

DID SOMEONE SAY MURDER?

A PLAY IN TWO ACTS

By David J. LeMaster

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P.O. BOX 248 • CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA 52406

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CHARACTERS

| | |
|------------------|--|
| JOE | A guy on a date. |
| MARY | His date. |
| HOSTESS | A conceited young lady. |
| WAITER | An authoritative young man. |
| WAITRESS | Who wants to be an actress. |
| MR. ELSINORE | Rich and arrogant. |
| MRS. ELSINORE | His rich and arrogant wife. |
| MRS. SALT | An old woman. |
| MRS. CABBAGE | Another old woman. |
| FLOWER GIRL | Sells flowers. |
| BUSBOY (or GIRL) | Busses tables. |
| MR. MITHINGTON | Elsinore's enemy. |
| MRS. MITHINGTON | His confused wife. |
| MANAGER | Either a man or a woman; the person in charge of the evening and the host of the murder. |
| COOK | Either a man or a woman; in charge of the manager. |
| RATHBONE | Either a man or a woman; the world's greatest detective, determined to solve the case. |

TIME & PLACE

Now. A posh restaurant - ritzy, beautiful, and the site of a murder.

SET

We are in a lovely, expensive restaurant. The entrance to the restaurant is center stage, where the Hostess station is located by a door. There are four tables across the stage. On far stage right sits JOE and MARY's table, which is located by a(n imaginary?) window. Next to them is the ELSINORE table, just right of the HOSTESS station. MRS. CABBAGE and MRS. SALT will sit at a table left of center. The MITHINGTONS' table is far left, separated from everyone else. They obviously got the bad spot. There is a door to the kitchen stage right, next to JOE and MARY's table, and they are inconvenienced by the door as characters run in and out. The MANAGER, RATHBONE, the WAITER and WAITRESS, and the COOK all come from the kitchen door. The four tables are fully furnished with plates, silverware, tablecloths, drinking glasses, napkins, candles, drink menus, and at least two chairs.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

It is at the discretion of the director whether or not to use real food. Directors may choose to perform this play as a "dinner theatre," providing the audience with a dinner (like chicken or lobster) to go with the characters onstage. There is one intermission. Although the four couples obviously have their own places at tables, they are in no way restricted to staying in their chairs. RATHBONE and the MANAGER should be free to roam about the stage. RATHBONE must have great energy to control everyone's focus throughout the majority of the show and should bounce from couple to couple as he accuses them of various murders. There is a "sudden clap of thunder" toward the end of Act One, followed by a blackout during which the characters wait for a murder. There are also gunshot sounds at the end of the first act during a second short blackout. Finally, RATHBONE pulls a weapon at the end of the Act Two. The weapon may be a knife, a gun, a concealed gun, or something more creative. RATHBONE's gasmask at the end of the first act can also be creative. As long as it covers his mouth and nose, the mask does not need to be elaborate. The BUSBOY, the COOK, the MANAGER, and RATHBONE may all be played by either a male or a female. Changes in pronoun reference, etc., may be made accordingly. There are a number of twists at the end involving either a change in character or a change in accent/personality. All changes are at the discretion of the director, but each change should be comic and exaggerated, giving the individual actors the opportunity to create completely different physical and vocal characteristics from what they have played up to that point.

DID SOMEONE SAY MURDER?

by
David J. LeMaster

ACT I

AT RISE: *We are in a very ritzy, fashionable restaurant. There are numerous tables across the stage. We're in dining-mood lighting. Enter a young couple, JOE and MARY. They walk through the door, obviously out of place in such a ritzy restaurant, and stand at the door, waiting for someone to seat them.*

JOE: Here we are!

MARY: Oh, what a beautiful place, Joe. Are you sure we can afford to eat here?

JOE: Nothing's too good for you, my love.

MARY: It looks very expensive.

JOE: Shee-shee, Fru-fru? Yes, it does. But don't worry. Tonight we'll eat, drink, and be merry. We'll have burgers and fries the rest of the week.

MARY: The rest of our *lives* from the looks of this place. **(pause)** Where is everyone?

JOE: **(glances at watch)** It's still early. Maybe they don't open the doors until later.

MARY: Have you been here before?

JOE: No. But the reviews are excellent.

MARY: I'm so excited. **(Enter HOSTESS. SHE looks them over for a moment and sneers. HOSTESS leaves.)** Did you see that?

JOE: Miss?

MARY: She turned up here nose at us. Like we're not classy enough to be here.

JOE: Oh, I'm sure she didn't mean it that way.

MARY: Maybe we shouldn't dine here after all.

JOE: The reviews are good. It looks marvelous. We're staying.

MARY: If you're sure...

JOE: Miss? Miss?

(Enter HOSTESS. SHE glares at them.)

.HOSTESS: Yes?

JOE: We'd like a table for two, please.

HOSTESS: Table for two. Did you have a reservation?

JOE: The paper says you don't need reservations.

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HOSTESS: You always need reservations. What do you think this is, McDonalds? **(SHE goes to the appointment book, reads intently; pause.)** Smoking or nonsmoking?

JOE: Nonsmoking.

HOSTESS: We don't have anything in nonsmoking.

JOE: Do you have anything on the patio?

HOSTESS: How do you know we have a patio?

JOE: I assumed...

HOSTESS: Of course we have a patio! Ha ha!

JOE: Oh. Well, we'd like a place on the patio.

HOSTESS: There's nothing available there, either.

JOE: Oh. I suppose smoking will be okay, then.

HOSTESS: We don't have anything in smoking either. We're completely booked. Call before you come next time. Goodbye. **(SHE turns to leave. MARY stops her.)**

MARY: Wait a moment. Miss? Look. Is it just me?

HOSTESS: Yes?

MARY: You're being very cold to us. I don't see anyone else around...

HOSTESS: No.

MARY: Well, then. Why can't we sit where we want?

HOSTESS: They're all reserved.

MARY: I don't see any reservation markers.

HOSTESS: Maybe they're invisible.

MARY: They're all reserved? Every single table?

HOSTESS: We're booked solid. It's murder night.

MARY: I beg your pardon?

JOE: Maybe we *should* go somewhere else—

MARY: Did you say murder night?

HOSTESS: Yes. That's what I said.

MARY: I've heard of these things! They have dinner and these actors come out and you get to play detective and there's a murder mystery—

HOSTESS: Not even close, Toots.

MARY: I beg your pardon?

HOSTESS: No actors. No playing detective for the audience. No getting up and going home afterward if you get killed. Just murder, plain and simple. With dinner. Got the picture?

MARY: How intriguing.

HOSTESS: I'm afraid it's very expensive and requires reservations far in advance.

JOE: Why don't we just call the restaurant down the street. If they don't want our business here. . .

MARY: I like it here.

JOE: But you said yourself—

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MARY: I changed my mind. I want to be here for murder night.

JOE: What? Murder?

MARY: I'm intrigued.

HOSTESS: Oh, it's quite intriguing. And deadly, too.

MARY: Sounds delicious!

JOE: Honey—

MARY: **(to JOE)** Give her a tip and see if she'll seat us.

JOE: Tip?

MARY: **(whispering)** She wants a tip. Don't you know anything about dining in these fancy restaurants?

JOE: But murder night?

MARY: Don't be frightened, darling. It's just a publicity stunt. **(to HOSTESS)** Isn't that right?

HOSTESS: What?

MARY: No one really gets killed on murder night. Do they?

HOSTESS: If I were you, I wouldn't stick around to find out.

MARY: Oh, how delightful!

(HOSTESS turns her back on JOE and MARY as another couple approaches. JOE keeps looking through his clothes for cash.)

ELSINORE: Table for two. Under Elsinore.

HOSTESS: Oh, yes. Mr. Elsinore. Right this way.

JOE: Wait a second. We were here first. You have to seat us. And I'll, uh, give you a tip on my credit card.

HOSTESS: Do you have a reservation, sir?

JOE: **(looks at her book)** Yes. It's... **(looks at book)** under Mithington.

HOSTESS: Oh, is it?

JOE: Mithington. Mr. and Mrs. Mithington. Isn't that right, honey?

MARY: **(delighted)** Yes! The Mithingtons.

JOE: And we'd like to be seated.

HOSTESS: Mithington, eh? Are you sure?

JOE: Yes.

ELSINORE: Elsinore—

HOSTESS: Just a moment Mr. Elsinore.

ELSINORE: We'd like our table.

MRS. ELSINORE: Those people obviously don't have a reservation.

HOSTESS: No. But if they want to be a "Mithington" on murder night. . .

MRS. ELSINORE: **(amused)** Oh. Yes, how unfortunate.

MARY: What?

ELSINORE: Tell, me, Mithington. Just what is it you do for a living, old boy?

JOE: Um. I'm an accountant.

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ELSINORE: (**knowing**) Is that right? (**to HOSTESS**) Yes. They're perfect to be here for a murder night.

HOSTESS: (**to JOE and MARY**) This way.

MARY: Wait, Joe. Maybe we shouldn't stay.

JOE: Oh, come on, Mary. Don't tell me they've frightened you with all this silly murder talk. You said—

MARY: I've changed my mind.

JOE: You wanted to eat here, and we're going to eat here.

HOSTESS: Even if you take the Mithingtons' place?

JOE: That's right.

HOSTESS: Very well. (**to ELSINORES**) You'll excuse me for a moment.

ELSINORE: I suppose.

MRS. ELSINORE: How rude.

ELSINORE: How crass.

MRS. ELSINORE: Ridiculous.

ELSINORE: They deserve what's coming to them.

MRS. ELSINORE: Indeed.

MARY: What was that?

ELSINORE: You'll find out.

MRS. ELSINORE: Yes. Poor things. You'll find out.

HOSTESS: Right this way, Mr. Mithington.

MARY: Wait a minute. I don't know about this. . .

HOSTESS: Do you want to take the Mithington reservation or not? I don't have all night.

JOE: Yes! Yes, we do.

MARY: (**to HOSTESS**) Did you say "murder night?"

HOSTESS: (**takes them to seats**) Here. (**tosses menus to table; points at the chairs**) Your waiter will be with you in a moment. Mithington.

(SHE goes back and politely escorts the ELSINORES to their table. JOE and MARY lean over table and try to whisper.)

MARY: I've got a bad feeling about this.

JOE: Well you had your chance. I wanted to go and you thought murder night sounded charming.

MARY: (**trying to convince herself**) They must be putting on a play.

JOE: Yes. That's it. A murder mystery play. It'll be fun. (**pause**) I just hope it's not too expensive.

HOSTESS: (**to ELSINORE**) I trust you'll have a marvelous evening, Mr. and Mrs. Elsinore.

ELSINORE: (**tipping her**) Thank you, my dear.

HOSTESS: (*seating them*) Here you are. (*takes out MRS. ELSINORE's chair*) Can I get you anything?

MRS. ELSINORE: Not just now, dearie. Thanks.

HOSTESS: Thank you.

(SHE goes back to the hostess table. SHE sneers at JOE and MARY as SHE goes by.)

MARY: See? He tipped her so she'd treat them well. Why don't you go tip her, Joe?

JOE: Well. Um. She's already seated us. Besides. I don't have any cash. (*enter BUSBOY, with water*)

BUSBOY: Water?

JOE: Oh. Yes, thanks. We'd like to know about your specials—

BUSBOY: I'm not the waiter. I'm the bus boy.

MARY: (*embarrassed*) Haven't you ever been in a fancy place like this before?

JOE: Well...

BUSBOY: Your waiter will be with you in a moment.

JOE: Thanks.

BUSBOY: Bread?

JOE: Yes.

MARY: No.

JOE: Why not?

MARY: I can't eat bread. It goes right to my thighs.

(BUSBOY shrugs and goes to the ELSINORE table.)

BUSBOY: Your waiter will be with you in a moment. Water?

ELSINORE: (*looking at menu*) No. But the Chablis looks quite good tonight.

MRS. ELSINORE: Yes. Let's order some.

BUSBOY: I'll get your waiter.

JOE: (*looking at menu*) Wait a minute. There's no food on this menu.

MARY: It's a drink menu.

JOE: Where's the real menu?

MARY: Maybe they don't have a formal menu. They just tell you what they have for the evening.

JOE: How do I know the price?

MARY: I don't know.

JOE: This is insane. We shouldn't have come here.

MARY: You asked me to dinner. Why are you worried about the price?

JOE: I just don't want to order something that's really expensive, that's all.

MARY: What, you don't think I'm worth a big dinner?

JOE: It's not that.

MARY: What is it, then?

JOE: Forget it?

MRS. ELSINORE: What about the lobster tonight?

ELSINORE: Excellent choice. It always goes well with a murder.

(Enter FLOWER GIRL, holding a basket of roses. SHE approaches JOE and MARY.)

FLOWER GIRL: ***(to JOE)*** Would you like a beautiful long-stemmed rose for your date this evening?

JOE: Uh.

MARY: Oh, how beautiful.

JOE: How much?

FLOWER GIRL: Just fifteen dollars.

JOE: Fifteen!

MARY: Joe.

JOE: But—

MARY: I'm not worth fifteen dollars?

JOE: No, it's not that—

MARY: First you complain about the menu—

FLOWER GIRL: What are you, some kind of cheapskate?

MARY: He is.

FLOWER GIRL: I'll give it to you for twelve.

JOE: Do you take credit cards?

FLOWER GIRL: No.

MARY: Pay her for the flower, Joe.

JOE: I don't have any cash.

MARY: You came to dinner without cash? How did you expect to pay the valet outside?

JOE: You mean I have to pay that guy that parked the car?

MARY: Yes.

JOE: With cash?

MARY: Oh, for goodness sake!

FLOWER GIRL: What a cheapskate.

JOE: It's an expensive place. I thought I'd put it on a credit card.

FLOWER GIRL: Give me back my flower.

(SHE snatches the flower from MARY. MARY begins to cry.)

JOE: Wait. Don't cry. I'll get the flower. ***(to FLOWER GIRL)*** Is there a money machine nearby?

(Enter BUSBOY with bread. HE puts the bread on JOE's table and wipes the table with a crumb catcher.)

BUSBOY: Bread?

JOE: Sure. You know where I can get cash?

(FLOWER GIRL snatches the rose from MARY and approaches MR. and MRS. ELSINORE.)

FLOWER GIRL: Rose for the lady?

ELSINORE: Yes. **(takes out his wallet and gives her cash)** And send this one to the girl over there.

(FLOWER GIRL gives him a rose and hands a rose to MARY.)

MARY: Oh, thank you!

MRS. ELSINORE: Henry?

ELSINORE: Oh, come now dear. She needs a rose.

MRS. ELSINORE: You're flirting with that girl!

ELSINORE: I am not. **(to FLOWER GIRL)** Give it to her.

MARY: Oh! Thank you!

JOE: **(to ELSINORE)** I'll pay you back.

ELSINORE: Nonsense. **(pause)** You'll get yours.

JOE: What?

MARY: **(with rose)** It's so beautiful.

JOE: What did he mean, "You'll get yours?"

BUSBOY: **(to ELSINORE)** Bread?

ELSINORE: No. **(takes out more cash)** Oh, miss!

FLOWER GIRL: Yeah?

ELSINORE: **(gives money)** Buy a flower for yourself, too.

FLOWER GIRL: Oh! Thank you.

ELSINORE: **(to MRS. ELSINORE)** Now, my dear. I wasn't flirting with the first girl. But I am with *her*.

MRS. ELSINORE: How dare you!

ELSINORE: Makes you mad enough to kill me, doesn't it?

(Pause. They all look at each other as ELSINORE's words sink in. BUSBOY and FLOWER GIRL both exit. MRS. SALT and MRS. CABBAGE enter and approach HOSTESS.)

HOSTESS: Hello, Mrs. Salt. Mrs. Cabbage. So good to see you both.

MRS. CABBAGE: Hello, Miss—

HOSTESS: Monroe.

MRS. CABBAGE: Right. Monroe. Were you here the last time?

HOSTESS: Yes.

MRS. SALT: Of course she was, Dorothy. Don't you remember?

MRS. CABBAGE: I remember the soup.

MRS. SALT: It was excellent.

MRS. CABBAGE: You make the best soup.

MRS. SALT: *You* didn't have the soup. *I* had the soup.

MRS. CABBAGE: You did?

MRS. SALT: Yes.

MRS. CABBAGE: What did I have?

MRS. SALT: You had the chicken.

MRS. CABBAGE: Oh, yes! The chicken.

HOSTESS: Your usual table?

MRS. SALT: We'd like one by the window tonight, if you don't mind.

HOSTESS: That one's taken.

MRS. SALT: It is?

HOSTESS: By them.

(SHE points at JOE and MARY. MARY is embarrassed.)

MRS. SALT: Who are they?

HOSTESS: ***(a giggle)*** They say they're the Mithingtons.

MRS. CABBAGE: Don't be absurd.

MRS. SALT: They're not the Mithingtons.

HOSTESS: I didn't think so.

MRS. SALT: What about that table?

HOSTESS: Yes. It's free.

MRS. SALT: Then we'll sit there.

(SHE takes them to a table. MARY whispers to JOE.)

MARY: Did you hear that?

JOE: Where is the darned waiter?

MARY: She said that table was free.

JOE: Maybe it's the smoking section.

MARY: But it's just over there.

ELSINORE: ***(to Hostess)*** Oh, Miss?

HOSTESS: Yes?

ELSINORE: We haven't seen the waiter.

HOSTESS: I'll send him to you.

MRS. ELSINORE: And when is the murder?

HOSTESS: Soon.

MRS. ELSINORE: Good. ***(to ELSINORE)*** You're not nervous, are you dear?

ELSINORE: Just hungry.

(FLOWER GIRL and BUSBOY approach MRS. SALT and MRS. CABBAGE.)

FLOWER GIRL: Roses?

BUS BOY: Water? Bread?

MRS. CABBAGE: No, and no.

MRS. SALT: I'll take a rose.

MRS. CABBAGE: Whatever for?

MRS. SALT: For later.

MRS. CABBAGE: Later? Are you meeting someone after dinner?

MRS. SALT: Perhaps.

MRS. CABBAGE: Who?

MRS. SALT: None of your bees-wax.

FLOWER GIRL: Fifteen dollars.

MRS. SALT: Fifteen? They were ten last time I came.

MRS. CABBAGE: You didn't get a flower last time I was here.

MRS. SALT: That's because I wasn't with you.

MRS. CABBAGE: Really?

FLOWER GIRL: Thank you, Ma'am.

MRS. SALT: **(pointing to ELSINORE)** Give it to that man over there.

FLOWER GIRL: Him?

MRS. SALT: Yes.

FLOWER GIRL: **(gives to ELSINORE)** Here.

ELSINORE: I beg your pardon?

MRS. ELSINORE: Well! I never!

FLOWER GIRL: From her.

(SHE points to MRS. SALT, who waves. ELSINORE is repulsed.)

ELSINORE: Oh, dear.

MRS. ELSINORE: Well. I can certainly see that it's murder night.

ELSINORE: Yes. It certainly is.

(FLOWER GIRL leaves. MRS. SALT and MRS. CABBAGE bury their heads in the wine list. The ELSINORES do the same. MARY cannot contain her curiosity. SHE turns to the ELSINORES.)

MARY: Excuse me.

MRS. ELSINORE: Henry.

ELSINORE: Hmm?

MRS. ELSINORE: That girl is trying to get your attention.

MARY: Excuse me?

ELSINORE: Yes? What is it?

MARY: What is the murder?

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ELSINORE: I beg your pardon?

MARY: The murder. The hostess keeps mentioning it.

ELSINORE: Yes?

MARY: What is it?

ELSINORE: It's the reason we came.

MRS. ELSINORE: Haven't you been here before?

MARY: No.

MRS. ELSINORE: Then why did you have a reservation?

MARY: (**embarrassed**) We really didn't. My boyfriend got carried away.

ELSINORE: Oh, dear.

MRS. ELSINORE: How unfortunate.

ELSINORE: Why ever did you come?

MARY: Is this bad?

ELSINORE: You'll see.

MARY: What do you mean "you'll see?"

MRS. ELSINORE: *Don't order the chicken.*

MARY: (**panicked**) What?

JOE: Mary, please. Turn around.

MARY: (**frantic**) She said not to order the chicken.

JOE: Why? Isn't it cooked?

MARY: Don't you get it? That's a clue. It's murder night, and we shouldn't order the chicken!

JOE: They're just being rude.

MARY: Rude? Then why didn't they just say, "get lost, honey?" *That's* rude. They said, "Don't order the chicken." That's *advice*.

JOE: That was their way of saying "get lost, honey." You know. (**voice**) "Don't order chicken." Sounds snippy to me.

(Enter WAITRESS and WAITER. They go to JOE and MARY'S table.)

WAITER: Hello. My name is Jeremy, and this is Heather. She's in training.

WAITRESS: I'm Heather. I'm in training.

WAITER: She's going to make a fantastic waitress.

WAITRESS: Yes. But what I really want to be is an actress.

WAITER: May I interest you in an appetizer?

WAITRESS: I've played Shakespeare and Chekov and Stoppard.

MARY: (**indicates the ELSINORES**) I think they were here before us.

WAITER: That's okay. We're waiting on you.

WAITRESS: And Shepherd, and Mammet, and Ibsen, and Brecht. . .

MARY: Oh, I don't mind. Wait on them. It's okay. I don't want to make them mad at us. Not on murder night.

WAITER: Nope. You're first.

WAITRESS: (**reciting**) Oh, that this too, too sullied flesh would melt!

Oh, that this too, too—

MARY: You played Hamlet?

WAITRESS: Yes.

MARY: And not Ophelia?

WAITRESS: It was a progressive company.

MARY: Oh.

WAITRESS: What?

MARY: Nothing.

WAITRESS: You find something wrong with that?

MARY: It's just that usually Hamlet is played by a man.

WAITRESS: Who says it has to be a man?

WAITER: Would you like to try the crab claws?

WAITRESS: I can do everything he can do. He just has to train me.

WAITER: Or perhaps some nice fried cheese.

JOE: Fried cheese. Yes. We'll have that.

WAITER: We're out of fried cheese.

JOE: Oh.

WAITER: What about crab claws?

JOE: Yes.

WAITER: We're out of those, too.

WAITRESS: Oh, that this too, too—

WAITER: Would you mind?

WAITRESS: Sorry.

MARY: Um. (**pause**) Could you settle a question for us?

WAITER: Certainly.

MARY: Just what is the murder night?

WAITER: (**dramatic alarm**) What?? Where did you hear that?

MARY: The hostess said it was murder night.

WAITER: She did?

WAITRESS: I thought that was tomorrow.

WAITER: Shh.

MARY: Um. Would you mind explaining—

WAITER: It's self-explanatory.

JOE: Just order some food. How about the artichoke salad?

WAITER: We're out.

JOE: All right, then the—

MARY: Would you be quiet? I've got to find out about murder night!

JOE: You're making a fool of yourself. Just order some food and enjoy yourself.

MARY: What food? There's no menu.

JOE: Oh, yeah. I forgot.

WAITER: No menu?

JOE: No. Only the wine list.

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WAITER: Would you like some wine?

JOE: No. We want some food.

WAITER: What would you like?

JOE: I don't know. We don't have a menu.

WAITER: There's one in your hand.

JOE: It's a wine list.

WAITER: So it is.

MARY: (**exasperated**) Could we see the manager?

WAITRESS: Why?

WAITER: I'll handle this. Why?

MARY: I really didn't like the way the hostess handled things.

WAITER: I'll tell the manager.

MARY: *I'd* like to tell the manager.

WAITER: Why?

ELSINORE: May we please order?

WAITER: What would you like?

ELSINORE: Chicken.

MRS. ELSINORE: Yes. Me, too.

MRS. SALT: And for me.

MRS. CABBAGE: I'll have chicken soup.

MRS. SALT: Chicken cacciatore.

ELSINORE: Chicken ala king.

MRS. ELSINORE: Chicken and dumplings.

MR. SALT: With chicken wings.

MRS. CABBAGE: And chicken salad.

MRS. ELSINORE: And chicken-fried chicken.

MARY: But you told me not to order the chicken!

MRS. ELSINORE: It's delicious.

ELSINORE: Scrumptious.

MRS. SALT: Outstanding.

WAITER: (**to MARY**) Is that what you want?

MARY: No. I do not want the chicken.

WAITER: That's all we serve.

WAITRESS: We only have chicken.

MARY: You don't have anything but chicken?

WAITER: We have murder.

ELSINORE: I'll have that.

MRS. ELSINORE: Oh, yes. A side of homicide.

MRS. SALT: With a touch of mayhem.

MRS. CABBAGE: Just a bit of death.

MARY: What's going on here!?

WAITER: Murder for everyone, then?

MARY: Joe! Do something.

JOE: I demand to see the manager!

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ELSINORE: Whatever for?

JOE: **(to MARY)** We're not satisfied with the service?

MARY: Right.

JOE: Right. We're not satisfied with the service.

WAITER: Well! I never!

WAITRESS: Well! I never!

HOSTESS: **(entering)** What's going on here?

JOE: We want to see the manager.

WAITRESS: They're not satisfied.

HOSTESS: I don't know why.

JOE: We don't even have menus.

HOSTESS: Why do you need a menu? Would you like some bread?

JOE: We've already had bread. And a rose. And now, I've got a headache.

ELSINORE: **(thrilled)** Perhaps it's the effects of cyanide!

HOSTESS: I'll get the manager.

MARY: I'm frightened.

JOE: Of what?

MARY: These people are crazy.

(WAITER and WAITRESS have disappeared. BUSBOY returns with water.)

BUSBOY: Water?

JOE: Yes.

ELSINORE: Don't drink it!

JOE: I beg your pardon?

ELSINORE: It's murder night. Don't drink the water.

BUSBOY: Nonsense. It's just water. See? **(HE drinks some. All watch, frightened.)** Delicious.

JOE: I'll pass.

BUSBOY: **(shrugs)** Suit yourself.

(exit BUSBOY; enter WAITER and WAITRESS with food)

WAITRESS: **(to MARY)** Chicken?

MARY: No. I do not want chicken.

WAITRESS: You ordered chicken.

MARY: I didn't order chicken!

WAITER: **(with ELSINORES)** Chicken for everyone!

MARY: I don't want chicken—

ELSINORE: Ah, the chicken!

WAITER: **(to MRS. ELSINORE)** Chicken.

MRS. ELSINORE: Thank you.

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MARY: **(to MRS. ELSINORE)** You told us not to eat the chicken.
MRS. ELSINORE: **(taking a bite)** It's delicious.
MRS. CABBAGE: Marvelous.
MRS. SALT: Excellent.

(enter MR. and MRS. MITHINGTON; they approach HOSTESS)

MR. MITHINGTON: Table for two. Mithington.
HOSTESS: Mithington! I knew it!
MARY: We're going to get thrown out.
JOE: I demand to speak with the manager.
WAITER: Again? Isn't the chicken okay?
JOE: It's not the chicken. It's the hostess.
HOSTESS: I've already seated the Mithingtons.
MR. MITHINGTON: What?
MRS. MITHINGTON: That's impossible.
HOSTESS: **(pointing)** They're right over there.
MRS. MITHINGTON: That isn't us.
MR. MITHINGTON: There must be some mistake.
HOSTESS: I'm sorry. You'll have to sit at the last table.
MR. MITHINGTON: But we want *that* table.
HOSTESS: Sorry.
MR. MITHINGTON: Where is the manager?
JOE: I demand to speak to the manager!
MRS. MITHINGTON: Bring us the manager.

(Lights change color. Everyone gasps. Enter MANAGER.)

MANAGER: Quiet! **(pause)** Sit down, Mr. and Mrs. Mithington.
MITHINGTON: But they have our table!
MANAGER: It doesn't matter. Sit down anywhere. You'll still be served.
Everyone gets served. . . on murder night.

(HOSTESS takes the MITHINGTONS, nervous, to a table. MANAGER looks at everyone.)

MANAGER: Well, now. It looks like we're all here.
MITHINGTON: I suppose so, but they took our—
MANAGER: Does everyone have chicken?
MARY: May I have something else, please?
MANAGER: Don't you like it?
MARY: No.
MANAGER: **(to WAITRESS)** Go get her the special.
WAITRESS: **(snickers)** Oh! The special.

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MARY: What special?

MANAGER: You'll love it.

MARY: Maybe I'll keep the chicken.

MANAGER: Don't be ridiculous. You don't want the chicken, so you may have the special.

JOE: May I have the special?

MANAGER: No.

JOE: Why does she get the special when I don't?

MRS. SALT: Oh, be quiet, would you?

MRS. CABBAGE: You're such a dreadful bore.

JOE: But why can't I—

MARY: You can have mine.

MANAGER: No, he can't. *You* must eat the special.

MARY: I don't want the special. I want to go home.

MANAGER: I'm terribly sorry, but nobody can leave. **(to HOSTESS)** Are they all here?

HOSTESS: Yes.

MANAGER: Very well. **(whispers in HOSTESS' ear; SHE nods and leaves)** Ladies and gentlemen, I'm happy to welcome you here tonight. As you know, it's a very special evening. **(WAITRESS and WAITER enter with a covered dish)** Ah. Here we are. The special for this woman right here.

MARY: Please, I don't want it!

MANAGER: You offend me, my dear. We've made it just for you.

MARY: No!

MANAGER: Very well. Anyone else not satisfied with their dish?

JOE: Well. I would like the check.

MANAGER: Nonsense. We're just getting started. **(HE waves WAITER and WAITRESS away.)** Now, I'd like to introduce our special guest this evening. You've read about him in the papers. You've seen him on the TV news. The one. The only. The world's greatest detective: Rathbone.

(Enter RATHBONE, to great applause; JOE and MARY look confused)

RATHBONE: Thank you! Thank you, all. I'm delighted to be here with you this evening. Is everyone having a good time?

(general murmur of agreement, pause)

JOE: Why is there a detective at dinner?

MANAGER: Don't you know?

HOSTESS: **(to MANAGER)** They forced their way in.

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MANAGER: Is that so? I thought they were the Mithingtons.

MITHINGTON: We're the Mithingtons. They took our reservation.

MRS. MITHINGTON: Cads.

MANAGER: Oh, dear.

JOE: Look, could we just leave?

RATHBONE: Wait! (**takes out magnifying glass and looks at JOE and MARY**) sTrying to get out before anyone notices, eh? Very suspicious indeed.

MANAGER: Please, Rathbone. Things haven't yet begun.

RATHBONE: Oh, I think they have. And *you (to JOE)* are under great suspicion, sir. Great suspicion, indeed.

JOE: What did I do?

MARY: This is all your fault. You took the Mithingtons' reservations.

MITHINGTON: Cad.

JOE: But I did it for you, Mary.

MANAGER: Please. We're wasting time.

MR. ELSINORE: Yes. Let's begin the evening. I'm ready for a good murder.

MANAGER: Very well. I'll dispense with the formalities. You all know why you're here.

MRS. MITHINGTON: (**points at JOE and MARY**) Not them. They forced their way in.

MANAGER: Oh, yes. Well, I suppose a bit of explanation is due.

RATHBONE: Do hurry. I'd like to get started.

MANAGER: We're here for murder night, don't you see?

MARY: Yes, but—

MANAGER: Which means any moment now we're due a murder.

MARY: That's impossible.

MR. MITHINGTON: It's quite possible, my dear. In fact, it's indisputable. Someone in this room will be murdered.

MARY: But why?

RATHBONE: So I can solve the crime, of course.

MARY: How do you solve a crime that everyone's expecting?

MRS. MITHINGTON: Good point, my dear. If we're all here expecting a murder, then there's no crime to solve.

MANAGER: Not necessarily. You all paid two hundred dollars a plate—

JOE: Two hundred dollars!

MANAGER: (**continuing**) To enjoy a good murder. And I've set one up for you. The only thing that has to happen now is—one of you has to take the initiative and kill someone.

MARY: Impossible! This is illegal.

MANAGER: Nonsense. We have a murder's permit.

MARY: There's no such thing.

MANAGER: It's hanging on the wall by the men's room.

JOE: Perhaps I should go inspect it.

MANAGER: Sit down.

JOE: But—

MANAGER: (**ferocious**) Down! (**JOE sits.**) Thank you. The murder is perfectly legal, my dear. I've worked it all out with the police, you see. Rathbone is such a genius detective that they can't keep him busy with everyday crime and killing, so they've given us permission to have a nice murder right here, under controlled circumstances, where Rathbone can solve the crime this evening and take the murderer straight to jail.

RATHBONE: It helps that my father is a multi-billionaire.

MANAGER: Yes, that does help, Rathbone. The police make far less fuss over things when your father's worth billions.

MARY: This is the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard. I'm leaving.

RATHBONE: Methinks the lady doth protest too much.

WAITRESS: Hey! That was my line. We did Hamlet when—

RATHBONE: Silence! (**to MARY**) Why is it, young lady, that everyone else here came for a good murder, while you and your—what is he? Husband? Fiancée?

JOE: Boyfriend.

MARY: Ex-boyfriend.

JOE: Mary!

RATHBONE: Ah! The two of you have great motivation then, for murder.

MANAGER: Ingenuously done, Rathbone.

RATHBONE: Thank you. Actually, you all have reasons for murder. Mr. and Mrs. Elsinore, bickering over flowers. Mr. Elsinore, buying a flower for the young man's date. The young man's date demanding a dinner that the young man obviously can never hope to pay for. The two ladies, hiding secret pasts... And the Mithingtons, completely overlooked by the hostess and replaced at their favorite table. Each of you has a justification to kill someone in this room.

WAITRESS: Oh! And I hate the waiter.

WAITER: Shh.

WAITRESS: Well, I do. I have every reason to kill you.

MRS. ELSINORE: Do be quiet, dear.

(WAITER and WAITRESS exit arguing.)

MARY: This is absurd.

RATHBONE: (**pause**) Well?

MARY: Well what?

RATHBONE: Well? It's time for the murder.

MANAGER: Yes. (**pause**) Well? We're waiting.

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JOE: Waiting for what?

RATHBONE: The murder.

MANAGER: Yes. Get on with it, whichever one of you.

RATHBONE: (**pause**) For Heaven's sake, hurry up!

ELSINORE: (**to MANAGER**) Wait a moment. You're telling me that you're not going to kill one of the dinner guests?

MANAGER: Me? Goodness, no. Why ever would I do that?

ELSINORE: I paid you to see a murder!

MANAGER: And so you did! (**to crowd**) We're waiting, and whichever one of you wants to kill somebody, I wish you'd hurry up.

MR. ELSINORE: I didn't pay to commit murder. I paid to watch a murder. And to see it solved.

MR. MITHINGTON: That's right!

MANAGER: Well, someone has to do the killing.

RATHBONE: Wasn't anyone hired to commit the crime?

MRS. SALT: Not I.

MRS. CABBAGE: Nor I.

MR. MITHINGTON: This is ridiculous!

MANAGER: Oh. Oh, dear.

MR. ELSINORE: We've been cheated.

RATHBONE: Eh? And just what were you expecting, Mr. Elsinore?

ELSINORE: Violence. Crime. Murder!

RATHBONE: And did you have a victim in mind. Perhaps... you paid for someone to kill Mrs. Elsinore for you?

MRS. ELSINORE: Darling!?

MRS. SALT: This is no good. He solved it too quickly.

MRS. CABBAGE: Not at all. There hasn't been a murder yet. Someone has to kill Mrs. Elsinore, first, before Rathbone can arrest them. (**to ELSINORE**) Take your knife and stab her in the heart, dear.

MRS. ELSINORE: How dare you!

MR. ELSINORE: I didn't pay to have you killed. I swear it.

MRS. ELSINORE: You heartless cad! Mother was right about you all along.

MR. ELSINORE: But darling—

MRS. ELSINORE: I'm leaving!

MANAGER: Sorry, Mrs. Elsinore. You can't leave. We're locked inside until Rathbone gets his man. (**pause**) Or woman.

MRS. ELSINORE: Egad! Henry!

MR. ELSINORE: I'll protect you, snookums.

MRS. ELSINORE: But you're trying to kill me.

MR. ELSINORE: I'm not.

JOE: (**a realization**) Wait a minute—Mary and I didn't pay two hundred dollars a plate like everyone else! Gosh-darn it, I guess that means

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we can't enjoy our dessert, then. So I guess you'll have to kick us out of here.

MARY: Yes! We haven't paid a thing.

JOE: So, sorry. We've got to go.

RATHBONE: (**dramatic**) Don't move. You're a prime suspect.

JOE: But no crime's been committed.

RATHBONE: That doesn't mean anything. There *will* be a crime. And as soon as it happens, you're the first one I'm coming to. You hear me, buddy? I've got my eye on you.

MANAGER: Are we all finished, now? Perhaps I should explain things more clearly. Each of you paid this evening for two reasons. First, you wanted to watch the world's greatest detective in action. But second, because for each of you, there is someone in this room you secretly would like to see murdered.

MRS. ELSINORE: (**slaps her husband**) You cad!

ELSINORE: But Eleanor!

(With a sudden clap of thunder, the lights go out—screams, shouts.)

MANAGER: Don't panic, everyone. We must have blown a fuse.

RATHBONE: Nobody move!

MANAGER: Monroe, darling? Could you do something about the lights?

(The lights go back on. Everyone is still seated.)

RATHBONE: Egad! Someone has committed a murder!

(Pause. They all look around. Nobody's dead.)

MANAGER: Well. Maybe. Not yet.

HOSTESS: What about the waiter and waitress?

RATHBONE: Of course! The waiter and waitress have been murdered!

(WAITER and WAITRESS both enter.)

WAITER: No, we're fine.

WAITRESS: I think I blew a fuse. I was trying to use the blender and the microwave at the same time.

HOSTESS: Is anybody dead?

MRS. ELSINORE: Not me. Much to my husband's chagrin.

ELSINORE: That's not true, darling.

MR. MITHINGTON: I'm alive.

MRS. MITHINGTON: Me, too.

JOE: Could we leave now?

RATHBONE: Not so fast! Your little lady!

JOE: What?

RATHBONE: (**pointing to girl**) Her!

JOE: Mary!

RATHBONE: She hasn't moved!

MARY: What? Oh, terribly sorry. I was distracted.

RATHBONE: Confound it! Will somebody kill somebody else so I can solve this thing?

HOSTESS: Wait a minute!

ALL: Yes?

HOSTESS: Heather, the waitress, said she was using the microwave and the blender at the same time.

ALL: Yes?

HOSTESS: Why was the waitress cooking!?

RATHBONE: Egad!

WAITRESS: I had to! The cook has a knife in his back.

RATHBONE: What?

(WAITER and MANAGER rush offstage. They come back with a bloodied cook's hat.)

MANAGER: It's true. The cook is dead.

RATHBONE: At last! Nobody move.

MANAGER: He was face down, boiling in the soup.

MRS. SALT: The soup! Uh! (**holds up bowl**) Somebody take this away.

MANAGER: Well, now. There's your murder.

RATHBONE: You're all suspects.

ELSINORE: Wait a minute.

MANAGER: What's that?

ELSINORE: I thought one of the dinner guests was to be murdered.

MRS. ELSINORE: You *do* want to be rid of me!

ELSINORE: It's not that, my dear. It's just—

MANAGER: Yes?

ELSINORE: It's what we paid for.

MANAGER: It's true.

RATHBONE: Ah ha! Then the cook isn't dead.

WAITRESS: Oh, yes. The cook is dead. (**enter COOK, hatless**)

COOK: No, the cook is not dead.

WAITRESS: Cookie!

COOK: (**to MANAGER**) You took my stinking hat.

MANAGER: I was trying to make a dramatic moment for everyone.

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COOK: Give me back my hat. (**HE does.**) Who wanted to send back the chicken?

WAITER: (**points to MARY**) She did.

MARY: No, I didn't.

COOK: And you wouldn't take the special?

WAITRESS: She wouldn't!

MARY: Would you be quiet? (**to COOK**) I didn't mean it—

COOK: Why are you here if you don't like my cooking?

MARY: I do! I do like your cooking.

JOE: I don't.

MARY: Please—

COOK: You don't like my cooking?

JOE: No.

COOK: I ought'a murder you for that!

RATHBONE: Egad! You heard him!

COOK: Who's this?

MANAGER: The detective.

COOK: Is it murder night?

MANAGER: Yes.

COOK: So none of you came here for my cooking? Just because you wanted the show of seeing someone get murdered?

MARY: I came here for your cooking. I don't like deaths.

COOK: Is that so? (**to WAITRESS**) Go get her the special.

WAITRESS: (**exiting**) Oh, the special!

MARY: Please—

COOK: You afraid to eat the special?

MARY: Should I be?

COOK: It's murder night, isn't it?

MARY: Oh, please.

COOK: Then eat the special.

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