

Extract from Miss Bilby and the Moss-Covered Cleric

Miss Bilby and the Moss-Covered Cleric

A Spoof Radio play to be performed with scripts and sound effects before a live audience

by

Linda Aronson
(extract only)

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Synopsis

When the vicar of Little-Willingale-on-the-Glebe dies suddenly, Inspector Gammage take it for a heart attack. but the Inspector's cook, Ms Clementine Bilby, retired Australian Opera Diva and amateur detective, smells a rat. A comedy thriller spoofing Agatha Christie and every bad radio play you ever heard.

CHARACTERS

NARRATOR	Plummy accent
MISS CLEMENTINE BILBY	In her sixties. Plummy English accent
HELENA FOOT-MANNING	In her sixties, aristocratic
INSPECTOR GAMMAGE	Middle aged North of England
IVY HOSKINS	In her twenties, twittery
MAJOR BAGSHOT	In his sixties bluff and military
HAROLD BAGSHOT	A bounder, the Major's son
DR MICHAEL TENNANT	The romantic male lead
SUPERINTENDENT GERALD "TWINKIE"	In his thirties, a war hero, aristocratic
HYDE-WORTHINGTON	US actor impersonating village bobby
SERGEANT FRANKLYN	Ancient yokel, the Major's undergardener
JOSIAH STUBBS	A slovenly barmaid, West of England
PEARL GRUBBS	Twenties, weak, plummy.
DEREK SMITHERS	An actor in rep.
CHORUS GIRL	

PAPER SELLER
PORTER
OFFICE BOY
SINGING TEACHER
VICAR
POSTMASTER
GRUFF VOICE
TELEPHONE OPERATOR

SOUND EFFECTS (WITH THE EMPHASIS ON CLICHE)

Spooky music, thrilling music, "quaint yokel" music. Footsteps on gravel, steam trains, train whistles, train doors, tinkling teacups, horses' hooves, church clock chimes, rain, traffic, London traffic, police cars, police car bells, bicycle tyres, bicycle bells, cows mooing, cat purring, typewriters, church organ, rat squeaking, telephone bells and conversations. Opera voices - male and female (since Miss Bilby has a vocal range from bass to soprano). Every predictable fade-in and fade-out.

FX FADE UP CLICHÉ RADIO THRILLER MUSIC

NARRATOR: The (*INSERT NAME OF THE THEATRE COMPANY*) presents Saturday Night Radio Theatre. This evening's play is Miss Bilby and the Case of the Moss-Covered Cleric, written by Linda Aronson

FX MORE RADIO THRILLER MUSIC

NARRATOR It was a wet October evening in Little Willingale-on-the Glebe.

FX DRIZZLE, DISTANT LIGHT TRAFFIC, CHURCH CLOCK CHIMING UNDER

NARRATOR: The church clock had barely struck five. The few antiquated gas lights boasted by Church Lane illuminated the ample shoulders and massy backside of Miss Clementine Bilby as she bicycled down the deserted thoroughfare with Inspector Gammage's fillet of pork and sixpenn'orth of scraps for Fluff the cat balanced precariously in the basket on top of her library books.

FX: BICYCLE TYRES SWISHING ALONG WET ROAD.
BICYCLE BELL.

NARRATOR: Miss Bilby was neither a light woman nor a woman in the first flush of youth (or even, it may be said, the second) and yet she

pedalled with gusto and accompanied herself to the tune of the triumphal march from *Aida* in an astonishingly powerful contralto.

FX

NARRATOR:: MISS BILBY HUMMING OVER

Some would have attributed her lung power to an early career in cross-channel swimming. The truth was that from her earliest years in the Australian outback town of Warrabadanga, Miss Bilby had wanted to be an Opera singer.

Suddenly, Miss Bilby caught a glimpse of a large object on the road. She swerved and jammed on her brakes, but it was too late.

FX MISS BILBY'S YELL, SCREECHING BIKE TYRES

NARRATOR: The bike struck the object a glancing blow.

FX A THUD, MORE SCREECHING TYRES

NARRATOR: The large object was the corpse of the vicar.

MISS BILBY: Great Heavens...! Bugger me for a hairy-nosed wombat!
Vicar? Reverend Hoskins?

NARRATOR: As she leaned over his crumpled form, she noticed that the shoulder of the Vicar's favourite tweed jacket was stained with an earthy-smelling substance. Miss Bilby reached out and touched the Vicar's head. It flopped to one side to reveal a face contorted and bloody. Miss Bilby gasped. She was about to launch into *Tu che a Dio spiegasti l'ai ...* (You who have winged your way to God, from *Lucia Di Lammermoor*), when she became aware of a footstep. She saw a shadow, an arm raised...

FX THUD ON THE HEAD, YELL, THUMP OF FALLING BODY.

NARRATOR: Miss Bilby fell to the ground unconscious. The next thing she knew she was being gently shaken by Sergeant Franklyn, the village bobby, in this instance being played by a second rate American actor called Skip

Williams employed to help sales in the United States.

FX FADE UP SERGEANT FRANKLIN'S VOICE — BAD AMERICAN ATTEMPT AT A COCKNEY ACCENT (Dick Van DYKE IN MARY POPPINS)

FRANKLIN: Well blow me down, Miss Bilby, are you 'orright?

MISS BILBY: (DISTRACTED) Oh dear, my head ...

FRANKLIN: Blimey, Ma'am, you seem to have 'ad a bit of a spill ...

MISS BILBY: Oh Sergeant Franklin, thank heavens you're here, the vicar has met with a terrible accident ...

FRANKLIN: The vicar ...?

MISS BILBY: Why yes! Look! Right behind you, he ...

FX SPOOKY MUSIC UNDER

FRANKLIN: Begging your pardon, Ma'am, there's nothing 'ere now... That is, except your parcels and library books. Hm, blimey what's this? *The Case of the Seven Bloody Corpses, Murder in the Casino, Inspector Parker Wins Again...!!*

MISS BILBY: Sergeant, I did **not** imagine the body, I ... Wait! What time is it?

FRANKLIN: It's just after five pawst five, Ma'am.

MISS BILBY: Do you mean I have been unconscious for only a few minutes...! Surely not! I insist upon telephoning the Vicarage ...

FRANKLIN: As you like, Ma'am ... Mind your step ...

FX FADE OUT. FADE UP TELEPHONE RINGING

VICAR (PLUMMILY, PHONE) Hallo? St Stephen's Vicarage, Little Willingale-on-the Glebe.

FRANKLIN: Oh! Good evenin' Vicar! This is Sergeant Franklin, sir.

VICAR (PHONE) Yes, ergeant? Is anything wrong?

FRANKLIN: No sir, not at all, sir. We had a report... That is, one of your parishioners thought you might have been ... unwell ... Sorry to trouble you, sir. Good evening.

VICAR (PHONE) Good evening to you.

FX PHONE BEING HUNG UP

MISS BILBY: Don't say anything, to anyone, Sergeant Franklin. This is one occasion upon which I am delighted to have been mistaken.

FRANKLIN: Miss Bilby, if it's not an intrusion, may I ask when the Parish is to 'ave the 'onour of your next recital?

MISS BILBY: Oh, I shall be doing my usual Christmas selection in early December, Sergeant. A little Bach, a swag of Handel.

FRANKLIN: Well, I'm sure we shall all look forward to it, Ma'am.

FX FADE OUT

NARRATOR: As Miss Bilby cycled home she remained convinced that she had seen the vicar's body. Yet how could this be? The Vicar was a quiet and retiring man with an interest in Roman coins. He was certainly not the kind to go in for practical jokes. It was all most perturbing

FX FADE UP BACK DOOR CLOSING, CAT MIAOWING.

NARRATOR Miss Bilby arrived home just as the Inspector was starting to worry.

INSPECTOR: Miss Bilby, wherever 'ave you been!

MISS BILBY I'm so sorry, Inspector, I went bum over bootstraps orf my bicycle.

INSPECTOR Fluff and me was starting to get worried! Oops, watch your step! Fluff's brought home another rat for us, naughty old chap!

FX CAT PURRING

MISS BILBY: You're hungry, aren't you Fluff. Well, your

supper won't be long now. And your Fillet of Pork will be ready in a jiffy, Inspector!

FX CLATTERING OF POTS. FADE OUT

INSPECTOR: Time enough then for another pipe. Right you are, Miss Bilby...

FX TAP RUNNING, BUBBLING POTS, PLUS MISS BILBY HUMMING UNDER

NARRATOR: The Inspector, apart from his police duties, was also Chief Warlock in the Little Willingale coven. He had at first employed Miss Bilby on a temporary basis, but she had wrought such miracles with steak and kidney and an overgrown kitchen garden that the Inspector begged her to accept a permanent position. It had been a hard decision for Miss Bilby. For genius as she was at the domestic arts, her heart lay far away from the kitchen range and the potting shed in the history-laden splendours of Covent Garden.

FX TRAFFIC, LONDON BUS ENGINE, COCKNEY CONDUCTOR SHOUTING "EARLS' CAWT" UNDER. FADE UP CHATTERING TEETH UNDER.

NARRATOR Miss Bilby had come to London from Warrabadanga dreaming of stardom, but alas, after a few appearances as a cowgirl in the chorus of *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* at the Croydon Palais, Miss Bilby found the London winters harsh and her debts increasingly difficult to pay. Domestic employment was her only option, so when the Inspector made his offer, she felt she could not refuse.

INSPECTOR (O.M) There you go, Miss Bilby, your very own wood-fired stove. Here's the axe. One day off a month and sleep in til six fifteen of a Sunday...

NARRATOR And so the years passes, and a fascination with murder mysteries real and fictitious – remained her passion. And there was, as it happened, a curious overlap between the two. For, as Miss Bilby frequently asserted to her many friends in Little Willingale-on-the-Glebe, particularly Miss Helena Foot-

Manning, who shared her love of " a good complicated *whodunnit*", there was never a murder committed in the real world which did not have a precedent somewhere in the tortuous plots of Grand Opera!

FX CAT PURRING, SPOON SCRAPING DISH CONTINUE
COOKING NOISES UNDER

MISS BILBY: Here, Fluff ...

FX CROCKERY AND CUTLERY

INSPECTOR: (MOUTH FULL) By gum, Miss Bilby, if you 'aven't done it again! These potatoes are nothing short of brilliant!

MISS BILBY: Thank you Inspector...

INSPECTOR: What a blow-out! And now, if I may trouble you? The piece of pork?

FX BUTCHER'S PAPER RUSTLING

MISS BILBY: I've wrapped it in two layers of butcher's paper with the ceremonial pitchfork.

INSPECTOR: Ee, that's a beauty, Miss Bilby! I always say, if you can't lay your hands on a fresh bit of virgin's liver for a sacrifice, go for a nice piece of pork.

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