

A man in a black top hat, tuxedo, and bow tie stands in a workshop, shouting with his mouth wide open and his right arm raised, pointing his index finger towards the top of the frame. He is positioned in the center of the image. To his left is a workbench with a red vise holding a long metal rod. To his right is a large sack of material on a wooden cart. The background is a brick wall with a metal ring handle. The lighting is warm and dramatic, highlighting the man and the workbench.

The Patent Office Robbery

a melodrama
for a young audience

by

Andrew Hilton

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Cover:
Richard Bremmer as Leonard Crisp

*The Patent Office Robbery** was commissioned and first performed by the Molecule Theatre Company at the Mermaid Theatre, London, on 19th September 1978, with the following cast of five:

Leonard Crisp	-	Richard Bremmer
Seddon	-	Paul Large
Adam Taylor	-	Antony Simons
Ellie Taylor	-	Lilian Evans
P.C. Thumb		
& all other roles	-	Dudley Rogers
<i>Director</i>	-	<i>Sally Miles</i>
<i>Scientific Deviser</i>	-	<i>Geoffrey Sneed</i>
<i>Composer</i>	-	<i>Colin Tarn</i>
<i>Pianist</i>	-	<i>Martin Turner</i>
<i>Designer</i>	-	<i>Trewin Copplestone</i>
<i>Lighting</i>	-	<i>Peter Sutton</i>

Following its Mermaid Theatre run, then played a 23-week U.K tour. It then enjoyed two revivals - and two further tours - with the same design and music, with the following companies:

1983

Leonard Crisp	-	Ron Meadows
Seddon	-	Paul Large
Adam Taylor	-	David Gilbrook
Ellie Taylor	-	Jo Miles
P.C. Thumb & all other roles	-	Kevin Martin
<i>Director</i>	-	<i>Sally Miles</i>
<i>Pianist</i>	-	<i>Roger Cutts</i>

1986

Leonard Crisp	-	Peter Czajkowski
Seddon	-	Tom Keller
Adam Taylor	-	Mark Dewison
Ellie Taylor	-	Kathy Milne
P.C. Thumb & all other roles	-	Kevin Dukes
<i>Director</i>	-	<i>Harry Sanders</i>
<i>Pianist</i>	-	<i>John O'Connell</i>

**The play was originally titled 'The Snatch!'*

Characters

Leonard Crisp

P.C. Thumb

Seddon

Adam Taylor

Ellie Taylor

Patent Officer

Caretaker

Newspaper Girl

Bulgarian Agent

Voice of Works Official

The play is set in the City of London in the late nineteenth century

Act One

Scene 1

By the Blackfriars Engineering Company. Factory gates, a small door within one. A lighted gas-lamp.

Music.

Enter Crisp. Overcoat, scarf, hat, newspaper. He looks around as if expecting someone. Enter P.C. Thumb. Crisp disappears behind his newspaper. Thumb patrols past him. Crisp lowers the newspaper and watches. Thumb turns. Crisp disappears again. Thumb turns away, but as Crisp's face appears again, turns back quickly. Quickly Crisp's face disappears. Thumb moves silently and slowly towards Crisp. Raising his truncheon in one hand, with the other he reaches to snatch the newspaper from Crisp's grasp ...

Thumb All right, you - !

Crisp Constable?

Thumb Mr. Crisp - you, sir! I'm sorry, sir. I took you for a villain, 'idin' there behind that paper!

Crisp Hiding? What - ?

Thumb No offence! I just couldn't ... Your face, see, be'ind the ... phew! You gets very jumpy this time o' night, sir. Partic'ly down 'ere by the river. My most 'umble apologies.

Crisp Oh, I see! A tall, dark figure like me, skulking here in the shadows on a cold evening - yes, it might seem a little suspicious.

Thumb I wouldn't suspect a respectable engineer like yourself, sir, not of anything I wouldn't. But 'til we know 'oo we're dealin' with, you understand ... There's so many o' these villains about, Mr. Crisp!

Crisp Is that really so?

Thumb As sure as my name's Thumb. An' ordin'ry an' decent lookin' people, some of 'em. 'Er Majesty, Queen Victoria, is not 'appy about it. Not 'appy at all. She's been 'eard to say - in private you know - that were she to walk down one of our London streets - even in broad daylight - she'd be surprised to meet an honest man!

Crisp Good heavens!

Thumb True, sir! On our toes, us lads in the Force. I see a villain, Mr. Crisp, I nab 'im. Thumb's thumb in the small of 'is back, no questions asked!

Crisp I'm very pleased to hear it, Mr. Thumb. We respectable citizens may rely on you then?

Thumb I think I can say - 'and on heart - I can sniff out villainy. If I was a villain, sir, standin' where you're standin' now, I'd be tremblin' in me boots! Well, I'll be

on my way. Beg pardon for mistakin' you.

Crisp Not at all.

Thumb Won't 'appen again. Eyes like razors!

Enter Seddon. An involuntary flinch as he sees Thumb.

Don't catch your death, now. Good evenin', sir!

Crisp Good evening.

Thumb Evenin', lad!

Seddon Evenin', Constable.

Exit Thumb. Seddon knocks on the small factory-gate door. It opens slightly.

Voice Oh, it's you. What do you want now?

Seddon I want to speak t' manager. Mr. Blisset.

Voice You can't.

Seddon But -

Voice Look, Seddon, 'ow many times do we have to tell you, we don't employ no gaol-birds 'ere!

Seddon But, please -

Voice Yer wastin' yer time, mate. Clear off!

The door slams. Seddon stands dejected for a moment, then turns to go.

Crisp Still out of luck?

Seddon You what?

Crisp Seddon's the name, isn't it?

Seddon Well?

Crisp I've seen you here before, Seddon. Three times in the last week.

Seddon Oh ay? An' what business it it o' yours?

Crisp There's a chance I could help you. You've been trying to get your job back.

Seddon Ay. On t' night-shift.

Crisp How come you lost it?

Seddon That's my business. Who are you, anyway?

Crisp Oh, come on, Seddon, out with it - you've been in prison, haven't you?

Seddon Ay.

Crisp What for? What had you done?

Seddon Bit o' burglary, smash an' grab an' that. Up in Manchester where I come from. It were years ago! I done me time for it an' all. Three year in Strangeways. When I got out I thought I'd start a new life. Come down to London an' be an engineer. Always wanted to be an engineer. But bein' in prison, it follers you everywhere.

They find out sooner or later an' out you go! If summat doesn't turn up soon I shall 'ave to stick to crime after all.

Crisp Why don't you?

Seddon Eh?

Crisp You and I could make an excellent team.

Seddon What - ?

Crisp Seddon, I'm offering you the chance of a lifetime. Learn to be an engineer - and make your fortune at the same time!

Seddon 'Ow could I do that?

Crisp A robbery. With me. Tomorrow night.

Seddon Oh! An' what would a robbery have to do with engineerin'?

Crisp Let's just say I am no ordinary robber. Well? There'd be five hundred pounds in it for you.

Seddon Five 'undred pound!

Crisp That's right. Think it over. But quickly.

He hands Seddon a small piece of paper.

Here's where to find me. If you decide to join me, be there tomorrow at ten o'clock sharp. Otherwise I'll count you out and do the job on my own. Understood?

Seddon Ay. Ay, well there's not much else for me now, is there? 'Least, that's 'ow it looks. I reckon you might well see me then.

Crisp You'll never regret it, you can take my word for - that policeman's coming back! You'd better hop it.

Seddon Ay, right!

Crisp Two o'clock tomorrow!

Seddon looks at Crisp, then exits.

Enter Thumb.

Thumb Still 'ere, Mr. Crisp!

Crisp Just on my way, Constable. I like to spend a few minutes in the air, contemplate the magnificence of our great city. Even on a night like this.

Thumb *[Bewildered]* I'm sure. Very wise. Only wish all o' them out on the streets at this time o' night 'ad nothing more criminal in mind. Still, that's life.

Crisp Quite. Well, it'll be turning very cold shortly. Goodnight.

Thumb Goodnight, sir! 'Ave a good day tomorrow, won't you!

Crisp I shall, Constable. Thank you.

Music

Exeunt

Scene 2

The next morning. Crisp's Workshop in a Thameside warehouse. Sets of engineering drawings, tools and other equipment. Two doors: one, a sliding gate, gives directly to the river; the other leads to the street outside.

Crisp is tinkering with a screw-jack. A knock at the street door.

Adam [Off] Mr. Crisp! Mr. Crisp!

Crisp frowns, conceals the screw-jack, unlocks and opens the door. Enter Adam. He is young, and poorly dressed.

Crisp What is it, Adam?

Adam I'm just back from the foundry, Mr. Crisp. They asked me to bring you these wheels.

He hands Crisp four small, railway-type iron wheels.

They said you were expecting them.

Crisp Ah, yes I was. Thank you ... Yes, these should do the job.

Adam What's that, Mr. Crisp?

Crisp Mm? ... Oh, nothing - just a small experiment.

Adam Well, I'd better get back to work. We're hoping to finish our invention today. Good luck with the experiment.

Crisp Oh yes - thank you!

Exit Adam. Crisp relocks the door, then looks again at the wheels.

Excellent!

He is fixing the wheels to the axles on a small trolley when there is another knock on the street door. He glances at his pocket-watch.

Who is it?

Seddon [Off] Seddon.

Crisp unlocks and opens the door. Enter Seddon.

Crisp Come in, Seddon! So - you've decided to join me.

Seddon Ay ... ay, I have.

Crisp Splendid!

Seddon On one condition, though ...

Crisp What's that?

Seddon No violence. No-one gettin' 'urt like. I've never gone in for that.

Crisp Heavens, you needn't worry yourself on that score. We shall use skill, not force.

Seddon Ay ... right, I see.

- Crisp** It's a deal then, is it? Five hundred pounds for you tomorrow when the job is done?
- Seddon** Ay, it's a deal!
- Crisp** Good. My name is Crisp. Leonard Crisp. I'm an engineer. This is my workshop.
- Seddon** You've a lot of stuff, haven't you?
- Crisp** Yes, I daresay. Tools, working drawings, some old inventions of mine.
- Seddon** You're an inventor an' all!
- Crisp** No! ... No, not anymore. I was an inventor. When I was young. I gave that side of it up.
- Seddon** But you are still an engineer?
- Crisp** Certainly, yes.
- Seddon** What makes you want to turn to crime, then?
- Crisp** I have my reasons. There's no time to waste. Let's get down to business.
- Seddon** Ay. What are we going to do?
- Crisp** We are going to snatch a safe.
- Seddon** Eh?
- Crisp** A steel safe. Snatch it from an office in the City and bring it back here.
- Seddon** 'Ow big is it?
- Crisp** A good size. About a metre high.
- Seddon** It'll weigh a ton! We'll never move it.
- Crisp** We shall. The techniques are simple. We shall bring it back here, crack the combination, seize the contents, then get rid of the safe into the river.

He pulls open the river door.

Here, see ...

Seddon almost falls into the Thames.

Careful!

- Seddon** It's a straight drop into 'water!
- Crisp** Exactly. And it's never less than three fathoms deep, even at low tide. The safe will just disappear in the mud at the bottom. Clever, don't you think?
- Seddon** Ay ... But why do we 'ave to bring it back 'ere? Why can't we just break into it on the spot like?
- Crisp** There'll be a caretaker in the building and a policeman on patrol in the street. So gelignite's out of the question. Cracking the combination will take time and will be better done back here. But more than that, Seddon, it's a matter of principle. This robbery is going to be a sensation - a triumph of engineering skill.

Seddon You're daft, you are. I'm gettin' out o' this.

Seddon makes for the door. Crisp beats him to it, locks it and smartly withdraws the key.

Crisp Oh no, you're not! You can't change your mind now! You know quite enough about this scheme already. You're in it 'til that safe's at the bottom of the river and you're as guilty of the crime as I am! Otherwise – I will chain you to that ring in the wall there and leave you there 'til you starve!

Seddon Oh!

Crisp Simple choice. Which is it to be?

Seddon I ... I'm with you then, Mr. Crisp!

Crisp There'll be no more changes of mind?

Seddon No, Mr. Crisp.

Crisp Good. You can trust me, Seddon - I do know what I'm doing!

Seddon Ay ... right.

Crisp So ... The safe is in an office with a window that overlooks the street. We shall take the safe out through that window.

Seddon Eh?

Crisp Perfectly possible! And there's no alternative. By that stage we shall have got the safe onto this trolley. We shall lower it to the pavement and simply push it back here. Is that clear?

Seddon Ay. But 'ow do we do it?

Crisp We're going to rehearse how we do it now. Just gone a quarter past ten - six hours before we have to leave. Ample. I've got together everything we need. It's a matter of planning and practice, that's all. Let's start with a model of the safe ...

He shifts a tea-chest, to which small feet have been added, to the centre of the room.

This is the right size and shape. Not as heavy as the real thing, of course - nowhere near - but it'll do to practise on. The first job is to raise it off the floor so that we can get that trolley underneath. How are we going to do that?

Seddon Search me! It'll be far too 'eavy to lift. Even the two of us together.

Crisp Not if we use a machine.

Crisp takes up a long steel pole with a flattened end.

This pole should do for a start.

Seddon You call that a machine?

Crisp If I can use it as a lever to lift up the safe, yes I do.

He picks up a wooden block and places it by the chest.

A fulcrum, to pivot it on ...

He levers up the chest.

There. How's that?

Seddon Ay, but that's just a tea-chest. You couldn't do that with the real thing.

Crisp Couldn't I? Do you think you could lift me off the ground, Seddon?

Seddon No - you're bigger than me!

Crisp Have a try. Go on. Try!

Seddon tries but fails to lift Crisp.

Seddon Hopeless!

Crisp What if I sit here on the chest? See if you can lift both me and the chest off the floor using the lever.

Crisp sits on the chest, facing Seddon.

Seddon Oh, right.

Seddon pushes down on the lever.

Ee, I can, can't I?

Crisp Of course you can! And it's easy, isn't it!

Seddon [*Levering again*] Ay ... Ay, it is. 'Ow's that, then?

Crisp Just do it again ... Hold it there. Now, how far have you lifted me up?

Seddon Eh?

Crisp How far is the chest off the ground?

Seddon Oh, about ... ten centimetres.

Crisp Right. And how far has your hand had to push down?

Seddon [*Levering again, slowly*] Er ... about twenty ... no, thirty centimetres, I should think.

Crisp Yes! You've had to push down thirty centimetres to lift me just ten centimetres. That's how the lever works, Seddon, and that's why it's a machine. It does a swap for you, you see. You push down three times as far as I move up. But in return it's about three times as easy as it would be without the machine. Yes?

Seddon Ay ... I think so.

Crisp That's why, with the help of a long lever we should just about be able to get a heavy steel safe off the floor. So ... if you lever the chest up ... go on ... I'll slip these blocks underneath to hold it there ... like that ... Now, take the lever round to the other side, and we'll do the same again.

Seddon Right.

He takes the lever, but not the block.

Crisp Don't forget the fulcrum.

Seddon Eh?

Crisp The fulcrum. The lever won't work without it.

Seddon Oh ... no.

He picks up the fulcrum and places it.

Right. Ready with more blocks?

Crisp Yes.

Seddon 'Ere goes, then ...

He levers the chest up and Crisp slips two more blocks underneath.

Crisp There. Well done. Do you still think I'm 'daft'?

Seddon No, Mr. Crisp. But I still don't see 'ow we get it any further. That trolley won't go under it like that.

Crisp I've thought of that. We need another machine now ... Here, see. A screw-jack. I've made two of these especially for tonight.

Seddon *[Peering at it]* I've 'eard about them. Never seen one work before, though.

Crisp Then watch ...

Crisp starts to jack one side of the chest up.

As I turn the screw with this handle, this little platform here, supporting the chest, moves up the screw. Very slowly, you see ... but as my hand is moving so much further - round and round in these big circles - I can use it to lift a very heavy weight.

Seddon Like the lever, you mean! Another sort of swap!

Crisp Exactly! My hand must be moving ... what, about a hundred centimetres for every one centimetre I lift the chest ... There, that should be enough. Now you do the other side. Here's the other jack ...

A knock on the door.

Adam *[Off]* Mr. Crisp! Mr. Crisp!

Crisp Curse it! What does he want now?

Seddon *[Alarmed]* Who is it?

Crisp Adam Taylor. He and his sister Ellie have the workshop next door. Think they're going to be great inventors one day!



Seddon Are you going to let 'im in?

Crisp *[Dismantling the model]* I shall have to. He knows I'm here.

Seddon But -

Crisp Just act naturally, Seddon! You're my new apprentice - yes?

Seddon Ay ... right.

Crisp unlocks and opens the door.

Crisp Adam. What can I do for you?

Adam I was just wondering, Mr. Crisp ... Oh!

Crisp Of course, you haven't met my new apprentice, Mr. Seddon, have you?

Adam No.

Crisp Seddon, this is Adam Taylor. Engineer and inventor.

Adam How d'you do, Mr. Seddon!

Seddon Er ... 'ow d'you do!

Crisp Seddon is just learning some simple machines, Adam. He shows great promise! Don't you, Seddon?

Seddon Ay ... 'ope so, Mr. Crisp.

Crisp Well, is there something I can - ?

Adam No, I just thought Ellie must be with you. She went out to get some small bolts. I heard voices in here, so I thought it must be her come back.

Crisp We haven't seen her.

Ellie *[Off]* Adam! Adam!

Adam Oh, there she is! I'm here, Ellie! Here with Mr. Crisp!

Crisp *[Aside]* Curse it!

Ellie appears at the door.

Ellie Hello! Hello, Mr. Crisp!

Adam I was just looking for you, Ellie. Have you got the bolts?

Ellie Yes, here -

Adam Oh, sorry! This is Mr. Crisp's new apprentice, Mr. Seddon. My sister, Ellie.

Seddon 'Ello.

Ellie Nice to meet you, Mr. Seddon.

Adam We're ready to assemble, Ellie! I've collected the springs from the foundry. They've done them beautifully.

Ellie That's wonderful!

Crisp What is this, Adam?

- Adam** Our first invention, Mr. Crisp. It's an improved kind of mangle. You know, for squeezing the water out of washing.
- Ellie** We've made it spring-loaded, so you can set it specially for each thing you put through it. It's going to work so much better!
- Crisp** I see. So this could be a success for you at last?
- Ellie** We hope so! Then we could afford a proper home - and a proper workshop, couldn't we?
- Adam** Yes!
- Crisp** Good. Good, I'm very pleased to hear it!
- Ellie** Thanks! Come on, Adam - let's go and get it finished!
- Adam** Right! Bye, Mr. Crisp, Mr. Seddon!
- Crisp** Oh, Adam, Ellie -
- Adam** Yes?
- Crisp** You will patent this invention of yours, won't you? Before anyone else finds out what it is.
- Adam** We hadn't thought of that.
- Crisp** You must. You can't be too careful. If I were you I should take the plans along to the Patent Office this very afternoon.
- Adam** Right, Mr. Crisp, we will. D'you know what time the Patent Office shuts?
- Crisp** Six o'clock sharp.
- Adam** Right. Southampton Buildings, isn't it? Not far. We'll be there before then. Thanks, Mr. Crisp.
- Ellie** Yes, thanks! Bye!

Exeunt Adam and Ellie. Crisp shuts and locks the door.

- Seddon** What's 'patent it' mean?
- Crisp** You apply for a certificate - to prove that the invention's yours and no-one else's. So the idea can't be snatched away from you and developed by someone else.
- Seddon** Oh!
- Crisp** That should wipe the smiles off their faces!
- Seddon** What?
- Crisp** Mm? ... Nothing! Nothing, Seddon - forget it! We must get on. Where were we? Oh yes, we'd just got one side of the safe jacked up, hadn't we? Let's put it back how it was.

They restore the model.

- There. You jack up the other side now.
- Seddon** Right.

Seddon places the jack, fits the handle and starts to turn it.

Seddon It's slow, isn't it!

Crisp When you have a real weight to deal with you'll be glad of that.

Seddon Ay ... Is that enough?

Crisp Let's see ...

He slips the trolley underneath the chest.

Yes, that's it ... Now let's lower the safe onto it ... Slowly!

They jack the chest down onto the trolley.

There ... Excellent! Stage one complete!

Seddon What do we do next?

Crisp We fix the safe to the trolley, then get them both up onto the windowsill.
And to do that we use yet another machine.

Seddon What's that then?

Crisp The slope!

Seddon Eh? You can't call a slope a machine!

Crisp Why not?

Seddon Well! ... Slopes don't move, or turn or anythin', do they!

Crisp So? They can help us, can't they - just like the lever and the screw? Look...

Crisp picks up a large, right-angled wedge.

Crisp This wedge is a small slope, isn't it?

Seddon 'Spose so.

Crisp If this was ten metres high and you wanted to get to the top you'd walk up here, wouldn't you? Not climb up here.

Seddon Oh, I see! You mean a slope is a long, but like an easy way to climb up an 'ill.

Crisp Exactly! Up a hill - or onto a windowsill! Another swap, Seddon. The slope is longer than the straight climb up, but it's much less of an effort.

Seddon Ay ... I see.

Crisp To engineers like us, that makes it a machine. And you say slopes never turn ... ?

He picks up a length of wooden pole, around which a thick rope is wound.

Crisp Well, what do you make of this?

Seddon It's a pole with a bit o' rope wound round it.

Crisp Yes, that's what it is. But doesn't it remind you of something? One of our machines?

Seddon I don't think so ... Lever? No, it's not like that ... No, you've foxed me there, Mr. Crisp.

Crisp holds the pole vertically, close to a screw-jack.

Oh, I see! It's like the screw, i'n't it?

Crisp Precisely.

Seddon I'll tell you somethin' else it's like an' all! The 'elter skelter I used to slide down when I was a kid! Round an' round an' round you went - wheeeeeeeeeeeee - right from top t' bottom!

Crisp Good! So what is it that goes round and round a helter skelter, and round and round a screw?

Seddon I don't foller you.

Crisp Put your foot on that end of the rope ... That's it. Now...

Keeping the pole vertical, Crisp unrolls the rope by moving the pole away from Seddon. The rope then forms a slope from the floor to the top of the pole. The wedge just happens to be on the floor underneath it, echoing the image.

What does it look like now?

Seddon It's a slope!

Crisp Yes! That's what a screw is! A long thin slope wound round a pole!

Seddon So they're cousins like - the slope and the screw!

Crisp I'd never thought of it like that – yes! You'll make an engineer yet! But come, back to our plans - time is getting on. The slope will certainly help us to lift the safe onto the windowsill.

Seddon Still be 'ard, though, won't it -

Crisp Very hard! And the slope alone won't be enough. We shall need to use our fourth machine at the same time. The wheel-and-axle!

Seddon You mean wheels on t' trolley?

Crisp No, I mean another kind of wheel-and-axle. One that - like the lever, the screw and the slope - will give us a swap. A swap that will make it easier to haul the safe up the slope. You'll see how that works later.

Seddon Oh, right ...

Crisp Then, with the safe on the windowsill, we shall come to our last problem - how to lift it into the air and lower it carefully into the street. For that, Seddon, we shall use our fifth and final machine - the pulley!

Seddon What's one o' them?

Crisp You'll see that shortly. But first, I think we should go right back to the beginning and make sure we know exactly what we're doing with the lever, the screw-jacks and the trolley. Agreed?

Seddon Ay!

Crisp *[Dismantling the model]* Tonight there must be no mistakes!

Seddon No, Mr. Crisp!

Crisp Right. Then let's start again!

Music.

They set to work as the lights fade.

Scene 3

Adam and Ellie's Room. A small, impoverished workshop-home.

Adam and Ellie, dressed in overalls, are just finishing fitting a spring-loading device to a large iron mangle.

Ellie There ... that's the last nut on this side!

Adam And ... on this! That's it - finished!

Ellie It looks a bit peculiar, doesn't it?

Adam Yes, but it won't - not when it's all produced as one. Not bits of old and new.

Ellie No. Anyway, never mind how it looks - let's see how it works

Adam Yes!

Ellie Here's the washing, all still full of water ...

Adam And a bucket - so we don't have a flood.

Ellie Now ... let's start with something really thin, shall we?

Adam Yes - something we always had to wring out by hand before.

Ellie Here, one of your shirts.

Adam Right. I know - *(starting to tighten a wing-nut on the mangle top)* first let's set the rollers just about as tight as they always used to be without our adjustable springs ... That's it!

Ellie Bit tighter.

Adam There?

Ellie Yes, I should think so.

Adam Now ... let's put it through, then see if we can get it even drier by tightening up the springs.

Ellie Right.

Adam feeds the shirt in. Ellie turns the wheel.

Ellie How is it? Quite a lot of water came out.

Adam Yes ... but, see - I can still wring more out by hand.

Ellie Right. Let's tighten up the springs, make the rollers really squeeze it this time ...

They screw down the springs as tight as they can. Again Adam feeds in the shirt and Ellie turns the wheel.

Adam More coming out!

Ellie Yes! ... Can you wring any more out of it now?

Adam wrings for all he is worth.



Adam No, not a drop! It works, Ellie! It works, it works!

Both Yippee!

Adam throws the shirt up into the air and lets it come down on his head.

Adam Now we can really call ourselves inventors, can't we!

Ellie Yes! Everyone's going to want one, I know they are! Think of all the sore hands it'll save! Let's mangle some more!

Adam Yes! Something thick next! I'll reset the rollers ...

Adam readjusts the springs, while Ellie searches in the washing.

Ellie Here - your corduroy trousers. We could never put these through at all before.

Adam Right. Here, I'll turn it this time ... Ready?

Ellie Ready! ... That's it, it's through! ... And I can't wring another drop out of it! Just as we planned, Adam - however thick or thin it is, our mangle will do it!

Adam Of course! Come on, let's do the rest!

They continue mangling, adjusting the springs when necessary, and as they do, they sing:

*Our ambition's always been
to be the inventors of a fine machine.
Now we've come up with this scheme
to squeeze the washing dry!*

*Oh, turn, turn the mangle-wheel,
our own new-fangled mangle-wheel.
Turn, turn the mangle-wheel
and squeeze the washing dry!*

*With this mangle there will be
no more wringing endlessly,
no more aching hands you see
to squeeze the washing dry!*

Oh, turn, turn etc ...

Adam takes a very long and narrow towel from the bucket.

Adam Right ... this is the last!

He feeds it in. Ellie turns the wheel.

Ellie It's strong, this mangle, isn't it!

Adam Very! ... Hey, not so fast!

Ellie Try stopping me!

Adam I can't ...

Ellie Pull! ...You're a weakling, Adam!

Adam I'm not! ... It's the wheel ... giving you so much leverage!

He lets go and falls back on the floor, laughing. Ellie finishes the towel.

You win! Phew! So that's the lot, isn't it?

Ellie Yes. Just hang it up and so much for this week's washing!

Adam Ellie, look at the time - almost five o'clock! The Patent Office - it shuts at six!

Ellie Oh my goodness, I'd forgotten!

Adam We must go at once. Leave that till we get back. Here, put your coat on.

Ellie Thanks ... You grab the plans.

Adam Where are they? ... Here ... Right. All ready?

Ellie All ready! Let's go and apply for our first patent!

Music.

Exeunt.

Scene 4

Crisp's Workshop.

Once again the chest stands on the trolley. Crisp and Seddon are now busy securing the two together with ropes.

Crisp This should fix it. When we haul it into the air, we don't want the trolley dropping off!

Seddon No!

Crisp Good ... that's it. The pulley stage at last! We'll have to move it over there first ...

Seddon Right!

By the river door three pulley systems hang from the ceiling: a one wheel, a two wheel, and a four wheel system.

Crisp That's fine ... There are the pulleys. I've made a special one for tonight, but these will do to practise on. Just let me get up to them ...

To reach the pulleys he uses a stepladder.

Now ... we'll start with this ... the simplest kind. Just one pulley wheel, see?

Seddon Ay.

Crisp Hook that end to the chest ... Now haul it up level with me ... Good. How does that feel?

Seddon Quite heavy! I couldn't lift the safe like this!

Crisp No, not with this pulley. All this does is to make it so you can lift the chest *up* by pulling *down* on the rope. And pulling down is generally easier than pulling up, isn't it?

Seddon Er ... ay, I s'pose it is.

Crisp Let it down ... Now, lift it again, and this time count the number of pulls you take to get it up to here.

Seddon Right ... One ... two ... three.

Crisp Three long pulls. Good. Let it down again ... Unhook it ... Now let's try a pulley with two wheels - one at the top and one the bottom ...

They hook up the two-wheeled pulley system.

Right. Let's see what two pulley wheels can do for you. Haul it up - and count the pulls again.

Seddon Right ... One ... two ... three ... four ... five ... six!

Crisp Aha!

Seddon Six pulls this time, Mr. Crisp! But it feels much lighter. About half the weight it was before! 'Ow's that?

Crisp Because this time there are two ropes holding up the load. You have to pull out twice as much rope to get it to the same height. But you only have to use half the effort. Just like the other machines, Seddon. By doubling the distance your arms move, you halve the effort they have to make. Let it down ... Let's try just one more ... This one with four pulley wheels ...

Pulley systems are swapped again.

Seddon Right ... all set, Mr. Crisp. Count the pulls?

Crisp Of course.

Seddon One ... two ... three ... four ... five ... six ... seven ... eight ... nine ten ... eleven ... twelve! It's really easy now!

Crisp About twice as easy as last time?

Seddon Ay! It 'ardly feels like a weight at all.

Crisp Good! Let it down ... Now, don't you think we'll be able to haul the safe into the air, using a pulley with even more wheels - with eight?

Seddon Is that 'ow many we'll use?

Crisp Yes.

Seddon Ay, then I think we will!

Crisp Excellent! So, we've practised almost every move we'll have to make. A robbery using just five simple machines. The lever, the screw, the slope, the wheel-and-axle and the pulley. But what a sensation it's going to cause!

Seddon Ay - if it works!

Crisp Of course it'll work! Nothing can go wrong with it now ... Look, it's almost half past five. We must leave. There's a lot to take, so we'll leave the chest on the trolley and put everything into it.

Seddon Right.

Crisp Here ... blocks ... *[etc.]*

He passes blocks, screwjacks etc. to Seddon who packs them into the chest. After the things we have already seen, come two sets of overalls, a dustsheet and a board.

Crisp Right, Seddon - we're ready!

Seddon One thing, Mr. Crisp ...

Crisp What's that?

Seddon You 'aven't told me where we're goin'.

Crisp Haven't I? Oh! We're going to the Patent Office!

Seddon Where?

Crisp Her Majesty's Patent Office! In the Patent Office safe are dozens, maybe hundreds of plans. Marvellous new ideas produced by the best inventors in Britain -

Seddon *[Indignant]* What do we want them for? I thought we were goin' to get rich!

Crisp We are! At midnight tonight, on London Bridge, we have an appointment with a Bulgarian agent. For those plans he is going to pay us two thousand pounds!

Seddon Eh!

Crisp Trust me, Seddon! Everything is arranged!

Seddon Oh, all right ... But ... but, no, Mr. Crisp, I don't understand ...

Crisp What d'you mean?

Seddon You're turnin' on your own kind, aren't you! Adam and Ellie Taylor for a start! And others - some o' them must be your friends an' all, mustn't they?

Crisp Friends? Friends! I hate them, Seddon! Every one of them!

Seddon Eh?

Crisp For twenty years I've hated them! Now, at last, I shall have my revenge!

Seddon Revenge? Why, what - ?

Crisp I was an inventor once, Seddon. Just like the Taylors there. Like all of them. Dreaming of being another George Stephenson or Isambard Brunel! You know what happened to me - to my genius?

Seddon What?

Crisp Stolen! My finest invention! Copied by the man who worked next door - just where the Taylors are now! Before I'd a chance to patent it, that man sold it off cheap to every manufacturer with wit enough to understand the plans. Within a year it had been built in every city in Europe, and I hadn't received a penny for it - not a penny! That was the end of career as an inventor, Seddon, and I swore one day I'd be revenged! Revenged on the whole pack of them!

[sings]

*When I was young and in my prime
inventing was my trade.
I thought all men were honest then
I'd never been betrayed!
But when - for shame! - a traitor came
and stole my work away
I swore upon the Devil's name
I'd take revenge one day!*

*Revenge, revenge, revenge, revenge
I'd take revenge one day!
Revenge, revenge, revenge, revenge
I'd take revenge one day!*

*So now's the time to do a crime
that's daring, rare and bold!
Inventors all I'll snatch your plans
and sell them all for gold!
For what just one to me has done
I'll make all good men pay!
I'll rob them all, yes every one
I'll take revenge today!*

*Revenge, revenge, revenge, revenge
I'll take revenge today!
Revenge, revenge, revenge, revenge
I'll have my revenge today!*

Come, Seddon - to the Patent Office!

Exeunt

Scene 5

An Office Corridor. A door, marked 'Her Majesty's Patent Office, Please Knock'.

Music.

Enter Adam and Ellie. Adam knocks on the door. It is opened by the Patent Officer, a middle-aged and smiling civil servant. Adam shows her the plans. After a moment's confusion - she first studies them upside down - the Patent Officer looks enthusiastic and shakes Adam and Ellie by the hand.

Exeunt Adam and Ellie.

The Patent Officer watches them go, then takes the plans into her office.

Scene 6

Inside the Patent Office. A large window. The reverse side of the door seen in Scene Five. A desk and a chair. A roller-calendar. A filing cabinet, perhaps. A portrait of Queen Victoria. A large steel safe.

The Patent Officer is putting Adam and Ellie's plans into the safe. She closes it and spins the combination. She looks at her watch, glances round the office, picks up her briefcase and umbrella, goes to the door, opens it. Outside, dressed as painters-and-decorators, stand Crisp and Seddon.

Officer Oh!

Crisp *[Broad-smiling cockney]* 'Scuse me, Miss. Come to do the decoratin'.

Officer Decorating?

Crisp Yes, Miss ... 'Ere, see ... 'Ome Office Order No. 2534311: 'Commence redecoratin' Patent Office, after it closes for the day, Tuesday, November 31st' ... Er, today, Miss.

Officer Oh. I'd have thought it was perfectly all right as it is. Still, if there's a Home Office Order, there's no use my objecting, is there?

Crisp I don't think there is, Miss, no!

Officer I'll leave you to it then. Shut the door behind you when you leave.

Crisp Of course, Miss.

Officer Goodnight. The main door will be locked at six sharp, but the caretaker will let you out.

Crisp Thank you, Miss. Goodnight.

Exit Patent Officer. Crisp locks the door behind her.

Right, Seddon. If we move fast we can be out of here in fifteen minutes. Here's the safe. Let's have a heave at it. See just how heavy it is.

They can't lift the safe at all.

Just as I thought.

Seddon Sure you wouldn't settle for a nice bit o' smash an' grab?

Crisp Nonsense! We apply the machines, that's all. We'll start with the lever. Come on - quickly!

Music

The robbery begins. But for perhaps one comic hold-up - a trapped finger or the like - it is fast and slick. The safe is levered up onto blocks, jacked up further and the trolley slipped underneath. They are about to jack it down onto the trolley when there is a loud knock on the door. They freeze.

Seddon The caretaker!

The door rattles.

Caretaker [Off] 'Ere! What you locked the door for?

Crisp 'Ang on, mate!

Crisp grabs a dust-sheet, well spattered with paint, from amongst his equipment, and throws it to Seddon.

Cover the safe with that!

Crisp grabs his ladder and leans it against the wall right next to the door. More knocking.

Caretaker [Off] 'Ey! What's goin' on?

Crisp unlocks and opens the door. The Caretaker, an ancient man, stands in the doorway, holding a duster.

Crisp 'Ello, mate! Just about to start paintin' over the door. On the ladder. Didn't want you knockin' me off it, did I?

Caretaker Oh. Sorry! Thought there must be something funny going on!

Crisp What - paintin' pink elephants on the ceilin'?

Caretaker Eh? [Chuckling hoarsely] Ay! That'd cheer the old place up a bit!

Crisp Anything'd do that, wouldn't it! Something you want, is there?

Caretaker I gen'rally go round with the duster this time o' night. Still, as you're decoratin' I'll just do the calendar. I change it in the evenin' so it's ready for Miss Protheroe first thing.

He has ambled round to the desk, putting his duster on top of the safe on the way. He picks up the calendar.

She's particular about the date ... Now, first of December tomorrow, isn't it ... ooops, gone past it! 'Ave to turn it right round now ... January, February, March, April -

Crisp Look, mate, why don't you take it with you, eh? Save it gettin' covered in paint, won't it? You can bring it back when we've finished for the night.

Caretaker Oh, all right. Don't want to get in your way ...

Going, he stops at the safe to pick up his duster.

Gets bigger and bigger, the safe in 'ere. Won't be any room for anything else one o' these days ... Oh well ... won't disturb you again.

Crisp That's all right, mate.

Exit Caretaker, shutting the door behind him.

Seddon Eee, that were close.

Re-enter Caretaker

Caretaker I ... I suppose you couldn't paint a pink elephant on the ceilin', could you?

Crisp What? - No, sorry. No pink paint on the order, was there, Fred?

Seddon Eh? - No, no.

Caretaker Shame. I'd have liked an elephant up there. Remind me of when I was young. Never mind.

Exit Caretaker. Crisp locks the door.

Seddon What was 'e then - a big game 'unter or summat?

Crisp Stupid old fool. Come, Seddon – onward.

Music.

The robbery continues. The safe is jacked down onto the trolley and pushed a little way towards the window. The ladder provides the slope, the trolley's railway wheels fitting it perfectly. Block and tackle is then hung just above the window [on the outside], the other end attached to the safe, and the safe is hauled up the slope onto the windowsill, ready to be lifted into the air. Whilst Crisp holds it there, Seddon attaches a guiding-rope and prepares to leap with it into the street. The set turns into ...

Scene 7

Outside the Patent Office. It is dark. A street lamp is lit. At the window of the Office, the safe, and Seddon with guiding-rope.

Seddon jumps into the street. He looks warily each way.

Seddon All clear, Mr. Crisp!

He backs away from the window, pulling his rope tight.

Ready!

The safe, trolley attached, rises off the windowsill. Seddon pulls it away from the wall. It begins to descend slowly. Suddenly, Seddon's attention is drawn to one side.

Police! Haul it up! Haul it up!

The safe rises until it is at window-height again - about six or seven feet clear of the ground. Seddon bends down to fiddle with his shoe-lace. Enter Thumb. His eyes light on Seddon, not on the safe.

Thumb 'Ello, 'ello, 'ello - 'oo 'ave we 'ere, then?

- Seddon** Oh! 'Ello, Constable!
- Thumb** Evenin', lad. Not loit'rin', are we?
- Seddon** Eh?
- Thumb** Loit'rin' with intent to commit a crime, lad!
- Seddon** Oh no, Constable! No, I'm just 'avin' a bit o' trouble with me shoelace like.
[*Breaking it*] It's broke, you see.
- Thumb** Oh yes - so it 'as! Not what they were, are they, shoelaces? Well, that's all right then. No offence, lad. Just can't be too careful. So much crime about these days, got to 'ave eyes in the back of me 'ead!
- Seddon** Really, Constable? Is it as bad as that?
- Thumb** Worse, lad! London's thick wi' villains - you can 'ardly move along the street for 'em.
- Seddon** Good leavens!
- Thumb** Still, Thumb'll root 'em out! Matter o' time, that's all. Mustn't dawdle. Never know what might be 'appenin' in the next street, do you?
- Seddon** No!
- Thumb** Tip me the wink if you see anythin' suspicious.
- Seddon** Yes, o' course, Constable!
- Thumb** Thumb's the name. City Branch.

Going, Thumb's helmet collides with the safe.

Oo, now that's not safe, is it? Fancy leavin' that 'anging' up there like that! Tall feller could 'urt 'is 'ead on that! Oh well, 'spect they'll move it in the morning. Mind 'ow you go!

Exit Thumb.

Seddon Cor! ... All right, Mr. Crisp - all clear!

Music.

The safe descends to the street. Crisp appears at the window, throwing out the dust-sheet with which Seddon covers the safe. Crisp then hands out the ladder etc., detaches the pulley and leaps to the ground. Ladder, lever etc. are arranged on top of the safe, so that it bears some resemblance to a decorator's barrow. The final touch, a sign advertising 'SNATCHEM & SELLEM, Painters and Decorators'.

Crisp Well, Mr. Snatchem - job completed to your satisfaction?

Seddon Certainly, Mr. Sellem!

Crisp Excellent!

*[Sings] Revenge at last on all my kind,
my cruel crime is done!
Inventors all you've lost your plans
I've snatched them every one!*

*At dark midnight from deepest spite
I'll trade them all away!
Who cares two wrongs can't make a right
I've snatched revenge today!*

*Revenge, revenge, revenge, revenge
I've snatched revenge today!
Revenge, revenge, revenge, revenge,
I've snatched my revenge today!*

End of Act One

Act Two

Scene 1

A City Street, late evening.

Enter Newsgirl.

Newsgirl Late-night extra! Late-night extra! Read all abaht it! Amazin' Patent Office Robbery! Read all abaht it ...

Enter Adam and Ellie.

Late-night extra! ... Read all abaht it, sir! Amazin' robbery at Patent Office! Only a penny, sir!

Adam What!

Ellie *[To Newsgirl]* Where was that?

Newsgirl Patent Office, Miss. Southampton Buildin's. 'Ere, read all abaht it. Only a penny.



Ellie We haven't got any money.

Newsgirl Not even a penny?

Adam No.

Newsgirl You are 'ard up, aren't you! 'Ere - 'ave one anyway.

Ellie Oh, thank you!

Newsgirl Late-night extra! Late-night extra! Read all abaht it! Amazin' Patent Office Robbery! Read all abaht it ...

Exit Newsgirl.

Ellie 'A huge steel safe, full of plans of new inventions, has been snatched from Her Majesty's Patent Office in Southampton Buildings in the City of London.'

Adam Oh no!

Ellie 'The robbery happened at about six o'clock this evening. Two men got into the Office dressed as painters-and-decorators. It seems they took the safe, which weighs almost a ton, out through the window.'

Adam They couldn't have!

Ellie That's what it says!

Adam "Already it's being called the most daring crime of the century." I should think it is!

Ellie What could anyone want with that safe?

Adam The plans - to sell them.

Ellie Who to?

Adam Anyone with the skills to make use of them, I suppose.

Ellie What about the patents on them?

Adam They aren't patented yet! Some of them, anyway. Ours certainly isn't! It's just waiting for a patent - waiting for the Patent Office to approve it. It takes ages!

Ellie So they could all be patented by someone else – in another country, possibly. And we'd lose the mangle completely!

Adam Yes! And our new home and our new workshop!

Ellie Adam, we mustn't give up! The police might catch them. Or they might not find a buyer for the plans - it's quite possible.

Adam Yes ... D'you think Mr. Crisp will have heard about it? He might have had some plans in that safe, too!

Ellie Of course he might! No, I bet he hasn't heard about it yet. I know he never reads the papers. Let's go and tell him. He'll know what we should do about it, anyway. See if we can catch him before he locks up for the night!

Adam Right!

Music.

Exeunt.

Scene 2

Crisp's Workshop. Centre, the safe, still on its trolley.

Seddon is trying to crack the lock, ear pressed to the door, hand turning the dial.

Seddon Ee! Never come across a safe like this before. Combination's as quiet as a mouse! ... Ah? ... No, nothin'!

A knock at the street door. Seddon freezes.

Crisp *[Off]* It's me - Crisp!

Seddon unlocks the door. Crisp bursts in, brandishing the news-sheet. Seddon shuts the door but forgets to lock it.

Crisp Look! In print already! ... "The most daring crime of the century!" We're the talk of London, not five hours after the event! ... See! "A dazzling feat of engineering! ... Police astonished!" Doesn't it make you proud?

Seddon Doesn't it make you afraid they'll guess who's done it?

Crisp Why should it? I'm a respectable man. Respectable men don't go about snatching safes, do they? Anyway, there are hundreds of engineers in

London. Why on earth should they suspect me?

Seddon No, I s'pose ...

Crisp This is just what I hoped for! Revenge, riches - and a sensation! Well, there'll be time to celebrate later. It's gone eleven o'clock. Soon we must leave for London Bridge. How are you getting on with the combination?

Seddon Well, actually, I 'aven't been 'avin' much luck like.

Crisp What?

Seddon I've never come across one like this before. You can 'ardly 'ear it turn!

Crisp I thought you said you were an expert!

Seddon Yes, but -

Crisp Out of my way!

Seddon Sorry, Mr. Crisp...

Crisp Quiet!

He presses his ear to the dial and turns.

It's very faint, but I can hear it ... Yes, there's the first!

Seddon How many numbers will there be?

Crisp I'm expecting just eight. But it'll be touch and go now.

Seddon Oh ...

Crisp Sshhh!

He concentrates again.

Adam *[Off]* Mr. Crisp! Mr. Crisp!

Crisp What?

Adam and Ellie, panting hard, burst in through the street door.

Adam Mr. Crisp - there's been a robbery! At the Patent Office! Look! Someone's stolen the safe with all the plans in! Yes! They say two men got in dressed as painters-and-decorators and took the safe out through the window! It's incredible!

Ellie has realised what it is that is standing in the middle of the room.

Ellie Adam ...

Adam The police can't understand how they did it!

Ellie Adam!

Adam What ... ? Mr. Crisp, what's that?

Crisp smiles.

No! It wasn't you!

Crisp laughs.

Mr. Crisp!

Ellie Adam, let's get the police!

Adam No! I can't believe it!

Ellie Adam!

She pulls him towards the door. Crisp darts to it and locks it, removing the key, all in one swift movement. With his other hand he picks up the long metal lever.

Crisp You can't get out! Stay still - just where you are! ... Well! We hadn't planned on being interrupted. What shall we do with them, Seddon? We shall have to silence them somehow. What would be most appropriate? Breaking them on the wheel? Pulling them apart with pulleys? What d'you fancy?

Seddon I ... I don't know, Mr. Crisp.

Crisp We'll turn it over in our minds while we make our rendezvous on the bridge. Whatever we decide, we can carry out when we get back! ...Get over there!

He motions Adam and Ellie towards a great iron ring set in the wall.

Adam You won't get away with this, Mr. Crisp!

Ellie No, you won't - you won't!

Crisp I shouldn't count on it if I were you. I'll stop at nothing now! Seddon, chain them to that ring!

Seddon Eh? Are you sure -

Crisp Do as I say! There's the chain, see!

Adam You're not going to - !

Crisp Don't try to resist, Adam! Or your sister will feel the weight of this! ... That's better! Those chains will keep you quiet enough. They were used for holding convicts here, not so many years ago. Waiting for a filthy, stinking cargo ship to transport them to Australia, poor devils! Still, at least they had a chance of staying alive!

Ellie Villain!

Crisp Don't fight him, Ellie! Or I'll finish you both off now ... All secure, Seddon?

Seddon Ay.

Crisp Good. Now ... five and twenty past eleven. We must be going.

Seddon We 'aven't opened the safe yet.

Crisp No - thanks to you, you fool!

His eyes rove the workshop. They light on a pile of rolled-up plans.

Ah! Yes, why not? There's going to be a small change of plan!

Seddon Eh?

Crisp Our foreign friend can have these instead. They're my own. All old and quite worthless. He won't even look at them until he's back on his ship and by then our money will be safe! Give me that bag ...

Seddon hands him a large canvas or leather bag.

Later on, when we've dealt with these two, we can get the safe open and think about finding another buyer for the real thing. Good, eh, Seddon?

Seddon Yes, 'spose so.

Crisp I told you I'd make your fortune, didn't I? Let's stuff them all in ... and good riddance! ... That's it! Right, come - to London Bridge! We'll leave these two to wonder what's in store for them when we get back!

Music.

Exit Crisp. Seddon glances at Adam and Ellie, then follows Crisp off. Adam and Ellie look at each other helplessly as the lights fade.

Scene 3

London Bridge, night.

Enter Thumb.

Thumb Phew! Freezin' night, this, poundin' the old beat! Still, got to keep a sharp lookout. See if I can pick up any clue regardin' this 'ere Patent Office Robbery. Bafflin' piece o' work. They come an' go like invisible men, some o' these villains! I was in that very harea myself at the time. Saw nothin' suspicious at all!

Enter, behind, Crisp and Seddon.

Nice an' quiet 'ere on the bridge, any'ow. Better give the south bank a quick look, see if there's a bit o' criminal life about over there. Mind 'ow you go!

Exit Thumb. Crisp consults his watch.

Crisp This is the spot. Just four minutes to midnight.

Seddon How will we recognise him?

Crisp He'll be wearing a long cloak and a hat with a wide brim. And, like me, he'll be carrying a newspaper. He'll walk past us, stop and touch his hat. He'll then open his newspaper and read it upside down -

Seddon Upside - ? 'Ow could 'e - ?

Crisp Pretend to read it, you fool! I shall do the same and he'll be sure that I'm his man. We'll shake hands and do the business. It's as simple as that. Three more minutes. He's due on the last stroke of the clock.

Seddon Mr. Crisp - that policeman, he's coming back!

Crisp What - curse it!

Seddon What shall we do, Mr. -

Crisp Calm, Seddon, calm! We are respectable citizens, out for a quite evening stroll!

Seddon At midnight? With a big bag full o' –

Crisp Sshhh!

Enter Thumb.

Good evening, Constable!

Thumb Good evening, sir - why, Mr. Crisp again!

Crisp Out for my evening stroll, Mr ... Mr Thumb, isn't it. I'm a little later than usual. Had a very busy day!

Thumb I see, sir. Very good.

Crisp Oh, you haven't met, have you? Seddon, my new apprentice.

Thumb Oh yes? Very good, lad, very - 'ere, 'aven't I seen you somewhere before?

Seddon Er ...

Crisp That's most unlikely. Seddon's a stranger in London. Come all the way from Manchester to learn his trade with me.

Thumb Really? I must'a got confused. Very wise, lad! You're in good 'ands with Mr. Crisp. Good to see a lad takin' up an honest trade, isn't it, sir? So many goin' to the bad.

Crisp Indeed. Seddon's future is very bright.

Thumb Bad do we've 'ad 'ere tonight. 'Spect you've 'eard, 'aven't you?

Crisp What, the Patent Office affair? Dreadful, dreadful! Do you think there's any chance of catching them?

Thumb Between ourselves, Mr. Crisp, not much. A clever couple by all accounts. And even if we do, I'm afraid it may be too late to save them plans. Out of the country by now, I reckon. Or well on the way.

Crisp I daresay. Foreign buyers, Seddon. Only too keen to snap up a few unpatented inventions. Tch tch.

A clock begins to strike midnight.

Good heavens, it's midnight! Well, Constable, don't let us keep you from your work ...

Thumb No, indeed, sir! No rest in the fight against crime, is there? Er ... yes, that way, I think. Don't fall in the river, will you! Goodnight to you both!

Crisp Goodnight!

Seddon Phew! Ten ... eleven ... twelve!

Exit Thumb. Crisp and Seddon turn to see the Agent, standing in the shadows. Seddon jumps.

Crisp Calm, Seddon!

Music.

The Agent approaches. Crisp touches his hat. The Agent passes them, stops, turns and touches his hat. Simultaneously, he and Crisp take out their newspapers [both the 'late-night extra'

edition], hold them up to read, peek at each other over the tops, then slowly turn them upside down. After furtive glances behind them, they shake hands and exchange the large bag for a bulging envelope. Exit Agent quickly. Crisp opens the envelope.

- Crisp** Two thousand pounds! And all for a bagful of useless plans!
- Seddon** What'll 'e do when 'e finds out?
- Crisp** He'll never trace us - I've made sure of that. So what can he do? But come, straight back to the workshop. To deal with Adam and Ellie!
- Seddon** What d'you really mean to do with them, Mr. Crisp?
- Crisp** Tie them up and throw them in the river.
- Seddon** Eh?
- Crisp** Why not? A pair of orphans like them. Even if their bodies get washed up in Gravesend they'll never be identified.
- Seddon** But you said -
- Crisp** No 'buts', Seddon! Our success depends on it! Come, we've no time to lose!

Music.

Exeunt.

Scene 4

Crisp's Workshop.

As before, except that Adam and Ellie are shouting for help and making as much noise as they can - banging on the wall, on the floor, anything they can reach. After a few seconds, Adam gives up.

- Adam** It's no use! There's no-one around here at this time of night. We'll just make ourselves hoarse!
- Ellie** We can't just sit here and wait for those two to get back. Isn't there any way we can get out of these chains?
- Adam** We'd need a saw that'd cut through steel! ... Unless ...
- Ellie** Unless what?
- Adam** There's quite a gap between the two ends of this link. If we could knock a wedge into it we might be able to force it open. There must be a wedge here somewhere, if only we can reach it ...
- Ellie** Yes ... There's one over there, look! Couldn't I reach that - if you squeeze your hands right through the ring? That's it! Now ...

They are handcuffed to either end of a long chain that passes freely through the iron ring. Adam pushes his hands and wrists through the ring as far as they will go. Ellie can't reach the wedge, even so.

- Ellie** Oh no!

Adam Lie down, Ellie. Get it with your feet.

Ellie Yes, of course! ... Got it!

She gives the wedge to Adam who tries it in the link.

Adam Yes, good. Can you reach that mallet now?

Ellie That's easy!

Much closer to them, a long-handled mallet.

Ellie Here! Right. Mind your fingers!

She gives the wedge a good thwack.

Any good?

Adam Opened it a fraction. Not nearly enough.

She gives it a mighty one this time.

A bit more, but still not enough. It's not going to do it, Ellie.

Ellie Is there anything else we could do? Lever it open - couldn't we do that?

Adam Maybe ... Yes, use one end of the link as the fulcrum and bend up the other! The wedge has opened it up enough for that. But we'll need a really strong piece of metal. Long, with a flattened end.

Ellie That metal ruler? No, it'd bend.

Adam Look - a crowbar! ... This'll do it ... Now, which link was it? This, yes ... If I stand on the chain ... Here, you try ...

Ellie Right ... let's see if the lever does the trick ...

Ellie heaves on the crow-bar. It slips out of the link.

Adam No ... try again ...

This time the link opens up.

Adam Done it! We're free! *[Parting the chain]* We'll have to carry these chains about with us, but at least we can get out!

Ellie Yes, thank goodness!

Adam Come on, then. Let's go and get the police!

Ellie Wait, Adam What if Crisp and Seddon come back, find we've escaped and just push the safe off somewhere else? They're hardly going to sit here with it and wait to be arrested, are they?

Adam No ... But what else can we do?

Ellie Couldn't we at least stop them moving it somehow?

Adam Perhaps ... Look, these are the wheels I collected from the foundry this morning! So that's what he wanted them for! I'd have thrown them straight in the river if I'd known!

Ellie So would I!

Adam You know, if there was any way of lifting it just a fraction, we could slip the wheels off and take them with us. Then they'd be in a mess, wouldn't they!

Ellie Yes - how could we do it?

Adam They must have used lots of machines in the robbery ...

Searching the room, Ellie finds the special pulley system and Adam the screw-jacks.

Ellie Here - pulleys!

Adam Yes, but look at these! Screw-jacks! He must have made them specially. These will do it. Quicker than rigging up the pulley.

Ellie Right!

Adam They fit perfectly! ... Here's a handle ... We'll have it off the floor in a moment ...

They jack the safe up, just clear of the floor.

Ellie Far enough!

Adam Should we take the whole trolley away?

Ellie Er ... no. No, just the wheels like you said. They might not notice then, until they try to move it. That could give us a bit more time.

Adam Right! ... Off?

Ellie Off.

Adam Good! Let's jack it down again ... There! Now put the jacks back where we found them ... and let's go!

Ellie No.

Adam What?

Ellie I'm going to stay.

Adam Stay! What on earth - ?

Ellie I can hide, can't I - over there, see!

Adam But - why?

Ellie When they find they can't move the safe what are they going to do?

Adam Run for it, probably.

Ellie Exactly! So if I stay here I may just hear where to. Then as soon as you get back with the police we can follow them. It's just a chance, Adam!

Adam It's too dangerous! They'd kill you if they found you!

Ellie They won't. They won't even look for me! They'll never dream that we haven't both escaped.

Adam I ... I ...

Ellie Oh go on, Adam! They'll catch us arguing about it at this rate! You go off for the police. I'll be all right here, honestly!

Adam But - !

Ellie I've made up my mind, Adam!

Adam All right. But hide yourself well - don't take any risks!

Ellie I won't! Don't worry.

Adam I'll be back with the first policeman I meet.

Exit Adam with the wheels. Ellie glances round the room and is then about to put the pulley back where she had found it, when she hears a noise outside. Dropping the pulley again, she darts into hiding.

Ellie They're here!

Enter Crisp and Seddon.

Crisp Now, my interfering friends! ... What! They've escaped!

Seddon Eh!

Crisp You fool! You bungled it! You said they were secure!

Seddon They were, Mr. Crisp! Honest! ... Look, the chain's gone completely. They must have broken it.

Crisp Broken it! Steel chain as thick as that! Don't be ridiculous!

Seddon Well, what ... ?

Crisp There's no use arguing about it! That's really fouled things up. They'll have gone straight for the police!

Seddon Ay! Let's go then!

Crisp What, and leave all the evidence! Seddon, for once in your miserable life, think what you're doing!

Seddon Y-yes, Mr. Crisp.

Crisp There's still a chance we can bluff our way out of this one. Here, this time I'll make sure we aren't taken by surprise ...

He locks the door, leaving the key in the lock.

If we can push the safe into the river, who's to say it was ever here?

Ellie *[Aside]* What!

Crisp The police will take my word before the Taylors'. And it would sound an incredible story, wouldn't it? Chained to a wall like convicts, threatened with murder! By me, a respectable engineer! The police'd laugh in their face!

Seddon What about the plans?

Crisp We'll just have to lose them. We've got our money, and with the plans at the bottom of the river I'll have at least a part of my revenge. Let's open the door ... Oh, turn the lamp down first. We don't want anyone on the river to see what we're doing!

Seddon No!

Seddon turns the lamp down very low, so that it is barely alight.

Crisp Right.

Crisp opens the river-door. Moonlight floods in.

There! ... Now, this should be easy. We just have to turn it a bit, that's all.

Seddon Ay.

They apply themselves to the safe. It doesn't move.

Crisp What on earth ...! The wheels! They've disappeared!

Seddon Eh!

Crisp Those two must have guessed what we'd do, the devils - they've taken them off! And taken them with them, by the looks of it!

Seddon 'Ow did they do it?

Crisp Pulley, screw-jacks - what does it matter? They're engineers, aren't they? If I ever lay my hands on them, I'll squeeze every last breath out of them!

Seddon Ay, but what do we do now?

Crisp Drag it!

Seddon Eh?

Crisp Tie a rope to the trolley and drag it. It won't be easy but it's possible. Come on, we've no time to lose!

Crisp fetches a rope, coming perilously close to Ellie. He ties it to the trolley, so that he and Seddon can both pull, tug-o-war fashion

Ready?

Seddon Ay.

Crisp One, two, three - heave! One, two, three - heave ...

The safe moves, though only a couple of inches at a time. Ellie looks round desperately for inspiration. The 'Heaves!' continue.

Ellie What can I do? Is there a machine I could use? ... Of course - the pulley!

The pulley system is lying on the floor where she dropped it. She creeps out of hiding and reaches for it. Her chains make a noise, just after a 'Heave.'

Crisp What was that?

Seddon Eh? Didn't hear anythin'.

Crisp Something on the river. On! One, two, three - heave!

Keeping in the shadow, Ellie attaches the pulley to a ring low in the wall or in the floor, then extends it to reach the safe, taking care that the noise it makes is covered by Crisp's 'Heaves!'. Finally, head well down, she attaches it to the trolley. She then creeps back to her hiding-place and starts to apply pressure to the rope.

Crisp ... One, two, three - heave!

Seddon Suddenly seems to 'ave got 'eavier, Mr. Crisp.

Crisp We're tiring, that's all. Pull harder. One, two, three - heave!

Seddon Didn't move at all that time!

Crisp No. Must be catching on something. A big pull will shift it. Come on - one, two, three - heave!

Ellie digs her heels in and again the safe doesn't move at all. She watches Crisp carefully.

Curse it – it's stuck! Let's have a look ...

As soon as they drop the rope Ellie pulls frantically on hers. The safe moves backwards.

What on earth ...!

Seddon It's a ghost!

Crisp dashes behind the safe, sees the pulley, follows the line of it until he sees Ellie.

You! You little devil!

Ellie dodges round him. Crisp picks up the crow-bar. Ellie now stands with her back to the open river-door.

Crisp So! You didn't get out when you had the chance! Stupid, Ellie! Very stupid indeed! When your brother gets back, you see, he'll have to force his way in. And in the time it takes to do that, I'll have you and that safe at the bottom of the river.

Ellie You won't! You won't!

Crisp Oh yes - believe me! Can you swim?

Ellie N-no!

Crisp Good! Then I won't have to hit you over the head with this to make sure you drown!

Crisp advances.

Seddon Mr. Crisp ...

Crisp Quiet, Seddon!

Ellie is now only a yard from the edge.

Go on, my dear! Only a few more steps. You can't escape!

She takes a tiny step backward.

Seddon Mr. Crisp - you can't!

Crisp Quiet! One more peep out of you and you'll go with her! Get over there!

Retreating, Seddon brushes against the pulley systems that hang from the ceiling.

Right, my young friend - your time's up! Out into the river with you!

Music.

Crisp advances horribly close. Ellie stretches out her hands and grips door and wall, straddling the gap. Seddon looks round desperately. He sees the pulleys and quietly picks up both ends

of one. Ellie screams. Crisp laughs. Seddon creeps up behind him and slips the hook through his belt. He pulls quickly on the rope. Crisp is being pulled into the air before he can see what is happening. A loud knocking at the street door.

Thumb *[Off]* Open up! Police!

Ellie unlocks the door. Thumb and Adam burst in.

Ellie We've got him, Adam! We've got him! She turns up the lamp.

Thumb Good heavens! Mr. Crisp, this is a surprise! I never thought to find you 'angin' in the air in such an hunrespectable fashion! Did you, Adam?

Adam No, Mr. Thumb!

Thumb An' I can't say as I thought to find the Patent Office safe standin' in the middle of your workshop! May I ask if you'd care to make a statement?

Crisp Curses! Curses on the lot of you!

Thumb I see! Well, if that's all, I think I must ask you to accompany me to the station
...

He holds up a pair of handcuffs.

Mr. Crisp?

Crisp scowls. Fade on tableau.

Scene 5

By the Blackfriars Engineering Company. A bright morning.

Enter Adam and Ellie with a large wooden notice, which reads in bright new letters: 'Now in Manufacture: Taylors' PATENT MANGLE! Squeeze your washing almost DRY! Available SOON!'

Ellie Here ... hang it on the gate, they said. There's a hook somewhere.

Adam Right ...

As they hang the notice on the gate, enter Thumb.

Thumb 'Ello, there! What's all this?

Ellie Hello, Mr. Thumb!

Thumb Mornin', Ellie. Mornin', Adam!

Adam Morning!

Thumb What brings you two this way?

Adam They've taken us on at the factory, Mr. Thumb. We're working on a new invention for them.

Thumb Are you now?

Ellie Yes! And they've started making the mangle - look!

- Thumb** 'Taylors' Patent Mangle' ... I see!
- Ellie** The first ones should be on sale next week.
- Thumb** Well, if you ask me, you'll 'ave a queue stretchin' from 'ere to Buckin'am Palace! Save a lot o' work, a good squeezin' mangle. I 'ad to wring out my own washing last night. 'Ands were red raw by the finish! You can put my name down for one now.
- Adam** Certainly, Mr. Thumb!
- Enter Seddon from the factory.*
- Seddon** Is it up yet? Oh - 'ello, Constable!
- Thumb** 'Ello there, lad! So you're 'ere, too!
- Seddon** Ay, workin' with Adam and Ellie. They persuaded fact'ry to take me back after all. With the judge lettin' me off at the trial like 'e did.
- Thumb** Quite right, too! Savin' Ellie from a watery grave - very well deserved! In fact, it's turned out best for all concerned, 'ain't it?
- Adam/Ellie** Yes!
- Seddon** Ay, it 'as!
- Thumb** 'Cept for Mr. Crisp, o' course! 'E's goin' to be locked away for quite a while. Such a respectable type I thought. Turned out to be a very nasty piece in the event.
- Ellie** Don't be too hard on him. He was robbed of his very first invention.
- Adam** Yes, we'd have felt a bit bitter if we really had lost the plans of the mangle.
- Thumb** Ay, 'e 'ad bad luck there. Mind, I think tryin' to murder your sister was takin' 'is bitter feelin's a bit far, Adam.
- Adam** Yes!
- Thumb** Still, I 'ear 'e's a reformed character now! Got the run of the prison, they say. You know, I don't mind sayin' the way 'e planned that robbery 'as begun to fascinate me. Trouble is, I can't keep them five machines all in me head at once. I was tryin' to explain them to my youngest the other day. I started on me fingers like this, you see ... there's the lever, the wheel-and-axle, the pulley, the screw - and there you are, got to me thumb and can't think what I've missed out!
- Ad/Ell/Sed** The slope!
- Thumb** The slope - of course! Mind, I shall forget another one next time! Anyway, better be off. See what tricks the villains are gettin' up to today!
- Adam** If you can spare a minute more, Mr. Thumb ... ?
- Thumb** Yes?
- Adam** There's one way you can be sure of remembering the five machines.
- Thumb** Eh?

Ellie Yes! Sing with us, Mr. Thumb!

Adam, Ellie & Seddon sing:

*There are five machines,
five simple machines!
The lever, the slope
they're the simplest of means!
Five machines
for helping us through,
the wheel-and-the-axle
the pulley, the screw!*

Adam *I once had a sack that I wanted to shift,
too big and too heavy for one man to lift.
I said to my sister, 'What can be the means?'*

Ellie *The answer I gave him - 'Use simple machines!'*
*There are five machines,
five simple machines! Etc...*

Seddon *I was asked by a man - 'oo I think you all know! -
to snatch a steel safe through an office window.
I said, 'You're a madman, we 'aven't the means!'
'E said it were easy - 'Use simple machines!'*

All *There are five machines,
five simple machines!
Etc ...*

Thumb *When called to arrest Mister Le-o-nard Crisp
I found 'e was finished, 'e could not resist.
I said, 'Mister Crisp, what 'as done for your schemes?'*

Spotlight on Crisp in prison garb.

Crisp *I said, 'I was beaten by simple machines!'*

All *There are five machines!
Etc ...*

Thumb 'Ere, Adam ...

Adam Yes?

Thumb I wonder if it's this song that Crisp is teachin' 'is pals in prison?

Adam What d'you mean, Mr. Thumb?

Thumb 'E's been teachin' the other prisoners everything 'e knows, they say. Turned 'is 'and to inventin' again, too.

Ellie Inventing?

Thumb Yes. Now what was it they said 'e was workin' on ... ? Oh yes. Some very cunnin' kind o' ladder. Only about three metres 'igh, but extends to about ten. An' does all kinds o' tricks. Should prove very popular.

Seddon I should think so - in prison.

Thumb What? ... Oh yes, I see!

They all laugh.

Adam Come on, everyone! One more time ...

*There are five machines,
five simple machines!
The lever, the slope,
they're the simplest of means!
Five machines
for helping us through,
the wheel-and-the-axle,
the pulley, the screw!*

The End