



TUMBLING DOWN

by Peter Hale

EXCERPT

A SMITH SCRIPT

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A One-Act Play
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CHARACTERS

Giles Henderson:	reclusive, author of popular novels set in 1920s, ex-army officer, 70s
Amanda Willoughby:	educated, well-bred but down-to-earth, 70s
Trish:	Giles' long-standing loyal PA, middle-aged, middle-class
Recorded voices:	a BBC newsreader and a reporter

TUMBLING DOWN

Suffolk, 2012. Giles' summerhouse in the country. A summer evening

Giles is sitting at a table to one side of the stage, on which there is a laptop computer connected to the internet. There is a wicker or similar arm chair at the other side.

TRISH *[entering]*: I heard you come back. I thought I'd find you out here

GILES: Ah, Trish, guardian of my life, you know me too well. In times of stress, a swift retreat to the summerhouse. Anyway, what's the reaction been?

TRISH: It has been on the 6 o'clock news

GILES: Much?

TRISH: Quite a detailed story, I'm afraid

GILES: Did they mention my books?

TRISH: Oh yes. According to the BBC you are well-known for your detective novels

GILES: My hero, Lieutenant Alexander Caxton, is not a detective, he's a Military Policeman. God, the ignorance of the BBC these days!

TRISH: At least they mentioned your books

GILES: Hmm. Have you seen any reporters outside?

TRISH: Not yet. You're not known as a recluse without a reason. You're not easy to find. A taxi did go past on the lane a few minutes ago, though

GILES: Has it gone back yet?

TRISH: I haven't seen it. May have gone the other way.

GILES: Hmm. Can I watch the news now do you think?

TRISH: You remember how to get iPlayer?

GILES: Of course...

TRISH [*hovering behind Giles*]: Is the internet working? Type in 'BBC.co.uk'....

GILES: Trish, I am not completely batty yet.

TRISH: Sorry, Giles. Have you clicked on iPlayer?

GILES [*pointing at screen*]: Yes. There - Six O'clock News

TRISH: It was about ten minutes in

GILES: So I'm not the lead story, then?

TRISH: No, that was another shooting of a child. Then came the Middle East crisis

GILES: OK. I've got it up on the screen.

TRISH and GILES [*simultaneously*]: Just move the slider ...

GILES: Ten minutes?

TRISH: Ten minutes

GILES: Right. Here goes. You go back to the house and keep an eye out

TRISH: All right. I'll let you know if you're on "Newsnight" [*exits*]

GILES: Yes, keep me posted.

[GILES watches the screen. During the next sequence AMANDA enters the summerhouse from the other side and sits in the other chair. GILES has his back to her and so does not notice her]

BBC NEWSREADER [*on the internet*]: ...of the UN resolution will be known tomorrow. Back in Britain, reclusive writer Giles Henderson was arrested today at Heathrow Airport after allegedly abusing a party of diplomats from Argentina. Our reporter John Davies is at the scene. John?

REPORTER [*on internet*]: Yes, Kirsty. Well, as viewers may know Giles Henderson has kept very much out of the public eye for decades, despite the popularity of his detective novels set in India the 1920s. I'm told that at about ten o'clock this morning he broke past security guards and into the VIP lounge where he marched up to three senior Argentinean army officers on the diplomatic mission. It seems he became aggressive and in the words of one witness confronted them, shook his fist and shouted "Las Malvinas son britanicas", which is Spanish for "The Falkland Islands are British".

Security g...*[the internet connection buffers. GILES follows the circle on the screen with his head]*

..guards intervened and he was led away and handed over to the police, where he is facing charges of...*[internet buffers]*

GILES: "Threatening behaviour"

REPORTER:threatening behaviour. Mr Henderson...*[internet buffers]*

GILES *[switches off the computer. To himself]*: There should be an analogy for living in the country and expecting fast broadband. Moving next door to a brothel and expecting nuns for neighbours.....

AMANDA: Not one of your better ones – Don't turn round!

GILES: Trish?

AMANDA: Don't turn round!

GILES: You're not Trish

AMANDA: I probably sound a little older than Trish..

GILES: Why can't I turn round? Have you got a gun pointing at me?

AMANDA: I might have

GILES: Do I know you?

AMANDA: You'll find out when I let you turn round. I just want to look at the back of your head. That's the last thing I remember seeing of you. You've gone grey, of course, but you still hold your head up high. Much less hair than I remember, though – less, even, than in the picture on your last book.

GILES: Have you read it?

AMANDA: No.

GILES: Have you read any of my books?

AMANDA: No

GILES: Do you read books?

AMANDA: Oh yes. Everything from Dickens to Will Self. But not detective novels

GILES: Mine are not detective novels. Can I turn round now?

AMANDA: No.

GILES: Never mind. You know, I'm rather enjoying this little mystery. I might use this device in my next book.

AMANDA: Your device of a military policeman in the 1920s in India doesn't disguise the fact Alexander Caxton is cobbled together from heroes rehashed from Conan Doyle and John Buchan

GILES: At least I am using high quality ingredients in my hash.. Do you read those authors, by any chance?

AMANDA: Giles, what do I say? If I say yes you'll be hurt because I prefer the originals. If I say no, I will at least be consistent with my other reading habits.

GILES: The 1920s were a critical period in our country's history and in its relationship with its Empire and with other races. I am helping my fellow countrymen fully to appreciate the influence they have on life today. Would you like me to turn round now?

AMANDA: Not yet

GILES: Much as I enjoy literary and historical conversations with an evidently well-read and educated lady, I do prefer them face to face.

AMANDA: And over a bottle of wine?

GILES: That would be perfect

AMANDA: Followed by bed?

GILES *[pause]*: This is more Ian Fleming than Conan Doyle. Have you got a gun?

AMANDA: What would your hero do if I had?