had better fetch some more from the choir school kitchen-or would you be happy with water, Matron?

MATRON: I'll go to the Choir School, Miss Tyrell and bring back another jug. Our Organist is looking thirsty and so is the Head. ( she exits )

TYRELL: Very well

CANON: I'll come too- you might need another pair of hands. ( exits )

DEAN: I have to say that Matron's last shot was one any snooker player would have been proud of.

TYRELL: I'm glad to have the opportunity Mr Dean, to have a word about something that has troubled me .

DEAN: And what is that?

TYRELL: Well, the other day I was busy in the Vestry silver cupboard where we keep the silver chalices, you know, and I was polishing the vessels for next day's service and a couple of candlesticks from the side altar in the North Choir Aisle

DEAN: Indeed?

TYRELL: When I heard Canon Piper talking to Binns Minor in the Vestry. They must have thought nobody was around, and I pulled the cupboard door behind me and was concealed rather effectively.

DEAN: What did they say?

TYRELL: The Canon said: "Why don't you?" then he said "Turn thy face" then "how beautiful"

DEAN: What did the boy say?

TYRELL:: Well I thought I heard Binns whispering something about "gay" and "dressing" and then the Canon said "How lovely"

DEAN : And you didn't intervene?

TYRELL: I was about to, but they both left the Vestry in a hurry and by the time I had extricated myself both were too far away. I wonder whether Matron or Miss Walker might winkle something out of Binns Minor.

DEAN: I shall certainly winkle something out of Canon Piper. There have always been rumours, you know. Nothing concrete, but I shall want to speak to him immediately after Mattins tomorrow. I notice that the anthem is "Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness": that might stir his conscience. And here comes Matron with a great jug of lemonade and now I must go about my business, lemonade or not. I have to prepare material about the Choir School. But here comes our most talented Organist, Mr Crisp. Perhaps you can offer him some refreshment.

TYRELL: Perhaps Matron will. I have to go to see that all the service booklets are ready for tomorrow. ( exits )

CRISP: Ah, Jenny, my tongue's hanging out.

MATRON: You had better be careful what you say: your tongue may be hanging out, but there are plenty of wagging ones, and flapping ears, too, in a cathedral precinct. Was it lemonade you were after?

CRISP: I'm after more than lemonade, Jenny.

MATRON: John, for both our sakes, be careful who is in earshot. You've only just finished at Oxford, and I know there's more than one beady pair of eyes fixed on us at the other end of the croquet lawn. The Virger is one of the worst.

CRISP: What? Miss Tyrell? I thought her a pleasant woman. Hard working, too, she's always in the Vestry, polishing up the plate

MATRON: That's because when you're in the Vestry you can hear everything that's said in the Dean's Office next door: there's a connecting door that is not soundproof-if you have great flapping ears.

CRISP: That's a bit hard, Jenny. You sound as if you didn't like her at all.

MATRON: I'm sorry: it's just that when you work in this rather heated and stifling atmosphere of a hothouse, you begin to resent all the other plants striving for the same bit of nourishment.

CRISP: And what might that be, Jenny?

MATRON: Now John, you know jolly well what the boys call you: "Golden Wonder": they merely see you as a young, talented organist and choir trainer. But the rest of us are more interested in your blond hair. I'm not the only girl who'd like to run her hands through it and ruffle it up...

CRISP: As a preliminary to other things?

MATRON: Yes, Wonderboy, and I'm not going to let anyone else come between us.

CRISP: I don't want them to- but if the Matron and the Organist can't have a conversation now and again without other people interfering-

MATRON: If that's what you think, why don't we go somewhere else? Miss Walker looks as if she will be after you if you don't watch out.

CRISP: Oh, I think I'll dash back to my flat in Vicar's Row. I've got to practise my finger work for the Fugue for Sunday morning, anyway. Why don't we meet later for a drink at The Parson's Nose? 'Bye...

MATRON: 'Bye.

WALKER: Ah, Matron, I meant to ask you whether you were aware that there's a very nasty smell in the Cloisters. I noticed it when going up to my flat. Do you think it could be drains?

MATRON: That, or possibly a dead monk who's making his presence felt, Miss Walker. Do you think he could be laid to rest by a good flush through with disinfectant?

WALKER: I think that's more likely to lay this particular ghost than bell book and candle- we're not in the realm of "The Exorcist"

MATRON: Well, for that you need to ask the Canon Piper, our precentor. I gather he was a specialist in that sort of thing before he joined the Chapter here: and in fact he does occasionally get called out when a poltergeist or something has been particularly annoying.: throwing the pots and pans about-that sort of thing.

WALKER: Almost certainly the result of poorly balanced saucepans or a cat- or indeed a mouse running around.

MATRON: Yes, there are always infestations of vermin in old buildings- cockroaches and rats.

WALKER: Not to mention the choirboys! Although, I must say, you have been very successful in keeping all three under control- I know I'm responsible to the parents for their sons' welfare, and their education, and I love my job- and I do admire how well you've adapted to life here.

MATRON: I like it too. I was Assistant Matron at a prep school in London, and then to get this job- in charge; in a delightful flat in such an idyllic setting: cloisters and croquet lawn- was everything I could wish. But I do feel rather suffocated by all these cathedral dignitaries who have spent the whole of their youth writing the sermons they spend the rest of their lives in preaching. Mind you, it seems to me that one or two might have had practical experience of they castigate so zealously.

WALKER: I know what you mean: our Precentor, in his role as chaplain to the Choir school, certainly gives a good deal of attention to the possible and potential peccadilloes of potential pupils.

MATRON: Possibly he has his own youthful follies in mind.

(SFX *Clock strikes half hour* )

MATRON: Oh! Five-thirty: I'll have to get back to supervise Saturday night supper: macaroni cheese, and lemon curd tart, then table tennis or Scrabble until bedtime.

WALKER: And then I'll take over and do the checking at nine o'clock. The older boys get longer, but the younger ones do need their sleep if they are going to be bright eyed and bushy tailed to sing the services tomorrow. Did I see John Crisp letting himself into the Cathedral?

MATRON: Yes, he said he was going to practise his Fugue- but now you must excuse me- duty calls.

WALKER: Me too. I've an appointment with some exercise books.

NARRATOR: And so the Cloister: a haven of calm and hotbed of gossip, turns over and sleeps. SFX *pigeons noise dies away and is replaced by hymn as below*

It is the next morning in The Dean's Office in the Cathedral. (SFX *ORGAN: the G minor Fugue of JS Bach which continues until the scene finishes*)

The Dean and Canon Piper enter

CANON: Will you be going for coffee with the congregation, Dean? I imagine some of our visitors might like to probe your sermon on Sodom and Gomorrah in rather more detail.

DEAN: As a matter of some urgency, Precentor, there are one or two things I should like to discuss with you. Sit down, please. ( Noise of chair scraped back )

It's about time we made our music more in line with modern society. As you know, we have to be a living church, addressing the needs of today's society and our services should be welcoming all our townsfolk, not just the select few who like Stanford and Purcell.

CANON: but we have wider range of music than that.

DEAN: We need some contemporary music, not just Victorians and Palestrina. Besides, there's too much in Latin: no-one understands it.

CANON: Speaking personally, I do. And considering we regularly have visiting groups from France, Holland, Italy and further afield, Latin is likely to be just as accessible as English. I remember in Sorrento I once saw a Japanese choir sing Mozart's Requiem: in Latin. No problems there.

DEAN: The Cathedral's finances are, as you know, in a perilous state. Economies must be made.

CANON : And is one of the economies to reduce the Choir?

DEAN: To move to less exhaustingly expensive system. We spend nearly a million pounds a year on our Lay Clerks and their accommodation and the Choir School. I have had a very significant offer to redevelop the buildings of the Choir School and I shall be laying these before the Chapter next week. I might tell you that the Archdeacon is fully in support and so are all the lay members of the Chapter.

CANON: The lay members who you invited on to the Chapter and the Archdeacon whose role is not in the Cathedral but in the parishes. I shall certainly oppose the decision and I carry a lot of weight

DEAN: Indeed you do.

CANON: And what is to become of the choir boys? Where are they to be educated?

DEAN: At the perfectly sound comprehensive school, if they are local,; and otherwise at their own expense rather than at ours. I shall be informing the Headmistress immediately after this interview, and Matron and Crisp, just as soon as he has finished his Fugue. It seems to have been going on far too long.

CANON: But the choirboys are at the heart of our worship..

DEAN: Possibly. I've never understood why you should get so passionate about the singing.

CANON: You mean to bring in guitars and synthesizers and what amounts to a skiffle band.

DEAN: We must attract a younger congregation. The crowd of old biddies of both sexes who are at this moment sipping the ghastly coffee and munching custard creams in the Refectory are here because they've been nowhere else for fifty years. They are as much a fixture as the monks entombed in the Chapter House . We need youngsters.

CANON May I remind you that the Organist is as you might put it "a youngster", and that a sizeable portion of your congregation, especially at Evensong is made up of the choristers and their parents?

DEAN. And while we're on the subject, it has come to my attention that you have shown rather an unhealthy interest in the senior trebles, Binns Minor in particular,

CANON: What a ridiculous idea!

DEAN: During the anthem this morning you couldn't take your eyes off him.

CANON: He was singing a solo, and doing it very well.

DEAN What went on the Vestry between you?

CANON: I can't think what you mean.

DEAN: Didn't you ask him to turn his profile and remark "How beautiful"? Wasn't there something about "gay dressing" and then you exclaimed "How lovely"?

CANON: There is a simple explanation: Binns Minor is thinking of entering the Choirboy of the Year competition, and we were discussing the pieces he was to sing-

DEAN: Oh really!

CANON: Yes: "Turn Thy face from my sins" "How beautiful are the feet " and Binns said he liked the Gaelic Blessing and I mentioned Brahms "How lovely is Thy dwelling place" although that is a full choral piece.

DEAN: So you say- but this might not be an explanation all might accept. I suggest that if you want my support, you think carefully before you oppose my plans. It would be easy for your interview with Binns minor to be formed into a very nasty little scene. Need I say more? And now I have another member of the Cathedral Staff to see. You had better take yourself to the Canonry.

CANON weakly) I haven't done anything wrong...

(he exits into the Cathedral. The organ is still heard as the door opens. MISS WALKER arrives)

WALKER; Good Morning, Mr Dean, that was a good service. I thought the boys acquitted themselves very well.

DEAN: Yes, they did. Miss Walker, I want to talk about a decision which I shall ask the Chapter to endorse next week. It affects the Choir School and indeed, your own position. Do sit down.

WALKER: What?

DEAN: As you know, I have been reviewing the Cathedral finances since my arrival here a year ago. And given that I was working in an inner-city parish, I may have rather different views on priorities from people who enjoy the rather sheltered life of the Cathedral Close.

WALKER: I have always made a point of ensuring that the school syllabus looks widely at the world and particularly at the plight of the children of other countries and indeed we run several missions to that end. The Carol Service money is donated to the homeless in the cities.

DEAN: And in view of that you will appreciate that as part of relating to those inner cities and to the need for finance which they quite rightly look to the Cathedral to support, that we close the Choir School from September.

WALKER: But what about the boys?

DEAN That is a decision I have already reached agreement on with most of the Chapter. I'm sure that local boys will be able to find places at a local school. I imagine some parent swill use the opportunity to move their sons to one of the Prep schools locally- or a boarding school if they so wish.

WALKER: But you will be splitting the boys up and friendships formed over their time here are very important to them.

DEAN: Yes, and I see no reason why such friendships cannot continue as they do when boys leave at thirteen. Usually they form new alliances quite easily.

WALKER: But the Choir will be destroyed.

DEAN: And no bad thing. It's time we found a style of worship more in keeping with the modern congregation.

WALKER: But Matron and I live in the school. Are you asking us to leave our homes?

DEAN: We may be able to offer you the flat to rent at commercial rates.

WALKER: Commercial rates! I could not possibly afford those prices, and I will have to find another Headship, if at all possible, in order to make ends meet. It's not easy for a single woman of a certain age to walk into a job of this sort, even with my experience, I love the flat: it gives on to the Cloister, and I have made my life here. Unlike you, Mr Dean, I do not have a second property. You have the advantage that if you were to be chucked out of the Deanery you have the house in rural Wales, which I understand you rent out for considerably more than the cost of my flat. I don't hear of you contributing from your income to the causes for which you intend to sacrifice me and the choir.

DEAN: When I was appointed to this post I was head-hunted because of my successes at restoring the finances of the church in Bristol and the need of this Cathedral for a sound financial manager. I am confident that the Chapter will be in support of these arrangements. (SFX *clock strikes three quarters as they continue to talk*)

WALKER: But Canon Piper will oppose this, I'm sure. He loves the Choir and the Music.

DEAN: He will offer no opposition.

WALKER: Then I can only suppose you have in some way gained a hold on him or threatened him. But I warn you, I shall fight!

DEAN: Goodbye, Miss Walker. The clock has struck the three quarters and I must now get ready for the Communion Service.

WALKER (aside) I hope the wine poisons you!

(SFX *A summoning bell is tolling and continues through the next scene*)

NARRATOR: In the Cloisters immediately afterwards: at the door to her flat, Miss Walker meets Mr Crisp.

CRISP: Good Morning, Miss Walker. I'm afraid I couldn't make the *apres matins* coffee: the Fugue is rather extended, but the Communion service today is a said service- the Dean has introduced a "light touch": he likes to get it all done in twenty minutes.

WALKER (tearfully) Really?

CRISP: Is something wrong? You look upset.

WALKER: I *am* upset- and I imagine you will be if you haven't been told- the Dean has decided to close the Choir School in July. You can say goodbye to the boys' choir as we know it. I'm to lose my job- and my flat.

CRISP: I haven't been told any of this. Why?

WALKER: Apparently because of the coats.

CRISP: He can't succeed. The Canon Precentor has a lot of power and enjoys support from the Chapter and he would never agree.

WALKER: The Dean has neutralised him- I don't know how, but I imagine he might find one or two episodes which, innocent in themselves, could be worked up into a very nasty story. People could be persuaded. People could be persuaded to see a pattern where none exists. You are fairly new, but you know

that when the Dean arrived, there have been two organists who lasted less than six months each: the Dean raised suspicions with regard to their relationships with the boys.

CRISP: I did hear that at his previous church there had been a falling out, and the organist left under a bit of a cloud, though nothing was ever proved. These stories get around. But what will you do? Can't we mount a campaign? A petition by the parents?

WALKER: If your conditions of employment are anything like mine, I imagine there will be a clause forbidding any such contact- and the Dean would throw us out straight away.

CRISP: Would he be that hard?

WALKER: He takes no prisoners. I don't know why? But he seems pretty sure that the Precentor will support him- or offer no opposition at any rate,

CRISP: That's bad. I was appointed by the Canon and he has always seemed very supportive,

WALKER: Well, I'm sorry to say it, but he does like blond hair: you aren't called the "Golden Wonder" for nothing ( hastily )- I mean obviously because you play so well and have done wonders with the boys- but from the Cantoris side of the Canons' stalls one can see your golden mane bobbing about when you are on the organ stool.

CRISP: Does Jenny- Matron- know? She'll lose her position and the flat as well.

WALKER: Perhaps you had better tell her. I know you and she have an understanding.

CRISP: Perhaps I should. I'm meeting her in ten minutes at the Parson's Nose in ten minutes.

WALKER Off you go then. At least you might be allowed to continue as organist, even if there is no longer a Cathedral Choir.

CRISP: I'm not sure I'd want to. Perhaps I'll find out that the Dean wants guitars and drums beaten: it seems a shame as we have opened our doors to other music makers. I'm conductor of the Community Choir – as part of the job- and we have been allowed to hold concerts in the Cathedral once a year: the hire fees are getting too much, I believe. Well, you're on the Committee.

WALKER: Yes- you do a wonderful job with the Choir: Considering they are eighty (most of them) and that rather constrains the Musical Choice. Off you go!

*(SFX bell stops, sound of pub chatter fades in. NB This could be live from other members of the cast if needed, with live chinks of glasses and it continues throughout the scene )*

NARRATOR: And so from the whisperings of the Cloisters, we move a stone's throw away to the chatter of the bar of the Parson's Nose: where John Crisp has just informed Matron of the news.

MATRON: I suppose she was very upset when you saw her...

CRISP: VERY; and she is normally so levelheaded. I'm surprised you're not more upset yourself.

MATRON: Oh I am, but it came as less of a shock, as I knew about it already.

CRISP: How?

MATRON: I was busy putting the boy's robes away- looking for surplice satins: there's always three or four

CRISP: Surplus surplice stains?

MATRON: Idiot! Anyway, the back of the Choir Vestry has a ventilator which gives on to the Dean's Office so I heard everything going on between the Dean and Canon Piper and Miss Walker.

CRISP: I know the Dean doesn't like choral music.

MATRON: Yes, I remember last Christmas he told you to cut the Carol Service to half its length

CRISP: He told me that when we got to the eighth carol: "Al this nyght" he called it "the Latin one" he was "disengaged" code for "bored"

MATRON: I'm not surprised: he positioned himself with his back to you and , sitting in the pews, I can tell you his face was like thunder.

CRISP: Well, I'm not keen on guitars and synthesizers: besides, those groups have their own ideas about tuning and the idea of keeping to time-even though it's nearly always a rigidly unvaried four four.

MATRON: Isn't that called "Common time" I always thik that trying to mix choral music and guitars islike building a fishpond on a well-kept lawn: the pond has its own charms, but it's damned inconvenient if you want to play croquet.

CRISP: I'm in favour of croquet- you see enough queer fish in the backwater of a cathedral cloister.

MATRON: That's the point. The Dean wants to make the Cathedral and its services part of the mainstream life of the City: he's introduced the point often enough .And there's a "pilgrimage" which is costing those with money enough to go a small fortune: the dean is going, paid for by the Cathedral, of course, and the money saved by closing the Choir School - and making it a hireable venue will be easy enough to justify as part of opening the doors as well as the financial gain. I suppose I shall have to look for a new job the third school post to find in the space of a year- and I have so enjoyed this one- a small choir school with biddable boys, a nice flat in the school- so convenient with the Cloister door and surplice room and choir vestry.

CRISP: I'll certainly need to move and I would have been sad to go- I like nearly all the people I have to work with- but one has to say the atmosphere generated by the Dean is pretty toxic. The Clergy seem afraid of him, particularly the Canon Precentor, and if he makes these changes to the Choir and the music, then it will be impossible to continue, and I don't see many organists applying for a job where there is a magnificent organ but few chances to use it.

MATRON: Well, something has to be done. Hello! Here's Miss Tyrell, our Verger. She looks upset. Hi Miss Tyrell? - anything wrong? (Miss Tyrell enters )

TYRELL: Plenty: there was some mix up at Communion, when putting the sacred vessels away, and I've just been accused of losing one of our valuable chalices, I haven't a clue where it's gone It was in the cupboard last week and now has disappeared. And I've just heard from Miss Walker that the Choir School is to close.

MATRON: And you knew about it?

TYRELL: oh, I'm only the Verger, putting out the robes and copes fir his Very Reverence to wear, keeping stock of all the pattens and chalices- cups and plates to the lowly likes of you and me- and getting out the Duraglit to polish off all the fingerprints which get on them during a service: It would be quite a thin if someone were to steal a chalice – or brain the Dean with it. they'd need to wear gloves, or the murder weapon would be covered in evidence.

CRISP: What about all the fingerprints of the people drinking from it?

TYRELL: Unlikely. Today, for example, there were so few to receive that the Dean took the bread and one round himself, and he never lets the faithful touch the chalice- just held to the lips and polished off afterwards.

CRISP: The cup or the wine?

TYRELL: Both. But if the Choir school closes, we'll have no choral processions and that was always so impressive- leading the double line of boys into the church and up to the choir stalls. You can't act as Virger to a be-jeaned "music group"!

MATRON: No- the procession of surpliced boys and men gives an air of solemnity and dignity to the start of a service.

By the way, Miss Tyrell, have you noticed a very odd smell in the Cloisters? It seems to be on the South side- the section leading from the door of the Vestry and the den's office door- just where the Cloister turns to run West, past my door. I'm surprised Miss Walker hasn't noticed it: she must pass it every time she comes from her flat through the Cloisters when escorting the boys to Choir practice.

CRISP: She probably thinks it's the Dean.

TYRELL: He'd have to be dead, and buried in that corner:( if only! ) Quite a lot of the Clergy in medieval times were buried in the Cloisters. But yes, I have already asked the Clerk of Works to investigate. He'll get the slab up in a jiffy, and then one can get into the vault- there's a set of steps to go down by. I remember some years ago there was a reason he had to go down there, and I was walking along from the western arm and just as I reached that corner, he poked his head up- I was really frightened- it was as if a decapitated head had suddenly appeared on the floor!

CRISP: So when is the Clerk of Works, Mr Salt, going to investigate the smell?

TYRELL: Later this afternoon- in fact I will have to go now, as I'm wanted to help. I suppose his Very Reverence will be there- and possibly our Canon- he is an expert in laying ghosts and exorcism- but there's only one devil I'd like him to exorcise right now!

MATRON: I've got some sewing to do, thank you. But I'm sure I'll hear about it-I must get back to my flat.

CRISP: And I'm going back to the organ loft. I might as well practise while I can. I suppose the sound system will soon be blasting out tapes- at the moment we only use the ones I've recorded for the gift shop. See you!

TYRELL: Goodbye!

( SFX: *Sound of pub fades and is replaced by a fade in of quiet organ music* )

NARRATOR: In the Cloisters after Evensong, a large slab has been raised revealing a grave-like opening, with a ladder placed inside it. The Dean, the Verger, and the Canon Precentor are listening to the Clerk of Works, Mr Salt.

SALT: (rural accent but defined ) This is about the third time I've had to get this slab up. There's a duct down there for the electrics and then a sort of tunnel running all along the North side of the Cloisters. The pillars which support the aisle roof have their footings down there and in the niches between each pillar are stone shelves and coffins on 'em. It's the entrance to the catacombs, y'see and there are burials right up to the Second War. After that, Deans and canons were interred at the Cloister Garth.

I traced the smell to one of the nineteenth century Deans: something had shifted and the lid was aslant. But I've been able to put it back and the smell is now safely contained. I packed some "plumber's mate" round the 4 edges and that should seal it. What was really interesting was the coffin of a Bishop from the sixteenth century: old King Harry's time.

CANON: The only Bishop out her in the Cloisters, due to the Reformation: he died just after Bloody Mary came to the throne, and she wouldn't have a Bishop who started off as a Catholic and followed King Harry away from Rome, gets a mitre from King Edward and then finds himself under Bloody Mary, so to speak. When he died, she wouldn't let him rest inside by her Catholic altar.

DEAN: I haven't been down there: I'd like to have a look. If one isn't overcome by the fumes.

VIRGER: I should think it might be rather dangerous – one might be buried alive if the slab fell back.

DEAN: then between the four of us, we could put the slab safely at the side of the hole: and I see you have some barriers in case anyone using the Cloisters has an accident.

SALT: Yes, I put them barriers round first thing, because those choirboys went past with their Headmistress after Evensong. There's Mr Crisp still up the organ now.

CANON: A long voluntary, but infinitely preferable to –

DEAN: (menacingly ) To what?

CANON: Nothing. I had better go back in the Cathedral: I need to fetch the music for tomorrow: there's a new set of Preces and Responses which I must look at. Excuse me.

NARRATOR: The Canon leaves the Cloisters, going back into the Cathedral.

DEAN: Well, I'm going down to have a look. Salt, will you be my guide?

SALT: Have my torch- and mind your head. I'll hold the ladder steady.

NARRATOR: The Dean descends.

SALT: Oh Miss Tyrell, can you switch off the Cloister lighting at the main box in the Dean's Vestry, please? There could be a faulty wire: the rats are powerful gnawers and nibblers.

MISS TYRELL: UGH! Yes. I think it needs your help, Mr Salt. I get confused. and I've just remembered I need to polish my mace in the vestry cupboard.

SALT: I've got to help Miss Tyrell to swith orf the lecky, MR Dean.

DEAN: ( SFX *reverberation?* ) I can see well enough with the torch and there's plenty of light coming through.

SALT: I'll go and help MissTyrell with the switch box: I'll only be five minutes..

NARRATOR: Both Mr Salt and Miss Tyrell leave the Cloister: Miss Tyrell to go to her cupboard and Mr Salt for the Mains box in the Dean's Vestry.

DEAN: Hullo! What's this doing here? Good heavens, why would it be down here? I need to get it up.

NARRATOR: The Dean, holding something, begins to climb the ladder-

DEAN: What do you think-

(SFX: *the organ music stops abruptly* and a sharp crack is heard [ best done live with two pieces of wood or a ruler on a table] )

Narrator: Half an hour later, in the Canon's house, Mr Salt, Miss Walker, Miss Tyrell, John Crisp, Miss McCoy and Canon Piper are in a tense meeting.

CANON: Well, this is very remarkable- Salt, can you go over that again?

SALT: I'm telling you: I'd gone to switch off the lekky- *eelecktricity*, Canon, because The Dean had insisted on going down into the vault and I wasn't happy about 'im down there with a loive woire so 'e 'ad a flamin' torch- 'scuse me usin' language – and there was plenty of loight anyways from above- even with the cloister loights orf. I comes back, and when I gets near, I sees that the ladder's wonky and I sees the Dean on the floor. I called out but he was past hearing. I rang Matron's doorbell, only a few yards from the vault, and she came out and...

CANON: So you saw that he was dead, Matron?

MATRON: ( briskly ) No question about it. I suppose he had slipped, the ladder had dislodged somehow and he had smashed his head on one of the coffins as he fell. Nobody could survive a real crack like that.

MISS TYRELL: I got there soon after, as you know. I'd been polishing the brass and things. The oddest thing was, on the cloister floor there was a great heavy chalice- I recognised it as the very one the Dean accused me of stealing- I've taken it back to the Vestry now and locked it away.

CANON: You shouldn't have done that, you know: it could be evidence.

MISS WALKER: Something of a fortunate accident- it's unlikely the Choir will be abandoned and we can all stay. The School will go on as usual, and we know you want the music to stay traditional, Canon. I suppose you will be in charge now, as Acting Dean. I don't imagine any of us will lose our houses...

CANON: By an ancient statute, the Precentor is in charge during an interregnum. You all know my musical tastes- and we can perhaps ensure that any new dean is of the Old School. The Queen appoints, but that is on the recommendation of the Chapter. The Archbishop is an old college friend and I think will give us a favourable hearing. It might be a grave accident but a happy turn of events for the Choir.

SALT: Excuse me, sir, but I don't think it's as simple as that.

CANON: What do you mean?

SALT: Well, sir, I put that ladder in place, and I know it couldn't have shifted.

CANON: Well, the Dean must have fallen off just as he got to the top and overbalanced. He has fallen rather heavily.

SALT: Fallen backwards, sir. His head wasn't smashed from behind, though, I could see that there was a great smash on the front of his skull: a round-shaped smash- he must have reached the top of the ladder, with his head out of the vault, and somebody smashed him right between the eyes with something heavy and round. The question is: who was holding that something?

CANON: It could be anybody.

SALT: No- the gated to the precincts were closed immediately after Evensong. And because of the vault being opened, I had secured all entry points. The only people who could have had access to the Cloisters at that time would be anyone coming from the Cathedral door in the South East corner, Matron's door to her flat in the South West corner and Miss Walker's access from her flat in the North West Corner. That means it must have been one of you, Canon; you, Matron; you, Miss Walker; you, Mr Crisp; or you, Virger.

CANON: (insincerely! ) But why would anybody murder the Dean?

MISS TYRELL: I suppose we all detested his wish to destroy the Choir and somebody thought of a way of preventing it.

CANON: I am sorry to say that it could have been any of us. We all wanted him dead and all had an opportunity once he had got himself into that vault.

SALT: I can tell you he was at his most vulnerable who knew he would have to emerge, slowly, and that his head would be above the floor; an ideal moment, if you had a suitable weapon, heavy and round, to smash his skull.

...I suppose I could make a few guesses as to your motives.

CANON: Well, if it is one of us, you'd better start. I suppose you do not include yourself in the suspects' line-up.

SALT: (slightly riled) If you remember, sir, I had gone to switch off the electricity because I was worried that the Dean might have electrocuted himself if there were bared wires in the cable conduit. And, begging your pardon, I had no motive for getting rid of the Dean. He was very anxious to have all the Health and Safety procedures in place and the fabric maintained. My job is Clerk of Works: I have nothing to do with Chapter politics or the Choir or the Music or the School.

CANON: Very well then: have you anything more you can add?

SALT: Well, sir, if we look at the motives and opportunities, I think it is pretty clear our Virger would have had plenty of reasons to want the Dean dead.

MISS TYRELL: Me? Ridiculous.

SALT: You know that you were furious and upset about how the Dean wanted everything to change. Without a choir there would be no procession, and the services and traditions you love would all go. After so many years in charge of all the logistics, , to be reduced to little more than a dogsbody was more than you could take. And the accusation that you had lost or possibly stolen a valuable chalice was too much. You were polishing several heavy articles in the Vestry, and you knew the Dean would want to explore the vault. Your own words to him were an encouragement: the detail of the buried monks.

MISS TYRELL: It is true that I had great fears for our Cathedral and its services. And I was cleaning the brass at the time: but I did not kill him: I wasn't aware that he was coming up from the vault. We all hated the idea of what he was going to do: what about the others?

SALT: What about you, Matron?

MATRON: Well, like the others I certainly had a motive for wishing the Dean out of the way: he was proposing to close the Choir School and I would have lost my job and flat.

MISS TYRELL: (insinuatingly ) Possibly more than that.

MATRON: (menacingly ) Meaning?

Virger: Well, it was hardly the first time I'd seen you in the Parson's Nose with our "golden wonder". It's pretty obvious you two have a relationship and would hate to have to beak it up and go your separate ways. You might well find it easy to gain a similar position in another Choir school. But Cathedral organist's posts, with a nice house to go with them, don't come up so often.

SALT: And your door, Matron, is in the South West corner: in a direct line to the vault,

MATRON: My door was shut and there are no windows: I couldn't have known that the Dean was going to go down the vault and still less the precise moment when he would return up the ladder.

CRISP: And I was at the organ console. You heard me playing when all this was going on. I only stopped when the Virger told me we were all to come to the cloister- and that was at least 15 minutes, I suppose, after the Dean died.

MISS WALKER: but it would have helped very much, Canon, if the Dean had been silenced, wouldn't it?

CANON: And what do you mean by that?

MISS WALKER: I am observant and the boys talk. You are a single man, and there are plenty of stories of cathedral clergy taking a fond interest in the choristers. You would have been devastated if the choir had been dispersed- our pride and joy- and although we all have respect for your dedication, some people, like the Dean, would find it only too easy to pressurise you beyond bearing.

CANON: You know I would oppose any attempt to close the school.

MATRON: yes, I believe you would , Canon, now. But I know that the Dean was effectively blackmailing you into going along with the closure. I'm afraid that I overheard his conversation with you in his office after Mattins. I was in the Vestry sewing room, and the cope cupboard forms the back of one of my cupboards. There is a loose board and I can hear what is said.

Virger: I'm afraid I have been rather stupid and got you, Canon, into a lot of trouble. I told the Dean that I was in the silver cupboard polishing up the vessels when I heard Canon Piper talking to Binns Minor. I fell into the "safeguarding" policy trap of reporting anything and everything, even when commonsense says otherwise., and I felt I had to report the Canon speaking admiringly of Binns Minor's face, asking him to turn it, and then saying "how lovely".

CRISP: Oh I know what that was: the items Binns was to sing in the Choirboy of the Year competition.

CANON: At least I have one supporter: thank you John. I tried to explain the mistake to the Dean.

MISS WALKER: It is clear that the Dean 2weaponised" the conversation and I suppose blackmailed you into silence regarding the Chapter decision.

SALT: I didn't know about that, but it certainly gives you a motive, Canon, . But Miss Walker, you too had a strong motive: the threatened closure of the school , the loss of your lovely home, the end of a post you have occupied for many happy years. And, forgive me, but you might have found it difficult to adapt to a new post, even if one existed.

MISS WALKER (sighs): There are very few choir schools left now. Only St Paul's and Westminster Abbey and the Drome in London. Margaret Street was closed in the 1960s. St George's Windsor is now a co-ed prep school and Wells Cathedral the same. Guildford never had one at all, and even Canterbury now "out source" the education of the Choristers to St Edmund's. King's at Cambridge is about the only other. We're fast returning to the 2bare ruined choirs where once the sweet birds sang, as Shakespeare so beautifully puts it.

SALT: very interesting details, Miss, but hardly to the point, if I may say so. You had a very strong motive to finish the dean off, and the vault you knew would be open, and your door from the Cloisters is at right angles to the vault.

MISS WALKER: All right, I had a motive, but one might say the same for you Mr Salt.

SALT: What do you mean?

MISS WALKER: The Dean was keeping a close eye on the performance management of all the employees. He wasn't above levelling criticism at the Clerk of Works, and you have two boys currently at the school on choral scholarships which pay all their fees. You would find it very difficult to fund their education at a local prep school, and they are too old to try another choral scholarship elsewhere. In the normal course of events they would have gained a scholarship to an independent school, but now they will have to transfer to whichever local school has spare places. So let's face it: we all had a motive- Yes?

MATRON, VIRGER, CANON, CRISP, SALT: Yes.

CANON: Couldn't it have been an accident?

SALT, CRISP, VIRGER, MATRON, WALKER: No.

CRISP: Should we call the police?

MATRON, VIRGER, CANON, SALT, WALKER: No.

MATRON: Perhaps we should take a break for a cup of tea and resume this meeting in the Chapter House in half an hour.

WALKER, SALT, VIRGER, CRISP, CANON: Yes.

MISS TYRELL: None of us will leave the premises in the meantime.

CANON, CRISP, MATRON, WALKER, SALT: No.

(SFX: **Clock strikes quarter** )

NARRATOR: And so the group take a break, knowing that the murderer may soon be revealed: but who is it?

You now have a break yourselves, to use much as our suspects will, in refreshment, and in wondering who has killed the Dean. Please write your answers on the paper provided, with the detail of how this was done, if you like.

We shall commence the last part of the Mystery, the dénouement, in half an hour.

