

# **AN ALL YOU CAN MURDER BUFFET**

**By Marissa DeYoung, Sabrina Salay, Hannah Singleton,  
Matt Steele, and Mike Steele**

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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

*(Written for 7 M, 12 F, and at least 3 that can be either, but can be performed as 6 M, 4 F, 12 that can be either, and unlimited extras.)*

CHEERLEADER ONE: An inept member of Knotting Community College's Cheerleading Team. 20's. (Male or female.)

CHEERLEADER TWO: An inept member of Knotting Community College's Cheerleading Team. 20's. (Male or female.)

CHEERLEADER THREE: An inept member of Knotting Community College's Cheerleading Team. 20's. (Male or female.)

COACH CANDY: The grumpy cheerleading coach at Knotting Community College. 30's. (Female.)

ANNIE: The meek mascot-wearing student on Knotting Community College's Cheerleading Team. 20's. (Female.)

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: An irritable cook at IHOFF: The International House of Fried Foods. French accent is required. 40's. (Male, but could be female – Babelle Rosalie.)

GEORGIA: An insulting busperson at IHOFF: The International House of Fried Foods. Southern accent is required. 40's. (Female, but could be male - Dakota.)

TERI: The stressed manager at IHOFF: The International House of Fried Foods. 40's. (Female, but could be male - Terry.)

AXEL: A gruff tattooed biker. Husband to Petunia. 40's. (Male.)

PETUNIA: A vegan tattooed biker. Wife to Axel. 40's. (Female.)

EMMA: An argumentative conjoined twin. Sister to Leigh. 20's. (Female, but could be male provided the other twin is also male - Pat.)

LEIGH: An argumentative conjoined twin. Sister to Emma. 20's. (Female, but could be male provided the other twin is also male - Rick.)

HOLLY: A doting woman who works as an elf at the mall. 20's. (Female.)

ALBERT: A mall Santa who takes his job very seriously. 40's. (Male.)

PAISLEY: An artistic fashion designer. 40's. (Female, but could be male - Suede.)

DR. MERIWETHER: The stern president of Knotting Community College. 40's. (Female, but could be male – still Dr. Meriwether.)

PEARL: An enthusiastic therapist. 30's. (Female, but could be male - Peter.)

MADAM ADELINA: A dramatic psychic. Strong improvisation skills are required. 50's. (Female, but could be male – The Mysterious Adolfo.)

LOGAN: A love-struck ventriloquist. 20's. (Male.)

RALPH: A committed mail carrier. 30's. (Male.)

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: A diva female impersonator extraordinaire. 40's. (Male.)

HOBO JOE: A humorous squatter. 40's. (Male.)

OPTIONAL ADDITIONAL CHEERLEADERS: Additional inept members of Knotting Community College's Cheerleading Team. 20's. (Male and/or Female.)

## CASTING ADJUSTMENTS

While some roles must be played by actors of a specific gender, it is noted which roles may be played by either male or female actors. The names and pronouns associated with these characters may be changed.

In the event that Jean Luc Francois is played by a female, and the character's name is changed to Babette Rosalie, Georgia should refer to Babette Rosalie as "Baby Rosie" instead of "Gene Luck Frankie."

In the event that Emma and Leigh are played by males, and the characters' names are changed to Pat and Rick, Pat should mention that their mother was expecting one son named Patrick as opposed to one daughter named Emily.

Throughout the play, the characters often discuss the arrival of a famous "Special Guest". The name used for this "Special Guest" is at the discretion of the director. The "Special Guest" is referred to as a male in the script, but could be female. The "Special Guest" can be completely fictional, a pop culture icon, a local celebrity, a school principal, a drama club president, etc. This element provides a touch of personalization to each production.

## SETTING

**PLACE AND TIME:** IHOFF: The International House of Fried Foods, an all you can eat buffet, present

### ACT I

Scene One: *A snowy evening*

Scene Two: *Later, the same evening*

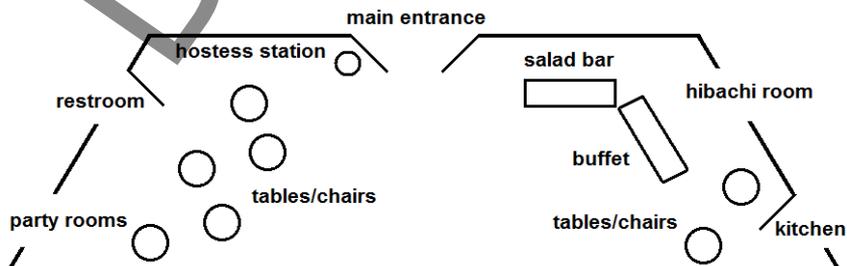
### ACT II

Scene One: *Even later, the same evening*

Scene Two: *Much later, the same evening*

## THE SET

The action takes place in the main room of IHOFF: The International House of Fried Foods. Downstage Right (DR) is an archway that leads to several private Party Rooms within the restaurant. Upstage Right (UR) is a door that serves as an entrance to a restroom. Upstage Center (UC) is a set of double doors that serve as the buffet's main entrance. One of these main entrance doors contains a non-functioning mail slot. Upstage Left (UL) is an archway that leads to a Hibachi Room. Downstage Left (DL) is a door that leads to the kitchen. Several dining tables and chairs are positioned around the restaurant. The tables are covered in table cloths. A hostess station is located to the right of the main entrance. A salad bar and buffet table are positioned in an "L" shape Center Left (CL). A drape hangs below the buffet table to the floor so that the space underneath is not visible to the audience. A "Protect the Whales" poster hangs on one of the walls.



## SOUND EFFECTS

In Act I, Scene One, wind is heard whenever the UC doors open.

In Act I, Scene One, a loud crash is heard offstage.

In Act I, Scene Two, a toilet flushes offstage.

In Act I, Scene One; Act I, Scene Two; and Act II, Scene One, an electric buzz is heard when the lights go off and then on again.

In Act II, Scene One, a slap is heard offstage.

In Act II, Scene Two, Annie's cellular phone makes an alert sound.

In Act II, Scene Two, a motorcycle rumble is heard offstage.

## AUDIENCE INTERACTION

The audience interacts with the character of Madam Adelina throughout the play. The actor playing Madam Adelina may need to do a little coaxing to get a reluctant audience responding. Whether the actor allows the audience to call out, or whether she requires individual audience members to raise their hands to answer her questions is up to the director.

As Madam Adelina is interacting with the audience, any other actors onstage should continue with their normal routines as if Madam Adelina is simply meditating, though these actors should be careful not to distract from the main action.

Towards the end of Act II, Scene One, the audience has the opportunity to interrogate the characters with the help of Madam Adelina. Madam Adelina asks the audience if they have any questions that they think should be asked of the suspects. The actor playing Madam Adelina should control which audience members ask their questions and write these questions in a pad. The actors onstage then improvise a short segment as the actor playing Madam Adelina asks the questions that have been written in the pad. This improvisation can be a lot of fun for both the actors and the audience, but the director should make sure that the cast is well prepared. During the rehearsal process, the director can feed questions to the actors that the audience might ask of the characters. The number of questions that Madam Adelina gathers is up to the director. Popular questions might include, "Why do Jean Luc Francois and Georgia not get along?", "How did Teri come to be manager of IHOFF?", and "Why do Emma and Leigh have so much money if they work for the circus?" In the original production, eight to ten questions were gathered at each performance, creating an improvisation segment that lasted roughly ten minutes.

## A FEW NOTES ABOUT STAGING THIS PLAY

In Act I, Scene One, snow is falling whenever the main entrance doors are opened. If a snow machine is unavailable, a snow shaker can easily be constructed by filling a PVC pipe with prop snowflakes and drilling holes throughout its length. If the PVC pipe is hung above the entrance behind the set, stage crew members can gently shake it to release a snowfall whenever the doors are opened.

In Act I, Scene One, a wall of snow traps the characters inside the restaurant. This wall of snow can be made from a large sheet of foam that has been painted white. Cotton batting attached to the sheet will add extra dimension. The sheet can be hung directly behind the main entrance doors. In Act II, Scene Two, Petunia falls through this wall of snow. A slit can be cut down the middle of the sheet so that a person can easily pass through the false wall.

In Act I, Scene Two, Hobo Joe is stabbed in the chest with shish kabob skewers. This effect can easily be created by sticking a piece of Styrofoam under the actor's costume. Shish kabob skewers can be stuck through the front of the costume and into the Styrofoam. Stage blood can be poured onto the actor's costume to make the stabbing look more authentic.

In Act II, Scene Two, Annie enters the stage with a trail of smoke following her as if her mascot costume is on fire. This effect can be created by placing a small amount of dry ice or a fog machine near the UL entrance immediately before Annie enters. As Annie runs through the entrance, the fake smoke will billow in behind her.

It is a good idea for a rag to be kept somewhere appropriate onstage so that any foods or liquids that may hit the floor throughout the show can be promptly cleaned to avoid the actors from slipping. Georgia, as the busperson at the buffet, might be the character that would most appropriately wipe the stage.

At the end of the play, the \*Special Guest\* arrives at the restaurant, but only as an offstage voice. Therefore, if the \*Special Guest\* is based on a real-life individual, this person does not need to actually be present during the performance. Rather, a gender-appropriate actor can voice this character.

Throughout the play, references are made to cellular phones (and applications), a blog, posting online, a GPS, a tablet, text messaging, and several pop culture icons. These references may be changed to best reflect modern technologies and current trends.

## PRODUCTION HISTORY

September 2011: Workshop Reading  
Nottingham High School  
Hamilton, NJ

November 2011: Full Production  
Nottingham High School  
Hamilton, NJ

THE ORIGINAL PRODUCTION OF  
**AN ALL YOU CAN MURDER BUFFET**  
A Murder Mystery Comedy with Audience Interaction

Written By  
Marissa DeYoung  
Sabrina Salay  
Hannah Singleton  
Matt Steele  
Mike Steele

COACH CANDY ..... Jessica Leigh Bookholdt  
ANNIE ..... Elizabeth Clifford  
JEAN-LUC-FRANCOIS ..... Josue Orellana  
GEORGIA ..... Haffie Sanoussy  
TERI ..... Hannah Singleton  
AXEL ..... Kevin Ortega  
PETUNIA ..... Marissa DeYoung  
EMMA ..... Sabrina Salay  
LEIGH ..... Emily Ocasio  
HOLLY ..... Tricia-Rae Parent  
ALBERT ..... Chris Palmer  
PAISLEY ..... Jaime Duncan  
DR. MERIWETHER ..... Maria Miktus  
PETER ..... Roberto Salas  
MADAM ADELINA ..... Jessica Getlik  
LOGAN ..... Wesley Cappiello  
RALPH ..... Joey Donnoli  
THE LOCELY LOLICIA ..... David Sanchez  
HOBO JOE ..... Caleb Riggins  
CHEERLEADER ONE ..... Christos Nyktas  
CHEERLEADER TWO ..... Tataniqua Glover  
CHEERLEADER THREE ..... Crystal Garnett  
ADDITIONAL CHEERLEADERS ..... Adrianna Cheeks, Amanda Montaque, Denisse Nin,  
Cynthia Pierre, Mckenzie Scarpati, Rachel Vause

**DIRECTED BY**  
Mike Steele

**ASSISTANT DIRECTED BY**  
Matt Steele

November 18 and 19, 2011  
Nottingham High School  
Hamilton, NJ

**PROP LIST**

**ACT I, SCENE ONE**

“Protect the Whales” sign (Annie)  
Cellular phone (Annie)  
Plates (Georgia)

Pot (Jean Luc Francois)  
Tray of food (Jean Luc Francois)  
“Protect the Whales” flier (Emma)  
Rorschach Test (Pearl)

Cellular phone (Dr. Meriwether)  
Ventriloquist's dummy (Logan)  
Large package (Ralph)  
French fries, baklava, and falafel  
(pre-set on buffet table)  
Mixed greens bowl (pre-set on salad bar)  
Large bowl of mixed greens (Jean Luc  
Francois)  
Tarot cards (Madam Adelina)

### ACT I, SCENE TWO

Vial of powder (Madam Adelina)  
Plate (pre-set on buffet table)  
Fried mozzarella sticks (pre-set on buffet  
table)  
Pad and pencil (Pearl)  
Spoons (pre-set on buffet table)  
Measuring tape (Paisley)  
Tablet (Albert)  
Flashlight (pre-set behind hostess  
station)  
Shish kabob skewers (Hobo Joe)  
Pen and delivery receipt (Ralph)  
Stuffed whale with a noose around its  
neck and an envelope containing a  
letter (pre-set in large package)

### ACT II, SCENE ONE

Check (Emma)  
Glass of water (pre-set on buffet table)  
Plates (Jean Luc Francois)

Gelatin mold (Jean Luc Francois)  
Half-made table cloth gown (Paisley)  
Candy cane (Holly)  
Needle and thread (Paisley)  
Large bottle of acetone (Pearl)  
Tray of brownies (Jean Luc Francois)  
Ketchup (Coach Candy)  
Makeup, hair clips, and gold star stickers  
(Pearl)  
Long balloon, air pump, and permanent  
magic marker (The Lovely Lolicia)  
Pad and pen (Madam Adelina)

### ACT II, SCENE TWO

Plate (pre-set on buffet table)  
Bucket (Ralph)  
Serving spoon (pre-set on buffet table)  
Towel (pre-set behind hostess station)  
Mop (Georgia)  
Tricycle (Petunia)  
Thermos (Petunia)  
Cellular phone (Petunia)  
Gun (Petunia)  
Telephone book (Albert)

## COSTUMES

*Since the setting is present day, most of the costumes would be contemporary. The action takes place in one evening, so all of the characters should wear the same costume from the beginning of the play until its conclusion.*

COACH CANDY wears a track suit with her name embroidered on the breast. A whistle hangs on a cord around her neck.

ANNIE wears a whale mascot costume.

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS might wear a chef's uniform complete with chef's hat.

GEORGIA might wear black dress pants, a dress shirt, and an apron.

TERI might be dressed in a tuxedo shirt and black pants.

AXEL and PETUNIA might wear leather jackets and bandanas. Both are covered in tattoos. Petunia carries a pocketbook.

EMMA and LEIGH should wear clothing that has been stitched together near the mid-section so that they remain connected.

ALBERT wears a Santa Claus suit which contains white faux fur cuffs. He also wears a hat and boots. He carries a sack.

HOLLY wears an elf costume.

PAISLEY wears flashy designer clothing. She dons a large hat at one point in Act I, Scene One. She carries a pocketbook.

DR. MERIWETHER might be dressed very professionally. She carries a briefcase.

PEARL might also be dressed professionally. She carries a tote bag.

MADAM ADELINA might wear loud, flowy clothing. She carries a purse.

LOGAN might wear a suit and tie that matches his dummy's attire.

RALPH wears a mail carrier's uniform.

THE LOVELY LOLICIA is dressed in drag, complete with a manicure and a wig. He carries a pocketbook.

HOBO JOE might wear old, dirty, tattered clothing.

THE CHEERLEADERS wear cheerleading uniforms.

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# AN ALL YOU CAN MURDER BUFFET

by

Marissa DeYoung, Sabrina Salay, Hannah Singleton, Matt Steele, Mike Steele

## ACT I

### SCENE ONE

*AT RISE: A whistle blows offstage DR. CHEERLEADERS – a group of college cheerleaders - enter DR. They wear cheerleading uniforms and begin to perform a sloppy routine.)*

CHEERLEADER ONE: Gimme a W!

CHEERLEADERS: W!

CHEERLEADER ONE: Gimme an H!

CHEERLEADERS: H!

CHEERLEADER ONE: Gimme an A!

CHEERLEADERS: A!

CHEERLEADER ONE: Gimme an L!

CHEERLEADERS: L!

CHEERLEADER ONE: Gimme an E!

CHEERLEADERS: E!

CHEERLEADER ONE: Gimme an S!

CHEERLEADERS: S!

CHEERLEADER ONE: What does that spell?

CHEERLEADERS: Whales! Let's protect the Whales!

*(The whistle blows offstage again, and COACH CANDY – a grumpy cheerleading coach - enters angrily DR. SHE wears a track suit with her name embroidered on the breast, and a whistle hangs on a cord around her neck.)*

COACH CANDY: Where's the whale? There's supposed to be a whale! We need the whale here!

ANNIE: *(Peeks her head out of UL entrance.)* Did I miss my cue, Coach?

COACH CANDY: Shut your blow-hole and get out here, Annie! I oughta whoop you like a rented mule!

*(ANNIE – a cheerleading team mascot - enters UL wearing a whale mascot costume and holding a "Protect the Whales" sign upside down. CHEERLEADERS form a sloppy formation. ANNIE attempts to pose in front of CHEERLEADERS, but trips and falls.)*

*(To ANNIE.)* Well, that was about as graceful as a lump of mud sliding down the back end of a cliff. You're a disgrace to Knottling Community College's Cheerleading Team. Consider yourself lucky that no one else fits the mascot costume or your position on the team would be as endangered as your little fishy family.

ANNIE: It just so happens, Coach Candy, that whales aren't fish at all; they're mammals. They breathe oxygen just like you and every other person in this room. So please show me some respect.

COACH CANDY: *(Clobbers ANNIE in the face of her costume.)* How's that for respect?

CHEERLEADERS: *(Laugh.)* Ha ha ha!

COACH CANDY: *(To CHEERLEADERS.)* I don't know what you pieces of mess are laughing at. Listen, Whales. Your entire routine was just as sad as Annie's entrance. Now, go outside and do splits or something. Draw some attention to the restaurant. Fundraiser dinners don't advertise themselves.

*(CHEERLEADERS open doors UC. Snow is falling heavily and a gust of wind is heard.)*

CHEERLEADER ONE: Do we have to go out there? It's snowing pretty hard, Coach.

COACH CANDY: Does this face look like it cares about your warmth? You're gonna go out there and protect the Whales, and you're gonna do it cheerfully! Now get outside and hustle, hustle, hustle! Cheer, cheer, cheer! *(COACH CANDY exits UL.)*

CHEERLEADER TWO: I hope we earn a ton of money for the team tonight. I've been passing out fliers all over town. I hit the college campus, the mall, and even the circus.

ANNIE: Well, if You-Know-Who comes, then we're sure to raise enough money to keep the team going next year. And maybe we'll raise a little extra to pay for new uniforms.

CHEERLEADER ONE: "You-Know-Who?"

CHEERLEADER THREE: What are you talking about Annie?

CHEERLEADER TWO: Who is "You-Know-Who?"

ANNIE: I didn't tell you? Last week, I sent an invitation to one of the greatest philanthropists of our generation.

CHEERLEADER ONE: Oprah Winfrey?

ANNIE: Someone better.

CHEERLEADER TWO: Michelle Obama?

ANNIE: Even better.

CHEERLEADER THREE: Lady GaGa?

ANNIE: No. \*Special Guest\*!

CHEERLEADER ONE: \*Special Guest\*?!?

ANNIE: Yes! I emailed and said that we're holding a fundraiser for our cheerleading team and we'd love if he would come and support the cause. And I think he might show up tonight. I check his blog first thing every morning, and it just so happens that he posted this earlier today... *(Pulls cellular phone out of her pocket and reads aloud.)* "I'm super excited to be making an appearance at the big event tonight! I hope some desserts are left by the time I get there."

CHEERLEADER ONE: \*Special Guest\* might show up!

CHEERLEADER TWO: I don't know. \*Special Guest\* is famous. Probably the most famous person in the entire universe. He goes to important events all the time. This is just a stupid fundraiser at a dinky buffet in some town in the middle of nowhere. Why would he even think of showing his face in a place like this?

CHEERLEADER THREE: Stop being a killjoy. I'm holding out hope. \*Special Guest\* might show up! Now let's get out there and practice our welcome cheer. Smiles ready?

CHEERLEADERS: Ready!

CHEERLEADER ONE: Come on, Annie. You need more practice than any of us.

*(ANNIE and CHEERLEADERS exit UC. GEORGIA – an insulting busperson - and JEAN LUC FRANCOIS – an irritable cook - enter DL. GEORGIA is carrying plates and begins to arrange them on tables. JEAN LUC FRANCOIS is carrying a pot.)*

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: Sacrebleu! You are not cleaning ze hot pots well enough.

GEORGIA: You got dirt in your eyes or somethin'? I clean just fine.

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: Georgia, I found a spot. Zese spots have never been here until your dirty self has come along. All of ze old buspeople could clean efficiently.

GEORGIA: Well, it's me you got workin' here now, mon cherie, so quit gettin' your undies all bunched up and deal with it.

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: In my land of Paris, women never speak of such filthy zings as undies!

*(TERI – a stressed restaurant manager - enters DL.)*

GEORGIA: Well, in my land of Mississippi, fellas who worry 'bout grease stains in pots might as well be called women!

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: You are a bad person! A very bad person!

TERI: Golly, gee! Jean Luc Francois, Georgia, what have I told you about arguing outside of the kitchen? If diners hear you, they might post negative restaurant reviews online. I don't need any additional stress. Clarissa just phoned and said that she won't be coming into work tonight, either. Apparently she's snowed in just like everyone else.

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: So, who will be working?

TERI: Well, let's see. Ten wait staff have called out, and so have four sous chefs and three buspeople. *(Calculates on fingers.)* Golly, gee! I guess that leaves the three of us.

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: What? You cannot possibly expect me to cook all of ze food on my own!

GEORGIA: Don't worry, Teri. I'll help Gene Luck Frankie over here with the cookin'.

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: My name is Jean Luc Francois!

GEORGIA: Same thing. I'll still help.

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: Ha! What does a busperson know about cooking? I attended ze finest of culinary schools in Europe. I have worked in ze most decadent of restaurants. You are a hillbilly who cannot even properly clean a spotty pot.

GEORGIA: *(Pounds fist into palm.)* Gene Luck Frankie hates spots in his pots? How 'bout Georgia puts some black and blue spots all over his face?

*(GEORGIA lunges at JEAN LUC FRANCOIS. TERI steps between them.)*

TERI: Now, hold it! No fighting.

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: *(To GEORGIA.)* You are a bad person! A very bad person!

TERI: Golly, gee! Will you two stop? There are only three of us here tonight, so that means we need to work together. I've closed off the Hibachi Room and we won't use any of the private Party Rooms. I doubt we'll see many diners with the weather like it is. But we must get back to work. Now, chop, chop!

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: *(To GEORGIA.)* I guess it is very difficult to master ze cleaning technique. *(Holds up pot and moves hand counterclockwise.)* Now, I will show you again. Ze trick is to scrub using ze counterclockwise strokes. Zat is how ze pots become tres magnifique.

GEORGIA: I still don't understand why.

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: Ah! What is so difficult? In France, all of our children are raised scrubbing counterclockwise.

GEORGIA: Well in Mississippi, all of our children are raised with digital clocks.

*(COACH CANDY enters UL.)*

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: Sacrebleu! I am leaving! Close zis place down. I am going home to watch my soap operas until ze snow is no more.

COACH CANDY: *(To JEAN LUC FRANCOIS.)* You go home, and you destroy any last hope my cheerleaders have of keeping their spirits alive. The team is dependent upon tonight's fundraiser. We must protect the Whales! *(To TERI.)* Teri, you promised that twenty percent of tonight's sales were gonna be given to the team's cause. I've hustled around this town hanging posters, my cheerleaders have been practicing their "thank you" cheer all week, and \*Special Guest\* might show up!

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: \*Special Guest\*!

GEORGIA: \*Special Guest\*!

TERI: \*Special Guest\*! Golly, gee! I'm \*Special Guest's\* biggest fan! Don't worry, Coach Candy, we're not closing the restaurant. The fundraiser will continue as planned. The owners

would murder me if I locked the doors early. I'd be out of a job. *(To JEAN LUC FRANCOIS.)*  
Do you know how hard it would be for me to find a new restaurant management job in this economy? Just as hard as it would be to find a job as a cook. So unless you want to be visiting the unemployment office, get back to work.

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: Do not worry. If \*Special Guest\* is coming, I am staying.

*(GEORGIA and JEAN LUC FRANCOIS exit DL.)*

TERI: *(To COACH CANDY.)* Hopefully, this storm won't keep away hungry diners and your fundraiser will be a success. Is there anything else I can do for you?

COACH CANDY: Can you get me new cheerleaders? The ones I have now high kick about as well as a lame horse.

TERI: No, but I can get you some egg rolls.

*(COACH CANDY shakes her head disgustedly and sits at a table. AXEL and PETUNIA – two tattooed bikers - enter UC. PETUNIA is carrying a pocketbook. Snow is still falling, and a gust of wind is heard.)*

*(To AXEL and PETUNIA.)* Welcome to IHOFF: The International House of Fried Foods.

Please, feel free to sit wherever you like.

AXEL: This place looks swell. Don't it, Petunia?

PETUNIA: Ya got *that* right!

AXEL: *(To TERI.)* What can I call you, lady?

TERI: Uh, my name's Teri...

AXEL: Teri. That's a name with good street cred.

PETUNIA: Ya got *that* right!

AXEL: I'm Axel, and the missus here is named Petunia. Petunia's been waiting to try the food at this joint for ages.

TERI: That's wonderful to hear. IHOFF is an all you can eat buffet featuring international dishes.

You'll find that we have a sampling of various cultural cuisines from around the globe.

Everything from country fried chicken to pork fried rice. We have anything you might like, as long as it's fried.

AXEL: Everything's fried? Perfect! This is our kind of joint.

PETUNIA: Ya got *that* right!

TERI: Fill your plates with some finger-licking, lip-smacking, artery-clogging goodness whenever you're ready. IHOFF is hosting a special event tonight. Twenty percent of your bill will support the Protect the Whales Mission. And I've just been informed that \*Special Guest\* might show up!

AXEL: Whatever. You said this place is all you can eat, right?

TERI: Yes, Sir.

AXEL: I don't know about *protecting* whales, but I sure could *eat* a whale.

*(PETUNIA gives AXEL a dirty look.)*

Oh, I'm sorry my little gumdrop.

TERI: Is there a problem?

*(JEAN LUC FRANCOIS enters DL with tray of food and places it on buffet table.)*

AXEL: Well, you see, Petunia over here is one of those... Oh, what do you call them? Vegans.

No animal products for this sweet sugar lump. Petunia don't enjoy jokes about animals, especially when it comes to eating them.

PETUNIA: Ya got *that* right!

AXEL: You don't happen to have a vegetarian section for little Petunia here, do you?

TERI: She's in luck. (*Indicates salad bar. To PETUNIA.*) We have our fried salad bar just over there. Help yourself to all the fried tofu, fried couscous, and fried mixed greens you can eat.

AXEL: (*To PETUNIA.*) That sounds pretty tasty. Don't you think, darling?

PETUNIA: Ya got that right!

AXEL: (*Studies food on buffet table. To JEAN LUC FRANCOIS.*) What a selection! Mister, make sure you have refills ready.

(*AXEL and PETUNIA select food and sit at a table.*)

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: (*Shouts into DL exit.*) Well, I could have ze refills ready if ze pots were cleaned properly!

GEORGIA: (*Offstage DL.*) They were!

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: (*Shouts into DL exit.*) You are a bad person! A very bad person!

(*JEAN LUC FRANCOIS exits DL. EMMA and LEIGH – argumentative conjoined twins - enter UC. THEY are conjoined at the mid-section. EMMA is carrying a "Protect the Whales" flier. Snow is still falling, and a gust of wind is heard.*)

EMMA: (*To TERI.*) Hello, we're here for the Protect the Whales fundraiser. (*Holds up flier.*) The other day, a cheerleader was passing around these fliers at the circus we perform with.

LEIGH: We used to work for the Protect the Whales organization and we always try to support the valiant cause.

EMMA: Table for two, please.

LEIGH: I want a booth, Emma.

EMMA: I want a table, Leigh.

LEIGH: Well, I want a booth, Emma.

EMMA: Well, I want a table, Leigh. And Mother likes me best. (*To TERI.*) We don't agree on much, but we *both* agree that marine life is important and should be preserved.

TERI: We only have tables at IHÖFF, anyway. No booths.

EMMA: (*To LEIGH.*) Ha! A table.

LEIGH: Aw, we never get a booth.

TERI: You're more than welcome to put a complaint in our suggestion box. We'd always like to hear how we can better serve our diners. It helps prevent people from posting negative restaurant reviews online. In the meantime, a dynamic duo like yourselves should feast upon some classic worldly fried duos for your stomachs. We have fried peanut butter and jelly, fried steak and potatoes, fried pork chops and applesauce -

EMMA: Thanks, but we share one stomach. And it's going to be filled with some fried Estonian food.

LEIGH: No way, Emma! I want a fried Australian steak.

EMMA: Shush your face, Leigh! I want Estonian food. And Mother still likes me best!

(*EMMA and LEIGH select food and sit at a table. ALBERT – a very serious mall Santa - and HOLLY – his doting elf - enter UC. ALBERT is dressed in a Santa Claus suit, complete with white faux fur cuffs, a hat, and boots. His pants are tucked into his boots and HE is carrying a sack. HOLLY is dressed as an elf. Snow is still falling, and a gust of wind is heard.*)

ALBERT: (*To EVERYONE onstage.*) Ho-Ho-Ho, boys and girls!

TERI: Albert! So good to see you again.

COACH CANDY: (*To TERI.*) Who are they? A few North Pole rejects?

TERI: Oh, that's Albert in the Santa suit and Holly in the elf costume. They work at the mall up the highway. Albert and Holly are two of our regular customers.

COACH CANDY: Those quacks are anything but regular. *(Grabs her stomach.)* Ooh! Speaking of "regular," nature is calling. *(COACH CANDY heads towards DL exit.)*

TERI: Coach Candy, that's the kitchen. *(Indicates the UR door.)* Wouldn't you prefer to use the private customer restroom rather than the toilet in the back? I'm sure it's much more pleasant out here.

*(A loud crash is heard offstage DL.)*

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: *(Offstage DL.)* You are a bad person! A very bad person!

COACH CANDY: *(To TERI.)* I'll take my chances. I'd rather do my deed in the midst of the French Revolution than hang around with the loony tunes out here. *(COACH CANDY exits DL.)*

TERI: How's business at the mall, Albert?

ALBERT: *(Grunts.)* Hrmph, hrmph.

HOLLY: Yes, Mr. Claus. I'll remind her, Mr. Claus. *(To TERI.)* Call him by his professional personality name when he's in the suit, remember?

TERI: Of course, Holly. *(To ALBERT.)* So sorry, Santa.

HOLLY: It helps him remain in character. Mr. Claus is incredibly dedicated to his work. We stopped here on our break because we heard there's some sort of fundraiser going on. That's tonight, isn't it?

TERI: It certainly is.

ALBERT: *(Rubs hands together.)* Say, you wouldn't happen to have any Ho-Ho-Hibachi tables open, would you? I want to warm my hands before we head back to the mall. It's freezing outside.

TERI: Our Hibachi Room is closed right now. The hibachi chef has the night off. Something about taking his kids to see Santa at the mall.

ALBERT: Figures. Everyone just wants to take advantage of this big, strong, red lap. No one ever stops to think that even Santy deserves a breaky.

HOLLY: Yes, Mr. Claus. How right you are, Mr. Claus.

ALBERT: I guess I'll just warm up with some fried wonton soup.

HOLLY: Albert –

ALBERT: *(Angrily.)* Ho-Ho-Ho!

HOLLY: I'm so sorry, Mr. Claus. Don't you think you should be watching your figure, Mr. Claus? Watching it grow, that is. Fried wonton soup might not be fattening enough to help you maintain a gorgeous portly physique.

ALBERT: Of course. What I need is a glass of whole milk and some fried cookies.

TERI: Please, help yourself to the dessert selection, Albert... Er, Santa.

*(ALBERT and HOLLY select food and sit at a table. PAISLEY – an artistic fashion designer - and DR. MERIWETHER – a stern college president - enter UC. PAISLEY is wearing flashy designer clothing and carrying a pocketbook. DR. MERIWETHER is carrying a briefcase. Snow is still falling, and a gust of wind is heard.)*

PAISLEY: This snow is simply ghastly! Now I need to re-steam my pants.

DR. MERIWETHER: That is the repercussion one must endure for wearing designer attire in a snowstorm.

PAISLEY: Your practicality nauseates me. Fashion never takes a holiday. *(Indicates ALBERT.)* Speaking of holidays...

DR. MERIWETHER: Can you imagine patronizing a buffet in a Santa Claus costume, Paisley? Every individual in this establishment is staring.

PAISLEY: Well, you can't help but stare when you see a suit as shoddy as that. The color is garish and those cuffs are cheap imitation fur. It's lovely when one attempts to make a fashion statement, but sometimes less is more.

*(PAISLEY pulls a large hat out of her pocketbook and places it on her head.)*

TERI: *(To PAISLEY and DR. MERIWETHER.)* Welcome to IHOFF: The International House of Fried Foods. Can I show you to a table?

DR. MERIWETHER: I am here on business. The name is Dr. Meriwether, current president of Knotting Community College. *(Indicates PAISLEY.)* This is my sister, Paisley.

TERI: Paisley? *The* Paisley? The fashion designer?

PAISLEY: The one and only.

TERI: Golly, gee! I didn't know you were related to the president of a local community college.

PAISLEY: We are very close siblings. I have this joke: Sis knows string theory, and I know thread theory. Ha ha!

*(PAISLEY laughs and TERI stares at her blankly.)*

TERI: *(To DR. MERIWETHER.)* What's string theory?

DR. MERIWETHER: I have not the foggiest idea.

PAISLEY: But doesn't it sound like one of those fancy things a college president would understand? And I know all about different types of sewing threads. Thread theory! That's the joke.

DR. MERIWETHER: *(Pulls "Protect the Whales" poster off of wall. To TERI.)* I shall be frank. I am unaware of what Coach Candy has told you, but this event is not being sponsored by Knotting Community College. Coach Candy and her cheerleading team have organized this fundraiser on their own, without my consent. I am here tonight to ensure the school's name will not be tarnished.

TERI: Oh, don't worry, Dr. Meriwether. IHOFF hosts all sorts of fundraisers and charity dinners, and they've all turned out great.

DR. MERIWETHER: Despite the thick cloud of grease that consistently hovers in the air, your establishment is not what concerns me. Those cheerleaders are a menace to my fine institution. They have a way of making a scene, causing trouble wherever they go. Why, just last month, the team was commissioned to model a new line of avant garde cheerleading uniforms designed by Paisley, and before the evening had concluded, grass stains covered the designer attire.

PAISLEY: I was infuriated. Imagine working on a line of stunning cheerleading garments for months and months only to have the clothing ruined in just a few short hours. Those ruthless cheerleaders couldn't stop sliding and falling all over the turf.

TERI: Golly, gee!

DR. MERIWETHER: That is exactly why Knotting Community College has chosen not to fund the cheerleading team next year. In conclusion, I have no choice but to end tonight's fundraising event at this very moment.

TERI: You can't! You mustn't!

DR. MERIWETHER: I am sorry, but my decision is final.

PAISLEY: And when Sis has her mind made up, there's no use arguing.

TERI: Oh, Dr. Meriwether, please! We're all looking forward to tonight. \*Special Guest\* might show up!

PAISLEY: I adore \*Special Guest\*! He always makes a fashion statement wherever he goes.

DR. MERIWETHER: \*Special Guest\*? Should I be familiar with this individual?

TERI: *(To DR. MERIWETHER.)* Are you kidding?

DR. MERIWETHER: I do not "kid."

TERI: "Special Guest" is one of the most influential people in the whole world.

DR. MERIWETHER: Well, I do not care if the Queen of England, herself, arrives. I must cancel this fundraiser, even if it kills me. I witnessed the team attempting to build some sort of human pyramid outside, but there was no sign of Coach Candy. Where might I find that abominable human being?

TERI: She went into the employee restroom in the kitchen. I'll show you.

*(TERI and DR. MERIWETHER exit DL. PAISLEY notices EMMA and LEIGH.)*

PAISLEY: *(To EMMA and LEIGH.)* Excuse me. Are you real Siamese twins?

EMMA: No, we just wear one shirt for kicks. Of course we're real. I'm Emma, and my sister's name is Leigh. Mother was only expecting one baby so she made us share one name: Emily. That's just one of the many hardships of being Siamese twins.

LEIGH: I prefer the more politically correct term, "conjoined twins."

EMMA: I prefer if you shut your mouth.

*(LEIGH opens her mouth, and it is filled with chewed food.)*

LEIGH: Yummy!

EMMA: You're gross.

PAISLEY: Such bitterness! Such disdain! You would fit perfectly into the fashion industry. Riddle me this: have either of you considered runway work?

LEIGH: Modeling does sound more exciting than working as a circus performer. But I've always thought my look to be a little more commercial than high fashion.

EMMA: I've always thought your look to be a little more ugly than anything. And Mother agrees with me!

PAISLEY: I've been considering creating a new line of couture gowns for conjoined women. I would love for the two of you to model some of my creations. I've never made a dress with two neck holes before. Well, once in middle school home economics class, but that was an accident.

LEIGH: That would be amazing. Wouldn't it, Emma?

EMMA: No way, Leigh. I hate dresses. And so does Mother!

LEIGH: You always get what you want. It's my turn to have a say.

EMMA: I always get my way because Mother likes me best!

LEIGH: She can't even tell who is who half the time!

PAISLEY: Ladies, quabbling is not fashionable. It causes your faces and clothing to become wrinkled. I'm sure I can design a gown that will suit both of your tastes.

*(PAISLEY sits with EMMA and LEIGH. COACH CANDY and DR. MERIWETHER enter DL. DR. MERIWETHER is still carrying the "Protect the Whales" poster.)*

DR. MERIWETHER: Coach Candy, this is unacceptable. I tell you the cheerleading team is being abolished, and you host a fundraiser without even consulting me.

COACH CANDY: The team needs to raise money if the school is gonna cut our funding.

DR. MERIWETHER: I am not simply cutting your funding. I am cutting you and the entire team. The cheerleaders are a disgrace to the college.

COACH CANDY: *(To DR. MERIWETHER.)* Well, your soul is a disgrace to mankind. That's if you even have a soul.

*(PEARL – an enthusiastic therapist – enters UC carrying a tote bag. SHE studies food on buffet table. Snow is still falling, and a gust of wind is heard.)*

DR. MERIWETHER: I am not the individual committing a fraudulent act.

COACH CANDY: Are you saying I'm lying?

DR. MERIWETHER: *(Holds up poster.)* From the carefully chosen rhetoric on your posters, you imply that this fundraiser will help protect actual whales, not the Knotting Community College Whales Cheerleading Team.

COACH CANDY: I don't have a lying bone in my body. The poster says, "Fundraiser at IHOFF: The International House of Fried Foods. Twenty Percent of your bill supports the Protect the Whales Mission." That mission is us. The school's name is down at the bottom.

DR. MERIWETHER: In a microscopic type setting.

COACH CANDY: It's not my fault if no one reads the fine print.

DR. MERIWETHER: Such deception! Such falsification! I will ensure that the team is abolished next year, regardless of what I have to do.

PEARL: *(To DR. MERIWETHER and COACH CANDY.)* Excuse me. I couldn't help but overhear your conversation. It was a very loud and very angry conversation, full of contempt. I may be wrong, but I sense a bit of tension between the two of you.

DR. MERIWETHER: Who might you be?

PEARL: I'm Pearl, a therapist. And being a therapist, I can help you settle your differences using therapeutic approaches, such as "I" sentences or the "Win-Win Guidelines" or... *(Pulls Rorschach Test out of her tote bag. To COACH CANDY.)* What does this look like to you?

COACH CANDY: It looks like what's gonna happen to your face if you don't get outta mine.

PEARL: I can tell that you have hostility issues. If you'd like, I can give you my card and you can register for my anger management class. I haven't had a patient fail the course yet.

COACH CANDY: Not one patient has failed?

PEARL: No. Then again, I just received my therapist's license this afternoon. I haven't had any patients at all. Would you like to be my first?

COACH CANDY: I'll pass.

PEARL: I don't want to pressure you, because everyone is allowed to make their own decisions. But, if you'll excuse me, I braved this blizzard to treat myself to a congratulatory dinner of fried catfish. Good evening.

*(PEARL selects food and sits at a table. MADAM ADELINA – a dramatic psychic - enters UC. SHE is carrying a purse. Snow is still falling, and a gust of wind is heard.)*

MADAM ADELINA: I sense a dark menace about this restaurant. I'm suddenly cold! Cold! Cold! I feel the icy chill of evil everywhere!

COACH CANDY: That tends to happen when you've been standing outside in a blizzard.

MADAM ADELINA: *(To COACH CANDY.)* You! You are a coach!

PAISLEY: *(To MADAM ADELINA.)* You couldn't tell from that raggedy, old track suit?

MADAM ADELINA: *(Ignores PAISLEY.)* You are *their* coach! The coach of those poor creatures whose lives are dangling before our eyes!

COACH CANDY: Yeah, well with the coordination those cheerleaders have, someone's bound to die in the pyramid. That's not my fault.

MADAM ADELINA: Please! Bring your helpless bundles of cheer inside! The weather won't be getting any warmer, and their spirits are becoming weaker. I beg of you, Coach Candy! Call them in before it's too late!

COACH CANDY: How did you know my name?

MADAM ADELINA: *(Drops the dramatics for a moment.)* Ugh! In case you can't tell, I'm a psychic. Madam Adelina, professional medium at your service.

DR. MERIWETHER: Coach Candy, your name is embroidered upon your uniform.

MADAM ADELINA: But I knew that!

AXEL: *(To MADAM ADELINA.)* Psychics are all a bunch of mumbo jumbo.

PETUNIA: Ya got *that* right!

MADAM ADELINA: I assure you, I am neither mumbo nor jumbo. But I have a hankering for some gumbo. Which is why I came out in such dastardly weather.

AXEL: All right, then. If you're real, tell us something only a psychic would know.

MADAM ADELINA: With you, I sense passion, love...

AXEL: Well, of course, I adore my little peablossom, but that's obvious.

MADAM ADELINA: Wait! Also, a secret. A dark secret.

AXEL: Okay, that's enough. We don't want everyone at the buffet knowing our secrets.

EMMA: She's just being vague and mystic so we'll believe she's for real. Madam Adelina is a fake.

LEIGH: How do you know? She could be a real psychic.

EMMA: Mother told me that only idiots believe in psychics. I guess you're an idiot.

MADAM ADELINA: Coach! Your cheerleaders! I feel as if their time on this earth is short. My soul was drawn here tonight to warn you. You must bring the team inside before they freeze to death.

DR. MERIWETHER: *(Pulls cellular phone out of briefcase and looks at it.)* Even if Madam Adelina is not truly clairvoyant, she is correct. According to my cellular phone, the temperature has significantly decreased in the past hour. I cannot permit my students to obtain frostbite in a blizzard.

COACH CANDY: Fine. I'll call the team inside. *(Opens UC doors and shouts into exit.)* All right, team! Get back inside! Hustle! That means you too, Annie, you uncoordinated sack of blubber.

ANNIE: *(Offstage UC.)* Coming, Coach!

*(CHEERLEADERS enter UC. ANNIE enters at the back of the group with LOGAN – a love-struck ventriloquist. LOGAN carries a ventriloquist's dummy.)*

COACH CANDY: *(To DR. MERIWETHER.)* They were doing just fine out there. It wasn't that cold.

CHEERLEADER TWO: Coach, I can't feel my face.

COACH CANDY: *(To CHEERLEADER TWO.)* Shut up and keep smiling. We've got Whales to protect.

MADAM ADELINA: *(Indicates LOGAN. To COACH CANDY.)* Something tells me the boy with the little man is not one of your own.

COACH CANDY: I don't know who that guy is, but as long as he's here to eat and make us money, I'm not gonna complain.

ANNIE: *(To LOGAN.)* Thank you for coming to our fundraiser. I really care about the team and I wouldn't know what to do without cheer practice every day.

*(CHEERLEADERS shove past ANNIE to sit at tables. GEORGIA enters DL with extra plates and places them on buffet table.)*

CHEERLEADER THREE: You're always in the way, Annie.

LOGAN: *(As the dummy.)* I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but it doesn't seem like the rest of the team cares about you very much. *(As himself.)* Which is totally uncalled for, because you're really awesome.

ANNIE: That's a nice thing to say.

LOGAN: I was on my way to the State Ventriloquist Convention at a hotel down the street, but I had to pull into the parking lot because I saw you practicing outside and couldn't resist saying, "Hello!"

LOGAN: *(As the dummy.)* I thought I'd say, "Hi!" too. *(As himself.)* Quiet, dummy! This isn't about you. *(To ANNIE.)* My name is Logan. Um, do you want to sit with me?

ANNIE: I'd love to sit with you.

LOGAN: *(As the dummy.)* Oh, I get it. This is sort of like a date. *(As himself.)* Quiet, dummy! Play it cool.

*(LOGAN and ANNIE sit at a table and stare dreamily at each other.)*

MADAM ADELINA: *(To COACH CANDY.)* I sense a budding romance beginning for that beautiful couple. Their auras are radiating passion. *(To EVERYONE onstage.)* And, if you will all excuse me, I sense some baby back ribs in the kitchen.

*(MADAM ADELINA exits DL. RALPH – a committed mail carrier - enters UC carrying a large package. Snow is still falling, and a gust of wind is heard.)*

RALPH: *(To GEORGIA.)* Hey, pal. I have a package for Teri. Did you know your mail slot is frozen? Not that this package would fit through that thing, anyway.

GEORGIA: Howdy, Ralph. How you doin'?

RALPH: I'm great, but yeesh, this weather isn't even for the birds. Well, maybe penguins. But you know what they say: "Whether rain or snow or high monsoon, the mail you trust will show up soon." Where's Teri? I need her signature.

GEORGIA: *(Shouts into DL exit.)* Hey, Teri! You got yourself a big ol' package!

TERI: *(Offstage DL.)* Golly, gee! I'll be right out!

CHEERLEADER ONE: *(To RALPH.)* Why don't you eat before you leave? We're having a fundraiser to protect the Whales.

RALPH: No can do, pal. I have mail to deliver.

CHEERLEADER TWO: But this is really important.

RALPH: So is the mail. *(Notices food on buffet table.)* Those French fries over there do look good, though.

CHEERLEADER THREE: Please, stay. There's baklava and falafel. And \*Special Guest\* might show up!

RALPH: But I have to... Did you say what I think you said?

CHEERLEADER THREE: "\*Special Guest\* might show up?"

RALPH: No, before that. Is there really falafel?

*(CHEERLEADER THREE nods. RALPH selects food and sits at a table. GEORGIA places large package on hostess station. UC doors blow open. Snow is still falling, and a gust of wind is heard. THE LOVELY LOLICIA – a diva female impersonator - emerges through the snow. HE is dressed in drag, has a manicure, and is carrying a pocketbook.)*

CHEERLEADER TWO: \*Special Guest\*!

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: Dry those lonesome tears! The Lovely Lolicia has arrived!

CHEERLEADERS: Ugh!

CHEERLEADER ONE: *(To THE LOVELY LOLICIA.)* We thought you were \*Special Guest\*.

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: Oh honey, he's a tired old mess. The Lovely Lolicia is going to be bigger than that piece of work. Just you wait. One day, you'll all be shouting Lolicia's name. The Lovely Lolicia only makes appearances at these small gigs now, but not for long. Today, this piano bar. Tomorrow, Madison Square Garden! *(Looks around.)* Wait a minute. This doesn't look like Pinky's Piano Bar.

LEIGH: What's Pinky's Piano Bar?

EMMA: *(To LEIGH.)* You know. It's that club with all the glitter on the front sidewalk a few blocks away.

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: That piece of trash GPS must have given me directions to the wrong place. I was supposed to perform at Pinky's Piano Bar. It's drag night.

CHEERLEADER THREE: While you're here, you might as well get something to eat. \*Special Guest\* might show up!

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: Well, I guess I could stay for a bit. Even though I have more talent in my freshly manicured pinky than \*Special Guest\*, I'm always up for meeting a celebrity.

*(THE LOVELY LOLICIA selects food and sits at a table. TERI enters DL.)*

CHEERLEADER ONE: *(To CHEERLEADERS.)* I'm starving.

COACH CANDY: *(To CHEERLEADERS.)* Eat light, team. Remember, it's hard to throw a food-filled cheerleader into the air. And it's even harder to catch one. Watch your diets.

TERI: *(To CHEERLEADERS.)* We are now serving calorie-free flavored water, and there's quite a large salad bar filled with healthy fried foods. *(Notices empty mixed greens bowl on salad bar. Shouts into DL exit.)* Jean Luc Francois, we're going to need a refill on the fried mixed greens!

*(JEAN LUC FRANCOIS enters DL carrying a new large bowl of mixed greens. HE hands the bowl angrily to TERI.)*

AXEL: *(To JEAN LUC FRANCOIS.)* Yum, yum! Keep that food coming, Frenchie!

*(MADAM ADELINA enters DL licking her fingers.)*

MADAM ADELINA: Baby back ribs are even more delectable when they're fried.

COACH CANDY: *(To MADAM ADELINA.)* Hey, Nostra-dumb-ass, where's your crystal ball?

MADAM ADELINA: Crystal ball? I don't have a crystal ball you moody giraffe. Not with me. It's much too fragile to carry in my purse. *(Pulls tarot cards out of purse.)* But fear not! I did bring my tarot cards.

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: *(To TERI.)* Keep an eye on zat woman. Madam Adelina ate all of ze fried baby back ribs. She is a bad person! A very bad person!

TERI: *(To MADAM ADELINA.)* I don't think we need any psychic readings tonight. Unless you want to tell me we're going to run out of food. But that never happens at IHOFF.

MADAM ADELINA: Doubt all you want, but you will be sorry when disaster strikes! My line of work is most legitimate. People hire me to do all sorts of things, like tell the future, help them with important life decisions, and... Oh, I don't know. Solve mysteries?

COACH CANDY: You keep acting like something bad is gonna happen.

MADAM ADELINA: What can I say? I sense things! Terrible things! Things you think can only happen in your nightmares! Darkness is coming!

*(An electric buzz is heard, and the lights go off.)*

COACH CANDY: What in the world...?

MADAM ADELINA: I was right!

COACH CANDY: I'm no fool! You did this on purpose, Madam Adelina.

MADAM ADELINA: Do you honestly think I turned off the lights just so your narrow-minded brain would believe in my predictions?

TERI: This usually happens during a storm. The backup generator will kick in any minute.

ANNIE: It's so dark!

AXEL: *(Sarcastically.)* Really? I didn't notice!

PEARL: I can't even see what I'm eating.

*(An electric buzz is heard, and the lights come on.)*

TERI: That sure was nerve wracking for a moment. Is everyone okay? No one's going to post a negative restaurant review online, right?

MADAM ADELINA: No! Now is just the beginning! The almighty moment of reckoning I have feared all along! Everyone, hold onto your souls! For it has arrived! That all-encompassing power that we both fear and crave, hate and adore, despise and worship!

TERI: Golly, gee! \*Special Guest\* must be here!

MADAM ADELINA: No, foolish woman! Death!

*(CHEERLEADERS gag violently. One by one, each cheerleader, except for CHEERLEADER THREE, falls face first into his or her salad plate.)*

GEORGIA: Boss, I think them bad online reviews might be the least of your problems.

CHEERLEADER THREE: *(Stands and walks away from tables CHEERLEADERS are sitting at.)*

What's going on? What happened?

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: Sacrebleu! It is as if zey have all choked!

CHEERLEADER THREE: Thank goodness I'm okay. \*Special Guest\* might show –

*(CHEERLEADER THREE gags and falls face first into large bowl of mixed greens on salad bar.)*

PEARL: Well, I'm not a medical doctor, just a therapist, but from my observations, I believe that entire cheerleading team is dead.

COACH CANDY: Dead?

DR. MERIWETHER: Dead?

TERI: Dead?

MADAM ADELINA: I knew it!

ALBERT: The Ho-Ho-Whole cheerleading team?

HOLLY: Well, not the *whole* cheerleading team.

*(ANNIE and LOGAN are still sitting and staring dreamily at each other. EVERYONE ELSE onstage except for CHEERLEADERS looks at ANNIE and LOGAN.)*

LOGAN: *(As the dummy. To ANNIE and himself.)* Uh, guys! *(As himself.)* Quiet, dummy! You're killing the romance. *(As the dummy.)* But everyone is staring at us.

ANNIE: *(Notices CHEERLEADERS.)* Oh, no! My teammates!

LOGAN: What happened?

LEIGH: How does almost an entire cheerleading team die at the same time?

TERI: *(To JEAN LUC FRANCOIS and GEORGIA.)* Quick! Call the police! Tell them a group of cheerleaders has choked on the fried greens.

*(JEAN LUC FRANCOIS and GEORGIA exit DL.)*

MADAM ADELINA: Those were no ordinary chokes. Those were the chokes of cheerleaders who had been poisoned!

ALBERT: Well, I would love to stick around, but my break is almost over. Time to spread joy and cheer to hundreds of smiling children at the mall.

HOLLY: Mr. Claus doesn't let the murder of innocent youngsters get him down.

ALBERT: Nope, nope!

HOLLY: Children need him.

ALBERT: You bet!

HOLLY: And we don't want to stay here and be the next people offed!

ALBERT: Darn right, Holly!

HOLLY: Quick, Mr. Claus! Let's get out of here, Mr. Claus!

*(ALBERT and HOLLY head to UC exit. TERI blocks them.)*

TERI: Wait one minute! If you think I'm going to let you leave all of us here with these dead bodies and a murderer, you are sorely mistaken!

ALBERT: Get in the Christmas spirit, and let us go!

TERI: I have no way of knowing that either of you are innocent. You might have poisoned the cheerleaders. No one is leaving IHOFF until the police arrive.

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: *(To TERI.)* Now, hold it right there, Mamacita! You better let me out of here! I have an audience waiting for me at Pinky's Piano Bar. A true diva never misses a performance. Normally I wouldn't think of getting physical with you, because I have class. But, when a murderer has struck up in this place, I am just going to have to throw all of that class out the window and beat you down until you set me free!

RALPH: And I have mail to deliver.

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: *(Shoves RALPH to the floor in front of buffet table.)* Nobody cares about your mail! I have a performance to do!

MADAM ADELINA: I sense tension!

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: You sense correctly!

PEARL: Oh! My specialty! *(To TERI, THE LOVELY LOLICIA, ALBERT, HOLLY, and RALPH.)* Everyone, stop and take deep, deep breaths. In. Out. In. Out. In. Out. In. Out. *(Kneels in front of buffet table, and pulls a Rorschach Test out of her tote bag. To RALPH, who is still on the floor.)* Tell me, does this relax you or fill you with more tension?

*(HOBO JOE - a humorous squatter wearing tattered clothing - reaches from under the drape on buffet table and grabs the Rorschach Test from PEARL.)*

HOBO JOE: It sorta reminds me of my childhood back in Albuquerque.

TERI: Golly, gee! *(TERI lifts the drape, revealing HOBO JOE underneath.)*

HOBO JOE: *(To JEAN LUC FRANCOIS.)* You're out of fried ham. Can I get a second helping?

COACH CANDY: Who is this dirty man?

TERI: *(To HOBO JOE.)* You! I had to kick you out of this place sixty-seven times last winter for squatting. I thought I was rid of you for good, Hobo Joe.

HOBO JOE: Nah. I just learned where to hide.

TERI: How long have you been squatting here this time?

HOBO JOE: A few days. Been sleeping right under the buffet table.

TERI: You know you're not allowed to sleep here, Hobo Joe.

HOBO JOE: What else am I supposed to do? It's a bit chilly outside, in case you can't tell.

AXEL: Me and Petunia only dine in the finest restaurants. We don't want to eat at a buffet where a filthy squatter lives.

PETUNIA: Ya got *that* right!

TERI: *(Pulls HOBO JOE out from under buffet table.)* Don't worry, Axel. Hobo Joe was just leaving.

RALPH: *(To HOBO JOE.)* What on earth are you doing here, pal?

PAISLEY: *(To HOBO JOE.)* And what on earth are you wearing?

HOBO JOE: I live here. I've lived here for awhile now. Off and on.

TERI: Yes, and he's about to get evicted, yet again.

DR. MERIWETHER: *(To COACH CANDY.)* Do you notice the chaos your team has caused?

This disaster is your fault. *(To PAISLEY.)* We must journey to the police station and inform the authorities that Coach Candy has permitted the murder of Knotting Community College's entire cheerleading team.

PAISLEY: *(To COACH CANDY.)* This is almost as disgusting of a display as last month's avant garde uniform incident. It wouldn't surprise me in the least if you had something to do with the murders.

DR. MERIWETHER: Say, "Goodbye!" to your career, Coach Candy! Perhaps you shall coach the cheerleading team in prison.

COACH CANDY: Not if I get to the police station first to clear my good name. *(To ANNIE.)* Get on the team bus, Annie. Hustle!

ANNIE: But I'm having such a great time with Logan and his dummy.

LOGAN: *(As the dummy.)* We're on a date. *(As himself.)* Quiet, dummy! Nobody was talking to you. *(To COACH CANDY.)* I can drive Annie back to campus.

PEARL: Well you're not all going to leave me behind with the dead bodies. You have no idea what that can do to a person's mental health.

TERI: Jean Luc Francois is taking care of everything right now. He's calling the police, and they will be here any minute. We're all going to be fine.

*(JEAN LUC FRANCOIS and GEORGIA enter DL.)*

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: Sacrebleu! We are doomed!

GEORGIA: The police said that this here crazy snow has blocked the roads. They won't be able to get to us for hours.

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: We are all going to die bad deaths! Very bad deaths!

EMMA: I'm not going to be the next person murdered.

LEIGH: Me, neither. We're leaving.

GEORGIA: *(To TERI.)* We've had enough. Me and Gene Luck Frankie are clockin' out for the night.

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: My name is Jean Luc Francois!

GEORGIA: Same thing. Let's go!

HOBO JOE: I'd rather take my chances in a blizzard than stay inside with a murderer.

TERI: I'm right with you, Hobo Joe.

*(TERI heads towards UC doors with HOBO JOE. ALBERT, HOLLY, THE LOVELY LOLICIA, RALPH, AXEL, PETUNIA, EMMA, LEIGH, DR. MERIWETHER, PAISLEY, PEARL, JEAN LUC FRANCOIS, GEORGIA, and COACH CANDY follow behind. ANNIE and LOGAN continue to sit at a table and stare dreamily at each other. MADAM ADELINA stands alone. TERI opens the UC doors and is confronted with a wall of snow that has accumulated, making it impossible for anyone to exit.)*

PEARL: Again, exact science is not my forte, but it looks to me like this wall of snow is far too dense to pass through.

TERI: We are completely snowed in!

MADAM ADELINA: I saw that coming!

*(Blackout.)*

## SCENE TWO

*AT RISE: All of the CHEERLEADERS' bodies are gone with the exception of CHEERLEADER THREE. COACH CANDY sits at a table, stunned. ANNIE and LOGAN sit at a table staring dreamily into each other's eyes. TERI paces. JEAN LUC FRANCOIS and GEORGIA enter DL.)*

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: *(Rubs back.)* Oh! Zis poor back!

GEORGIA: Aw, suck it up you French pastry. We only got one more body to lift.

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: *(To TERI.)* You are asking for a lawsuit, making me carry all of zese bodies into ze kitchen!

TERI: Well, we need them out of the way. We can't have dead cheerleaders rotting on the floor.

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: So you zink it is better to have ze bodies rotting in ze kitchen? How will we keep zem fresh? Zey won't fit in ze freezer. (*Sniffs CHEERLEADER THREE.*) Oh, zis one has ze bad stink! Zis one has ze very bad stink!

TERI: Fill the sinks with ice, and stuff the bodies inside.

GEORGIA: Where in tarnation are we supposed to find enough ice to fill the sinks?

TERI: Think, Georgia. Open the back door and scoop up some snow. There's plenty of that around.

(*JEAN LUC FRANCOIS and GEORGIA lift CHEERLEADER THREE.*)

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: (*To GEORGIA.*) Oh la la! You Mississippi women are strong like oxes!

(*JEAN LUC FRANCOIS and GEORGIA exit DL carrying CHEERLEADER THREE.*)

COACH CANDY: I just don't understand how I could lose all of my cheerleaders like this. The whole team!

ANNIE: Not the whole team, Coach. You still have me.

COACH CANDY: (*Clobbers ANNIE in the face of her costume.*) The whole team, you wannabe! You look like a floppy fish when you perform. (*COACH CANDY exits DR.*)

ANNIE: A whale is not a fish. It gives birth to live offspring. It's a mammal.

LOGAN: I believe you, Annie.

ANNIE: How can Coach Candy not know this? I mean, whales even have fur.

LOGAN: And you are furrer than all of those other cheerleaders. (*As the dummy.*) The furrriest! (*As himself.*) Quiet, dummy! Back off. I like Annie.

ANNIE: That's the nicest thing anyone has ever said to me. Thank you both for your kindness. (*ANNIE hugs LOGAN and the dummy.*)

TERI: (*To ANNIE and LOGAN.*) Please, Annie, Logan, I asked everyone to go to the Party Rooms for a reason. I don't think it's a good idea for any of us to be out here until the police arrive and can look for clues.

LOGAN: Come, my little whale. Let's find a nice Party Room of our own. (*As the dummy.*) Hey, can I come too? (*As himself.*) I guess I have to bring you along. Come on, dummy!

(*ANNIE and LOGAN exit DR. JEAN LUC FRANCOIS and GEORGIA enter DL.*)

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: Zat is it. I cannot lift anozer zing.

TERI: That's fine, Jean Luc Francois. But I need the two of you to see to it that the diners have plenty of food to eat. They're already in shock. I don't want them to be hungry as well. Surely, they'd post negative restaurant reviews online.

GEORGIA: That there mess of chokin' cheerleaders was premeditated. I'd bet my uncle's wooden leg on it.

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: But how could zey all have been poisoned?

GEORGIA: Musta been the salad. They were all eatin' that slop.

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: Are you saying I poisoned ze salad? Or, worse, zat it was bad cooking?

TERI: Not necessarily. Everyone had a chance to poison the salad when the bowl was set out.

And those who hadn't been walking around the salad bar had a chance to do it in the kitchen or when the lights went off. But murder or no murder, we need to keep the food coming. Let's whip up some eel tempura and wasabi sauce.

(*TERI, GEORGIA, and JEAN LUC FRANCOIS exit DL. MADAM ADELINA enters DR. SHE reaches into her purse and pulls out a vial of powder. SHE sprinkles the powder on the floor around her. THE LOVELY LOLICIA enters DR, heading to UR exit, but stops when HE sees MADAM ADELINA.*)

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: What are you doing, sugar?

MADAM ADELINA: Oh! You startled me! The psychic energies that were released during the murders have not yet dissipated. I'm trying to conjure up any remnants of cheerleader spirits that might still be lingering. Would you care to join?

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: Honey, I'm too tired to conjure up a martini, let alone an entire cheerleading team.

MADAM ADELINA: I should have brought my crystal ball. Crystals make things like this so much easier.

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: Girl, what are you going to do with a ball? *(Waves hands mockingly.)*

Wave your hands around that piece of glass and try to tell us whodunit?

MADAM ADELINA: *(Grabs THE LOVELY LOLICIA'S hands.)* Your hands!

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: Fierce, right? I tried a new color on my nails this week.

MADAM ADELINA: No! Not the nails! The hands! So nimble. So agile. So... Strong!

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: They don't look that strong to me.

MADAM ADELINA: Strong enough. Tell me, do you work with your hands?

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: I don't know what you're talking about.

MADAM ADELINA: Are you a welder?

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: *(Avoids answering the question.)* I'm going to powder my nose in case

\*Special Guest\* shows up.

MADAM ADELINA: A basket weaver?

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: No.

MADAM ADELINA: Do you make friendship bracelets?

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: Never.

MADAM ADELINA: Wait! I know!

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: Just go back to your rituals and leave me alone!

*(THE LOVELY LOLICIA exits UR. MADAM ADELINA closes her eyes, makes strange noises, and waves arms as if meditating. The lights dim. MADAM ADELINA opens her eyes and addresses the AUDIENCE.)*

MADAM ADELINA: *(To AUDIENCE.)* Oh, hello, otherworldly beings! There are so many of you. I hope you didn't witness the little spat that just occurred. I do try to remain peaceful. How are you doing tonight? *(Prompts a response from AUDIENCE.)* I'm doing splendidly, however, there are some cheerleaders who are not doing as well as you or I. Have you seen what's been going on? Tragic! Simply tragic! I need your help! Since you are in another plane of some sort, you can see things that I cannot if I am in the Party Rooms. Pay close attention to everything that occurs. I will be back later. Please, let me know if you witness anything suspicious. This is a matter of life and after-life. Until we meet again...

*(MADAM ADELINA closes eyes and repeats strange noises. The lights return to normal.*

*COACH CANDY enters DR.)*

COACH CANDY: *(Nudges MADAM ADELINA.)* Wake up, whack-a-doodle!

MADAM ADELINA: *(Screams.)* Ahhh!

COACH CANDY: You're supposed to stay in the Party Rooms like the rest of us.

MADAM ADELINA: Weren't you ever taught the dangers of waking someone who is in a trance?

COACH CANDY: I'm sorry, I went to public school. Trance etiquette wasn't part of the curriculum.

*(RALPH enters DR and observes COACH CANDY and MADAM ADELINA.)*

MADAM ADELINA: I found some otherworldly beings who promised to keep a close eye on the goings and comings of this place.

COACH CANDY: (*Sarcastically.*) Right. Sure. Me, too.

MADAM ADELINA: Sarcasm is the easiest way to ignore the spirits that linger around you.

COACH CANDY: No. It's the easiest way for me to ignore you.

MADAM ADELINA: But the otherworldly beings -

COACH CANDY: *You're* an otherworldly being.

MADAM ADELINA: Oh! Well... Well... (*Drops the dramatics for a moment.*) Your mom is an otherworldly being! (*MADAM ADELINA exits DR.*)

COACH CANDY: (*To RALPH.*) Ah, nothing satisfies a little post verbal victory like some chow.

Don't you agree? (*COACH CANDY heads to buffet table and fills a plate with fried mozzarella sticks.*)

RALPH: Filling up on fried mozzarella sticks. Nothing has changed, huh babe?

COACH CANDY: Excuse me?

RALPH: Arguing always gave you an appetite for cheese. Didn't it, babe? I remember you gorging yourself on Gouda when we had our first fight.

COACH CANDY: How did you know I crave cheese when my adrenaline is pumping?

RALPH: You don't remember the potato farm in Boise?

COACH CANDY: Shmoopsie Poo! I didn't recognize you in that mailperson getup. It's been so long.

(*PEARL enters DR, notices RALPH and COACH CANDY, and hides behind a table.*)

RALPH: We had a good thing going, babe. Why did you leave me all alone in Idaho?

COACH CANDY: I needed something more than what the West could offer me, Ralph. I had nothing to challenge me there.

RALPH: You gave up the love of your life to coach pathetic cheerleaders.

COACH CANDY: Coaching pathetic cheerleaders *is* the love of my life. I love the hustle of the sport. It's what I was born to do. With you, I felt trapped. I didn't want a life as a farmer. I wanted to change the world through cheer.

RALPH: Well, it was unfair to leave me out west with only a pair of pom-poms to remember you by. Didn't you see that I was going to make you my wife?

COACH CANDY: We only knew each other for a week.

RALPH: We were in love, babe. You left. You left without telling me where you were going, without saying, "Goodbye." We could have spent our lives working the potato farm together.

COACH CANDY: Well, I'm sorry I squished your heart into mashed potatoes, but it looks like you've moved on. And you've got a nice job out here.

RALPH: I became a mailman to deliver packages all over the country, hoping that, one day, I would be able to find you, babe. I've been on this route for eleven years now.

COACH CANDY: Are you saying you came all the way to the Protect the Whales fundraiser because you knew I would be here?

RALPH: Eh, no. I actually read \*Special Guest's\* blog this morning and made sure I'd be here to deliver that package during the fundraiser because I thought he might show up. Running into you was just an added bonus.

COACH CANDY: An added bonus? Am I second to \*Special Guest\* in your heart?

RALPH: Well, meeting him would be pretty life-changing, babe.

COACH CANDY: Swine! (*COACH CANDY grabs mozzarella sticks, throws them at RALPH, and exits UL.*)

RALPH: Wait, babe! That's not what I meant! \*Special Guest\* can't hold a candle to you!

(*RALPH exits UL. PEARL pulls a pad and pencil out of her tote bag, and begins to jot notes. DR. MERIWETHER and PAISLEY enter DR. PAISLEY removes a table cloth from a table.*)

DR. MERIWETHER: Are you purposely acting in defiance, Pearl? Our strict instructions were to remain inside one of the Party Rooms. We must follow Teri's orders.

PEARL: I needed to grab some more sustenance. Don't you know how important it is for your mental health to keep your blood sugar at a steady rate after suffering a traumatic experience?

DR. MERIWETHER: Do you not know that Teri manages this establishment? We should be obeying her wishes.

PEARL: Well then, what, may I ask, are you doing out here?

DR. MERIWETHER: I must discuss with Teri the ingredients of the entire menu at IHOFF. I have lectured to the others in the Party Rooms about the dangers of consuming items of which we are uncertain. I know Coach Candy has severe food allergies. I, myself, experience gastritis when digesting corn. We must be conscious of what enters our digestive tracts. Clearly, the cheerleaders were unaware of what they were putting in their own bodies. Such a tragedy.

PAISLEY: *(Holds up table cloth.)* This fabric is a tragedy. But I guess it will have to do.

DR. MERIWETHER: *(To PAISLEY.)* Paisley, must you construct a gown for the twins at this very minute?

PAISLEY: Creative inspiration should be delved into immediately. If I wait for this murder nonsense to blow over, all of my ideas could be completely stale. Or even worse, outdated.

*(AXEL and PETUNIA enter DR. THEY head to UC exit.)*

AXEL: Don't mind us, folks. *(To PETUNIA.)* Grab some spoons from the buffet table, angel pie. We gotta protect Polly and Molly! Look!

*(AXEL opens UC doors. EVERYONE onstage looks outside. As THEY do so, LOGAN and ANNIE enter DR and sneak silently across the stage. THEY exit UL.)*

PEARL: I can't see anything out there. The snow is too thick.

DR. MERIWETHER: Who might Polly and Molly be?

AXEL: Our babies. They're outside.

DR. MERIWETHER: Babies? Your children are unsheltered in this blizzard?

PETUNIA: Ya got *that* right!

AXEL: We're just going to dig ourselves a nice little tunnel to Polly and Molly real quick so we can bring them inside. This snow is bound to get them rusty.

DR. MERIWETHER: *(Grabs a spoon from buffet table.)* Quickly, find a spoon! We must protect... *(To AXEL.)* One moment, Axel. Your babies will become rusty?

AXEL: Yeah! Polly and Molly can stand a little inclement weather, but this blizzard might be too rough on their delicate bodies.

DR. MERIWETHER: I am the leader of one of the finest academic institutions on the east coast, and yet I am completely and utterly confused. Who, exactly, are Polly and Molly?

AXEL: Our children! Our babies! Our bikes! *(To PETUNIA.)* Now hurry, doll baby! Let's start digging!

*(HOBO JOE enters DR and heads to UL exit.)*

DR. MERIWETHER: *(To AXEL.)* Is this some sort of farce? Do you not realize that a mass massacre has just taken place? *(To HOBO JOE.)* And you! Where do you think you are going?

HOBO JOE: Well, not that it's any of your business, but it's too crowded in those Party Rooms. I'm going to the Hibachi Room to take a snooze.

DR. MERIWETHER: I see. And were you given permission to do so by Teri? Hmm?

HOBO JOE: I never asked for her permission to sleep in there before. Why should I do it now?

DR. MERIWETHER: Despicable! (*Points to HOBO JOE.*) I do not care if you are tired. (*Points to PEARL.*) I do not care if you are hungry. (*Points to PAISLEY.*) I do not care if you have chosen to sew an evening gown for conjoined twins. (*Points to AXEL and PETUNIA.*) And I certainly do not care if you wish to protect your vehicles from tarnish. We should follow the orders we were given. Running amuck is unacceptable. You are behaving worse than college students.

HOBO JOE: Hey, Dr. Meriwether.

DR. MERIWETHER: What is it?

HOBO JOE: How about you take that loud mouth of yours and bite me?

DR. MERIWETHER: I beg your pardon!

HOBO JOE: You heard me! Pearl is hungry, so let her eat. Paisley wants to make some couture junk, so let her sew. And if I had bikes as nice as the one's outside, I'd be digging them out of molten lava if I had to. Years ago, my ex-girlfriend had a bike just like the one Petunia has, and it brought her more joy than you could even dream about. We should all be doing the things that make us happy, because for all we know, we're about to be murdered. So, for the love of fried pork buns, let me take a nap on a nice, warm hibachi bed! (*Grabs the table cloth from PAISLEY.*) Now, gimme one of these old rags. I need a blanket. (*To EVERYONE onstage.*) Sweet dreams, people! (*HOBO JOE exits UL.*)

PEARL: (*To DR. MERIWETHER.*) Do you see all the tension you have created?

DR. MERIWETHER: The tension that I have created? Would it not be the act of murder that has created said tension? I am completely, undoubtedly, one-hundred percent, tension-free. You can ask my sister. I am always chipper.

PAISLEY: Sis, you're about as much fun as a root canal.

(*EMMA and LEIGH enter DR.*)

EMMA: (*To PAISLEY.*) Paisley, can you settle an argument we're having?

PEARL: (*To EMMA and LEIGH.*) I can help. I've taken a few courses in group resolution therapy.

LEIGH: Sorry, Pearl, but this is a fashion question. (*To PAISLEY.*) Do you think we would look better in a halter top? Or completely strapless?

EMMA: I want a halter gown.

LEIGH: Well, I want a strapless gown.

EMMA: Well, I want a halter. And Mother likes me best!

PAISLEY: Girls! Please! You're giving me a headache. If you're going to have a rivalry, at least do as we do in the fashion industry and talk behind each other's backs.

EMMA: That's a little hard for us.

LEIGH: We share the same back.

PAISLEY: The type of gown I have in mind for both of you is a surprise. Now, come over here and let me take your measurements.

(*PAISLEY pulls measuring tape out of her pocketbook and measures EMMA and LEIGH.*)

(*COACH CANDY and RALPH enter UL.*)

COACH CANDY: (*To RALPH.*) You disgust me! (*Notices EVERYONE onstage.*) Oh, hey everybody.

PEARL: Is Ralph bothering you, Coach Candy?

COACH CANDY: Who, him? Oh, no! I was just... Uh, speaking of the rancid odor coming from the Hibachi Room since Hobo Joe decided to sleep in there.

(*ALBERT, HOLLY, and MADAM ADELINA enter DR. MADAM ADELINA is crying.*)

ALBERT: Someone has been picking on Madam Adelina. She is very upset, and Santa doesn't like to see anyone's Christmas spirit ruined. Which one of you naughty adults has hurt this little woman's feelings?

COACH CANDY: (*Proudly.*) That would be me!

ALBERT: Holly, I want you to put Coach Candy down on Santa's Naughty List this year.

HOLLY: Yes, Mr. Claus. Of course, Mr. Claus.

COACH CANDY: You really brought your entire Naughty List with you?

ALBERT: My Naughty and Nice Lists are more easily transportable with modern technology. I just store all of that information on my new tablet. (*Pulls a tablet out of his sack and hands it to HOLLY who begins typing.*) Mrs. Claus gave it to me last year for Christmas.

HOLLY: It looks like you'll be finding some coal in your stocking this year, Coach Candy.

COACH CANDY: Is that some sort of threat?

RALPH: (*Puts hand on COACH CANDY's shoulder. To HOLLY.*) How dare you threaten Coach Candy, pal!

COACH CANDY: (*Slaps RALPH's hand away.*) Don't touch me!

(*TERI, JEAN LUC FRANCOIS, and GEORGIA enter DL.*)

TERI: Golly, gee! What is everyone doing out here? I thought I told all of you to stay in the Party Rooms.

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: Zese Americans never listen. Zey are bad listeners! Zey are very bad listeners!

DR. MERIWETHER: This group has an inability to cooperate.

AXEL: Petunia, over here don't give a rattlesnake's tuckus about cooperating when our expensive property runs the risk of being damaged.

PETUNIA: Ya got *that* right!

TERI: You think your valuables are in jeopardy? This entire business is about to collapse. Who will want to eat at a buffet where the food's been poisoned? Think of the negative restaurant reviews that will be posted online!

COACH CANDY: You could decorate this place all spooky and call it a haunted buffet. You'd make a *killing* off of that! (*Laughs.*) Ha ha! (*Notices that no one else onstage finds her joke humorous.*) What? Too Soon?

TERI: Everyone, take a plate of fried savory items and head back to the Party Rooms. We don't want anyone else to get hurt.

(*An electric buzz is heard, and the lights go off.*)

PAISLEY: You have to be kidding me.

AXEL: I can't see anything.

MADAM ADELINA: I knew this would happen again!

COACH CANDY: You did not, you quack.

(*EMMA and LEIGH head towards DR exit.*)

EMMA: Right, left, right, left, right, left. No, Leigh, your other right.

(*EMMA and LEIGH crash into a table onstage.*)

LEIGH: You're paying for that, Emma!

EMMA: No way. You're the one who doesn't know right from left, Leigh!

(*TERI grabs a flashlight from behind the hostess station and turns it on.*)

TERI: I'm going to check the fuse box. (*TERI exits DL.*)

GEORGIA: Who, in the name of Saint Willy, is grabbin' my shoulder?

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: Zat would be me.

GEORGIA: Well, let go! Will you? I don't want no murderer clutchin' onto me, ready to pounce!

*(An electric buzz is heard, and the lights come on.)*

RALPH: I can't believe there was another blackout. *(To COACH CANDY.)* This storm is crazy, huh babe?

COACH CANDY: Shut it, will you?

*(TERI enters DL and returns flashlight to hostess station.)*

TERI: Okay, is everyone safe and accounted for?

EMMA: I haven't seen the smelly guy in awhile.

TERI: He's probably somewhere stealing food. Hobo Joe has been sneaking treats from this restaurant ever since it opened. I'm going to turn him over to the police when they arrive.

PEARL: Now, now, Teri! Do you know what mistreating the less fortunate does to their self-esteem?

TERI: Actually, no, I don't.

PEARL: Darn it! I don't either. I was hoping you could tell me.

TERI: Hobo Joe is just a ne'er do well who likes to take things that aren't his. If I get my hands on him -

*(LOGAN enters UL.)*

LOGAN: Um, Teri, I think you might want to see this!

TERI: And where have you been?

LOGAN: *(As the dummy.)* None of your business! *(As himself.)* Quiet, dummy! This is serious! *(To TERI.)* Really! This is very important!

TERI: What is it that I need to see?

*(ANNIE enters UL, dragging in the lifeless body of HOBO JOE who has several shish kabob skewers sticking out of his chest.)*

ANNIE: This!

HOLLY: What's wrong with him?

GEORGIA: Looks like that poor grubby guy got impaled with shish kabob skewers. I wouldn't want to eat that mess grilled or fried.

PEARL: I'd say he's dead.

EMMA: Another murder?

LEIGH: They're dropping like chemically treated flies tonight.

DR. MERIWETHER: This is most unnerving! We must discover who murdered Hobo Joe and the cheerleading team before another victim is chosen!

HOLLY: Once we find him, he is going right at the top of Mr. Claus' Naughty List!

RALPH: Hey, pal. Why did you say *he*? Why couldn't the murderer be a woman?

ALBERT: It could be any of us. Except for me. I didn't do it.

PAISLEY: I don't trust anyone who tucks his pants into his boots. Such a fashion faux pas.

ALBERT: How dare you insult the suit!

HOLLY: Calm down, Mr. Claus. Remember to keep your temperament jolly, Mr. Claus.

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: Where is zat beautiful lady wiz ze flashy clothes?

PEARL: The Lovely Lolicia?

MADAM ADELINA: My senses are telling me that I should know where she is. *(To herself.)* Think... Think...

*(A toilet flushes offstage UR. THE LOVELY LOLICIA enters UR. EVERYONE onstage stares at him.)*

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: Well, this is embarrassing.

MADAM ADELINA: I knew it! That's where she went.

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: *(Indicates UR exit.)* You all might not want to go in there for awhile, if you know what I mean.

TERI: Have you been in the restroom this whole time?

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: A true lady never reveals her business! Did I miss anything while I was gone?

TERI: Hobo Joe has been murdered!

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: Oh... Anything else?

ANNIE: *(Pulls cellular phone from her pocket and looks at it.)* Well, here's some news. \*Special Guest\* just updated his blog: "I'm almost at the big event!" \*Special Guest\* might show up!

PAISLEY: You're being foolish, Annie. If \*Special Guest\* hasn't arrived by now, he is most likely going to an important gala somewhere else.

COACH CANDY: *(To ANNIE.)* Put that stupid phone back in your pocket.

RALPH: Speaking of pockets, pal... *(Reaches into his pocket and pulls out a pen and delivery receipt.)* Teri, I still need your signature for that package.

TERI: *(Signs delivery receipt and removes large package from hostess station.)* I wonder what's in this thing, anyway. I wasn't expecting any supply deliveries. *(Opens large package and digs around inside.)* This is an awfully big box for such small items. *(SHE produces a stuffed whale with a noose around its neck and an envelope containing a letter.)* Golly, gee! A whale with a noose around its neck! And a letter!

RALPH: Open it up, pal.

TERI: *(Opens envelope and reads letter inside.)* Golly, gee!

COACH CANDY: What does it say?

TERI: It says... *(Reads letter aloud.)* "Expect some crazy things to go down tonight."

DR. MERIWETHER: I think it is safe to surmise that these "crazy things" have already occurred.

MADAM ADELINA: And I sense there is more to come!

*(Blackout.)*

## ACT II

### SCENE ONE

*AT RISE: MADAM ADELINA sprinkles powder from her vial around HOBO JOE's lifeless body, which lies on the floor. JEAN LUC FRANCOIS and GEORGIA enter DL.*

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: If I must make room in zat kitchen for one more body, I am going to snap!

GEORGIA: *(Notices MADAM ADELINA.)* We need to get outta here quick. This lady makes me as nervous as a long-tailed cat in a room full of rockin' chairs.

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: Help me bring zis body to ze sink wiz ze cheerleaders.

*(JEAN LUC FRANCOIS and GEORGIA lift HOBO JOE and head to DL exit.)*

MADAM ADELINA: Please, do not move the body!

GEORGIA: Sorry, lady. We were told by our boss to put this here fella on ice with the others.

MADAM ADELINA: Can't you see that I am preparing for a séance? Your fingerprints are soiling Hobo Joe's chakras.

GEORGIA: Don't worry. If his charcoals, or whatever you said, are dirty, Gene Luck Frankie over here will clean 'em up good and spiffy with his counterclockwise strokes.

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: My name is Jean Luc Francois!

GEORGIA: Same thing.

*(HOLLY enters DR.)*

HOLLY: Have any of you seen the big man?

MADAM ADELINA: "The big man?"

HOLLY: You know. Mr. Claus. I think he might have gone into the kitchen to find some freshly made doughnuts.

GEORGIA: Freshly made? Where does your leprechaun brain get off thinkin' that we had time to make a new batch of doughnuts? We've been luggin' these here bodies around all night long.

HOLLY: Well, can you help me find him? I'm worried about Mr. Claus!

*(HOLLY exits UL. JEAN LUC FRANCOIS and GEORGIA follow UL. THEY struggle as THEY carry HOBO JOE. THEY give up, toss HOBO JOE to the floor, and exit UL. ANNIE and LOGAN enter DR.)*

ANNIE: *(To LOGAN.)* I just need to get away. I feel like you're the only person here who understands me.

LOGAN: *(As the dummy.)* Excuse me? Person? *(As himself.)* Quiet, dummy! You don't count.

ANNIE: Sorry. You *both* understand me.

LOGAN: I feel the same way. If we aren't murdered tonight, you and I should meet up sometime in the outside world and have more chats like these.

ANNIE: I'd like that.

*(EMMA and LEIGH enter DR. THEY step over HOBO JOE to get to ANNIE.)*

EMMA: *(To LEIGH.)* Watch the body, Emma!

LEIGH: I'm watching, Leigh! I'm watching!

EMMA: *(To ANNIE.)* Annie, we haven't had a chance to tell you today how much we appreciate what you are doing.

ANNIE: Me? What am I doing?

LEIGH: Emma and I don't agree on much, but there is one thing we do agree on.

ANNIE: What's that?

EMMA and LEIGH: Whales!

EMMA: Imagine what the world would be like without them.

LEIGH: They help to regulate the eco system of the oceans.

EMMA: They are the beautiful ballerinas of the great seas.

LEIGH: Not to mention, they brought us such heartwarming classics as "Moby Dick," "Pinocchio," and "Free Willy."

EMMA: And the fact that your team is, or was, going to raise money to help protect these majestic creatures is very noble.

LEIGH: Therefore, we have decided to donate to your cause.

EMMA: *(Pulls a check out of her pocket.)* Here is a check for fifteen thousand dollars.

ANNIE: That is so sweet. But, I'm confused. What does the cheerleading team have to do with "Free Willy?"

LEIGH: This check is to help get our planet's whales off of the Endangered Species List.

ANNIE: I think you might be a little confused. The fundraiser isn't –

(PAISLEY enters DR.)

PAISLEY: (To EMMA and LEIGH.) Emma! Leigh! What are you doing out here? I must finish your gown before the creative juices escape my brain. \*Special Guest\* might show up! I want him to see my work. What if he's interested in a new summer look?

EMMA: Excuse us, Paisley, but some things are more important.

LEIGH: Like protecting the seas' lovely giants from becoming extinct.

ANNIE: You don't understand –

(RALPH enters DR.)

RALPH: Have any of you pals seen Coach Candy? She seems to have run off again.

EMMA: No.

LEIGH: Why do you ask?

RALPH: Oh, no particular reason.

(HOLLY, JEAN LUC FRANCOIS, and GEORGIA enter UL.)

HOLLY: I just don't understand where he could have gone. Mr. Claus only moves faster than a leisurely pace when he's on his sleigh.

PAISLEY: I know where Santa probably is.

HOLLY: Tell me, Paisley!

PAISLEY: Off somewhere committing murder.

HOLLY: How dare you! Mr. Claus would never do anything like that!

GEORGIA: Are you sure, sweetie? I mean, how well do you know him?

HOLLY: I've been his little helper at the mall for three Christmas seasons now. Mr. Claus is a truly lovely man.

(TERI enters DL.)

TERI: Golly, gee! What are all of you doing out here again? (To JEAN LUC FRANCOIS and GEORGIA.) And what is Hobo Joe still doing on the floor?

HOLLY: Teri, I can't find Mr. Claus anywhere. (Indicates PAISLEY.) And this jaded wench over here is accusing him of something he hasn't done!

PAISLEY: Who are you calling a wench, you tacky garden gnome?

RALPH: (To TERI.) And I can't find Coach Candy. You gotta help me, pal!

TERI: This is what happens when you don't stay in one spot. But I'm sure Albert and Coach Candy couldn't have gone far.

MADAM ADELINA: (Closes her eyes.) I see it! I see it!

EMMA: What?

LEIGH: What do you see?

TERI: More phony predictions!

MADAM ADELINA: A Party Room! We must get into one of the Party Rooms!

PAISLEY: This woman is a twenty-four hour per day headache.

MADAM ADELINA: Energies are drawing me to a Party Room! We should investigate right away!

TERI: Why?

MADAM ADELINA: Now is not the time for questions! Now is the time for actions!

EMMA: Stuff a fried meatball in that mouth!

MADAM ADELINA: Won't anyone believe me? A violation is occurring in another room as we speak!

TERI: Now, Madam Adelina, I am going to tell you one last time. No one here believes in your nonsense. There is absolutely nothing questionable going on in a Party Room.

COACH CANDY: (*Offstage DR.*) Keep your hands to yourself, you overgrown fairy!

(*A slap is heard offstage DR. COACH CANDY and ALBERT enter DR. COACH CANDY is wearing ALBERT's Santa hat. ALBERT's coat is unbuttoned, revealing his padded belly. ALBERT is rubbing his cheek as if he has been slapped.*)

ALBERT: I didn't mean it, Coach Candy!

COACH CANDY: If one of you is the murderer, could you please move Santa to the top of your hit list? This fool tried to get all handsy with me in one of the Party Rooms!

MADAM ADELINA: How shocking!

GEORGIA: How gross!

LOGAN: How romantic!

HOLLY: (*To ALBERT.*) How dare you!

(*HOLLY grabs a glass of water from buffet table and splashes it in ALBERT's face. SHE runs to a table, crying.*)

ALBERT: Hey, now! That wasn't very nice.

COACH CANDY: And you think the way you just treated me was nice? (*Imitates ALBERT.*) "Try on my hat, Coach Candy. Ho-Ho-How about you let Santa take a peek at your Christmas List?" (*Throws Santa hat at ALBERT.*) Pervert!

ALBERT: I didn't mean anything by it.

GEORGIA: Bologna! I know how you men think. And I could see in your eyes the moment you stepped those boots through the front doors that you wanted to spread your Christmas cheer to a few of the gals in this place.

ALBERT: Okay, okay. I'll admit Santa was a little naughty just now. But I don't know what I did to upset my dear little helper.

GEORGIA: Aw, come on, Santa Baby. I've only known you and Holly for two hours, and I could tell after five minutes that she was so hot for you, she coulda melted the North Pole. How could you not know after three years?

ALBERT: I thought all elves were just very devoted to their Santas.

TERI: You also just made yourself look suspicious. You attempted to have a scandalous rendezvous in the middle of a murder scene.

ALBERT: I only wanted one little kiss.

(*HOLLY weeps loudly.*)

GEORGIA: (*To HOLLY.*) Just put your head on my shoulder, sister. I feel your pain. (*To ALBERT.*) Go hang your head in shame you two-timin' possum. You're makin' this poor girl weep enough to fill the Mississippi River.

ALBERT: I don't have to stand here and listen to anyone call me names. (*ALBERT exits DR.*)

TERI: (*To EVERYONE else onstage.*) Now, can all of you please go back into the Party Rooms? If we keep an eye on one another, we will all remain safe.

RALPH: (*To COACH CANDY.*) Babe, did Santa hurt you?

COACH CANDY: Quit trying to protect me, Ralph!

(*COACH CANDY, RALPH, and MADAM ADELINA exit DR.*)

PAISLEY: (*To EMMA and LEIGH.*) Come on, girls. We can have our first fitting in one of the Party Rooms.

EMMA: One moment, Paisley. Leigh drank too much diet soda, so now I have to use the restroom.

LEIGH: Sorry, Emma.

EMMA: Clod!

*(EMMA and LEIGH exit UR. PAISLEY exits DR.)*

TERI: Jean Luc Francois, help me lift Hobo Joe.

*(TERI and JEAN LUC FRANCOIS lift HOBO JOE and head to DL exit.)*

ANNIE: I'm getting sort of hungry again.

TERI: Georgia, can you please serve some desserts? These diners need to eat or they'll be even crankier than they are now. They'll definitely post negative restaurant reviews online.

GEORGIA: Sure thing. I'll just go stand in a room full of knives while a murderin' fool is on the loose.

*(TERI and JEAN LUC FRANCOIS exit DL with HOBO JOE. ANNIE and LOGAN sit at a table and stare dreamily at each other.)*

TERI: *(Offstage DL.)* But first, clean the blood off the hibachi table!

GEORGIA: *(To HOLLY.)* Can't that blind bat see that me and you need to have some girl-talk out here? Everything with her is either, "Clear those plates!" or, "Put more food out for the diners!"

You would think I was here to serve y'all! Are you going to be okay?

HOLLY: Yes, I'll be fine.

*(GEORGIA heads to UL exit.)*

*(Weeps loudly.)* No, I won't!

*(GEORGIA rushes back to comfort HOLLY.)*

GEORGIA: Let it out, darlin'.

HOLLY: I've been so good to Mr. Claus for all these years. When babies cry on his lap, I'm there with a box of tissues. When angry mothers complain about the length of the line, I move things forward at a faster pace. And when little children punch him in the stomach, I punch those little children right back. What else do I have to do to show Mr. Claus that I love him?

GEORGIA: I tell you, men are just pigs.

HOLLY: It's hard working under someone. You get treated like a slave, and then you don't get appreciated for all of the hard work you do. I'm standing all day, while Mr. Claus gets to sit on his butt. You should see the bunions I'm getting on my feet.

*(EMMA and LEIGH poke their heads out of UR doorway, observing HOLLY and GEORGIA.)*

GEORGIA: You should see the blisters on mine. I work eighty-five hours a week in this fried grease pit with no overtime.

HOLLY: Is that even legal?

GEORGIA: Who knows? I got this job to earn a few extra buckaroos, and before I knew it, I was workin' full-time. You've got no clue what it's like havin' to scrub layers of grease outta hot pots using... *(Mocks JEAN LUC FRANCOIS.)* "Ze counterclockwise strokes." We should both quit our jobs. Goodbye and good riddance. I hate this place.

*(EMMA and LEIGH gasp. GEORGIA and HOLLY look in the direction on UR door, but EMMA and LEIGH duck away.)*

HOLLY: I love Mr. Claus too much to leave him.

GEORGIA: I see. I guess there's a part of my achy breaky heart that loves this place too.

*(JEAN LUC FRANCOIS enters DL with plates and places them on the buffet table.)*

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: *(To GEORGIA.)* Sacrebleu! Don't just sit zere like ze useless slab of Mississippi mud zat you are!

GEORGIA: *(To HOLLY.)* Then there's the other part that makes me wanna watch this place burn to the ground.

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: I need help cleaning ze silverware and ze pots. And do not forget to use ze counterclockwise strokes, you nitwit. Do you hear me?

GEORGIA: I hear you, you miserable cream puff.

*(GEORGIA and JEAN LUC FRANCOIS exit DL. EMMA and LEIGH enter UR. THEY whisper to each other.)*

LEIGH: Did you hear that?

EMMA: Of course I heard it! I'm not deaf, you moron!

LEIGH: Georgia wants to see the restaurant burn down. She has to be the murderer.

EMMA: We should tell everyone.

LEIGH: But if she is the murderer, and she knows we suspect her, she'll murder us next. We should keep this information a secret.

EMMA: You know, for once, you actually said something that makes sense. Mother would be so proud of you!

LEIGH: You think?

EMMA: You bet! Too bad she still loves me best! We should keep an eye on Georgia and make sure she doesn't murder anyone else.

LEIGH: *(Points to DL exit.)* She went that way!

*(EMMA and LEIGH head to DL exit. JEAN LUC FRANCOIS enters DL just as EMMA and LEIGH reach the door. HE holds a large gelatin mold.)*

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: *(To EMMA and LEIGH.)* And where do you zink you are going? Zis kitchen is for employees only. I would appreciate it if you two would stop being nosy little busy-bodies and stay away from zis door while we are working. *(JEAN LUC FRANCOIS places the gelatin mold on buffet table and exits DL.)*

EMMA: Come on, Leigh. There's an entrance to the kitchen in the Hibachi Room. We can spy from in there.

*(EMMA and LEIGH exit UL. ALBERT enters DR.)*

ALBERT: *(To HOLLY.)* Ah! My little helper. You're still here.

HOLLY: You! Go away! I don't want to speak to you ever again.

ALBERT: Oh, come now. We're a team. You can't stay mad at me forever.

HOLLY: I most certainly can.

ALBERT: You should see your face flush when you get angry. Why, it's so red, I should fire Rudolph and let you guide my sleigh tonight. *(Laughs.)* Ho-Ho-Ho!

HOLLY: Oh, Mr. Claus, you always win me over when your little round belly shakes when you laugh like a bowl full of jelly. *(Smacks ALBERT's stomach.)* But that doesn't excuse what you did!

*(PAISLEY enters DR with half-made table cloth gown. SHE notices ALBERT and HOLLY and hides behind buffet table.)*

ALBERT: I know, I know. But I only become flirty with women because, deep down, just like the rest of the world, I am very insecure.

HOLLY: What do you have to be insecure about? You're the best mall Santa in the business.

ALBERT: I guess it all stems back to my days as an adolescent. You see, I was always a bit of a round little sugar plum growing up. I was often made fun of by my classmates in the school hallways.

HOLLY: How awful! Poor Mr. Claus.

ALBERT: Yes, it's true. I was an easy target for every clique: the jocks, the brainiacs, the marching band... Oh, but the cheerleaders! They were the worst. There was no end to the torture they caused me.

HOLLY: I never knew!

ALBERT: Yes. My high school's cheerleading team made fun of me every day. So I made a vow that, one day, I would show all of those nasty cheerleaders that I could be a star. It became my mission to become the best mall Santa in the Ho-Ho-History of mall Santa-dom! But even as Santa, I needed to watch my weight. At first, I was too fat, but now I'm too thin.

HOLLY: *(Pulls a candy cane out of her pocket and hands it to ALBERT.)* Perhaps some sugar will help, Mr. Claus.

ALBERT: Thank you, Holly. Are you ready to go back to the Party Rooms?

HOLLY: Yes, Mr. Claus. After you, Mr. Claus.

*(HOLLY and ALBERT exit DR. PAISLEY sits at a table and begins sewing dress with a needle and thread. AXEL and PETUNIA enter DR and notice gelatin mold.)*

AXEL: All right! Dessert is served! *(To PETUNIA.)* Look at that dessert, Petunia! Such gelatinous craftsmanship.

PETUNIA: Ya got *that* right.

AXEL: It's almost too beautiful to ruin with spoons.

PETUNIA: Ya got *that* right!

AXEL: Let's destroy that sucker!

*(PETUNIA takes the gelatin mold and moves it to a table. AXEL and PETUNIA sit and begin eating the gelatin. PEARL enters DR.)*

PEARL: *(To AXEL and PETUNIA.)* The two of you sure must be very hungry.

AXEL: Actually, we're stuffed. But gelatin is Petunia's favorite snack.

PETUNIA: Ya got *that* right.

PEARL: *(To PETUNIA.)* You know, the way you're eating that gelatin is very, shall we say...

Violent? It seems as if you have some pent up anger inside that you are taking out on the food.

*(PETUNIA stops eating and scowls at PEARL.)*

AXEL: Where are you going with this, Pearl?

PEARL: I was just wondering if there is anything you or Petunia would like to talk about. The first step to solving a problem is admitting you have one.

AXEL: Are you saying my little turtle dove has a problem? *(Lifts PEARL by the collar.)* Who do you think you are, anyway? Huh?

PEARL: I'm a therapist.

AXEL: You could be lying.

PEARL: I am a certified therapist, license number 100583.

*(RALPH enters DR.)*

AXEL: Well, we don't need no shrink! Me and the missus may be stuck inside because of a blizzard, our bikes may be destroyed from water damage, and there may be a murderer on the

loose ready to make us the next victims, but other than that, everything is hunky dory. So back off, Dr. Spock! *(AXEL releases PEARL and sits.)*

RALPH: Whoa, now! There's no need for violence, pals.

AXEL: Don't mess with me. You don't where I've been or what I can do. I've got more street cred than you can even imagine. You see these, here, beautiful pieces of work? *(Shows RALPH the tattoos on his arms.)* I earned these. *(Points to a tattoo on his arm.)* This I got when I spent six months in the clink after being charged with stealing dinner rolls from all of the diners in town. *(Points to another tattoo on his arm.)* And this one my buddy gave me himself when we were sixteen and we ran away to the Yukon.

RALPH: What's that one on your hand, pal?

AXEL: *(Covers tattoo on his hand.)* This? Oh, I forget what this one stands for.

RALPH: Really? I'm pretty sure I've seen that logo before.

AXEL: *(Grabs RALPH.)* I told you, it's nothing!

PEARL: You know, Axel, you're not just showing your colorful tattoos, but you're also showing your true colors. You're filled with anger. If you are the murderer, I could get you off the hook with a nice insanity plea.

AXEL: Lady, if you think I'm the one who's insane, then you've got some serious problems. Everyone in this joint is more of a nutcase than I'll ever be.

*(MADAM ADELINA enters DR. Her eyes are closed and SHE waves her arms, meditating.)*

PEARL: One of the first signs of insanity is claiming that the perfectly normal people around you are crazy.

AXEL: *(Points to MADAM ADELINA.)* You think I'm crazier than that?

*(THE LOVELY LOLICIA enters DR.)*

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: *(Notices MADAM ADELINA.)* Madam Adelina flails her arms more than a drag queen at a Barbra Streisand concert.

*(DR. MERIWETHER enters DR.)*

DR. MERIWETHER: Revert and return to the Party Rooms, Lolicia... *(Notices EVERYONE else onstage.)* Well, once again, it appears as if I am still the only individual who can follow instructions.

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: I only came out here to see if anyone had nail polish remover. I'm bored to tears with my new color, already.

PEARL: I believe I might have a little bit left. *(Pulls a large bottle of acetone out of her tote bag and hands it to THE LOVELY LOLICIA.)* Here you go. I always come prepared. Well groomed nails build high self-esteem.

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: Thanks, gorgeous. *(THE LOVELY LOLICIA sits at a table and begins removing nail polish.)*

PAISLEY: *(Indicates MADAM ADELINA, who is still waving her arms.)* Is she okay?

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: Oh, she'll be fine, sugar. She just started wandering off and doing that sloppy dance. Let's hope she doesn't poke anybody's eyes out with those talons.

PEARL: Madam Adelina, may I ask what you are doing?

MADAM ADELINA: *(Her eyes remain closed.)* Don't interrupt me!

DR. MERIWETHER: If you do not indicate the logic behind your actions, we will have no choice but to restrain you for the remainder of the evening for your own protection.

MADAM ADELINA: The magnetic forces have pulled me into this room. I feel as if another murder is in the near future! I must absorb the energies to foresee who the next victim shall be! *(SHE approaches AXEL and grabs his face. Her eyes remain closed.)* Yes! *(Releases*

*AXEL's face.*) No! (*Grabs DR. MERIWETHER's face.*) Yes! (*Releases DR. MERIWETHER's face.*) No! (*Grabs the dummy's face.*) Yes! Yes! This is it. I sense it! I sense it!

LOGAN: What do you sense?

MADAM ADELINA: I sense... (*Opens her eyes.*) That this dummy is not the murderer.

LOGAN: (*As the dummy.*) I could have told you that.

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: What a phony!

MADAM ADELINA: (*To THE LOVELY LOLICIA.*) Don't sass me, you harlot! Let's not forget that I know more about you than you are willing to admit to everyone else!

DR. MERIWETHER: Is this true?

MADAM ADELINA: Very true!

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: Very untrue! (*Indicates MADAM ADELINA.*) This crazy psychic doesn't know what she's talking about.

*(JEAN LUC FRANCOIS enters DL with a tray of brownies and places them on buffet table.)*

MADAM ADELINA: I most certainly *do* know what I am talking about! I saw your hands earlier.

DR. MERIWETHER: (*To THE LOVELY LOLICIA.*) What, may I ask, is so fascinating about the hands of The Lovely Lolicia?

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: Beats me. (*Holds up hands.*) Look, everyone! Do these hands look like anything out of the ordinary?

AXEL: Those look like normal hands to me.

PETUNIA: Ya got *that* right!

DR. MERIWETHER: Perfectly normal.

PEARL: The most normal hands I have ever seen.

LOGAN: (*As the dummy.*) Well, they are kind of big for a woman. (*As himself.*) Quiet, dummy! That's not polite. (*As the dummy.*) I mean, yes, very normal.

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: (*To MADAM ADELINA.*) Well, now, don't you look like a nutjob? Stop making such a big deal out of my very normal hands.

*(JEAN LUC FRANCOIS notices THE LOVELY LOLICIA's hands and drops the tray of brownies.)*

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: Sacrebleu! Zose hands!

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: What about them?

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: Zose are no ordinary hands! Zose are ze hands of a true artist. I work with my hands everyday. I knead dough. I decorate cakes. I fill up little eclairs wiz just ze right amount of cream. I know what an artist's hands looks like. (*Grabs THE LOVELY LOLICIA's hand, studying it.*) Tell me, are you good wiz ze slight of hand work?

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: Well, I am known to perform a mean card trick every now and then.

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: I see. Your hands are quick, nimble... You sound like ze perfect candidate to swiftly drop poison into a delicious salad when no one is looking!

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: No!

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: Oui!

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: I would never do such a thing! That's just trashy!

RALPH: And why should we believe you, pal?

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: Listen, I don't have to take any of this! There is enough criticism in my line of work as a drag performer. I do not care to stand here and listen to accusations from lunatics.

MADAM ADELINA: (*Shouts.*) I assure you, the lunacy is far from over! I feel another murder lingering in the air!

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: (*Shouts.*) Of course you do! It's because you probably have it all planned, you wickedly old witch!

(TERI and GEORGIA enter DL. COACH CANDY, HOLLY, and ALBERT enter DR. EMMA and LEIGH enter UL.)

TERI: Golly, gee! What is the ruckus?

LEIGH: You could probably hear that screaming from down the block.

COACH CANDY: I'm tired of having to listen to all of these diva fits.

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: Madam Adelina and Jean Luc Francois over here were just accusing little old me of murder.

MADAM ADELINA: I was simply pointing out the agility of your hands. I wasn't accusing you of anything.

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: I was!

TERI: Now, now, I know everyone is a little testy tonight. Murders are very stressful.

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: (*Shouts.*) Testy? Lady, I'm on the edge of my sanity!

TERI: Lower your voice, please! \*Special Guest\* might show up! He'll think that this restaurant is too chaotic and won't stay to eat.

DR. MERIWETHER: I still do not understand. Who is this \*Special Guest\* individual that we keep alluding to?

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: It doesn't matter! What matters is that my dignity is slowly being stripped away by liars.

COACH CANDY: Excuse you, but did you just say that \*Special Guest\* doesn't matter? I'm going to tell him you said that.

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: Oh, get a grip! Why would \*Special Guest\* come to a cheap, greasy buffet? I bet the rumor that he might show up was nothing but a big lie.

DR. MERIWETHER: Well, this would not be the first lie Coach Candy has used to coerce your simple minds into attending this evening's event.

COACH CANDY: I didn't coerce anybody.

DR. MERIWETHER: Coach Candy is a lying deceitful woman who will stop at nothing to get what she desires.

RALPH: (*To COACH CANDY.*) What's she talking about, babe?

COACH CANDY: (*To DR. MERIWETHER.*) What I did was technically not a lie. (*To RALPH.*) And stop calling me "babe."

TERI: Will someone please explain what the argument is about this time?

COACH CANDY: Okay, okay, I'll fess up. Now, I won't say that I lied to all of you about tonight's event, but I will admit that my posters... Well, they might have been a little misleading.

HOLLY: How so?

DR. MERIWETHER: Tonight's fundraiser was not created to assist whales. Well, not whales in our oceans.

MADAM ADELINA: What kind of whales was our money going to benefit?

COACH CANDY: The greatest Whales of them all! The Knotting Community College Whales! My cheerleading team!

EMMA: What?

LEIGH: Emma and I came here tonight specifically because we thought we were going to be protecting whales. *Real* whales!

EMMA: We used to work for the Protect the Whales organization. It's a charity that's near and dear to our heart.

LEIGH: We thought our hard earned money would keep whales alive.

COACH CANDY: Dr. Meriwether was gonna cut the funding for my team. I needed to raise money to keep *us* alive. It's not my fault that our college's mascot just so happens to be one of the planet's most endangered and vulnerable creatures.

EMMA: You are a sick and twisted woman!

LEIGH: You disgust us!

COACH CANDY: My team was in trouble. I had to do something.

EMMA: You could have organized a bake sale.

COACH CANDY: Bake sales are for sissies.

AXEL: Well, me and Petunia would have gladly come and bought an eggless bundt cake had we known.

PETUNIA: Ya got *that* right!

AXEL: I would have bought Petunia any dairy-free, vegan baked goods.

PETUNIA: Ya got *that* right!

AXEL: (*To COACH CANDY.*) But now, knowing what kind of person you really are, I wouldn't even buy so much as a chocolate covered pretzel from you!

PETUNIA: Ya got *that* right!

EMMA: And to think, we gave Annie fifteen thousand dollars for the cause!

LEIGH: (*To COACH CANDY.*) You aren't going to see fifteen cents of that check!

COACH CANDY: (*To ANNIE.*) Did Emma and Leigh really give you fifteen thousand dollars?

ANNIE: (*Pulls check out of her pocket.*) You bet! I have the check right here.

EMMA: Not anymore!

LEIGH: (*To ANNIE.*) Hand it over!

COACH CANDY: (*To EMMA and LEIGH.*) Oh, no you don't! You already gave it to us, so it's ours!

*(COACH CANDY, EMMA, and LEIGH struggle to get the check from ANNIE. An electric buzz is heard, and the lights go off.)*

PAISLEY: Oh, no!

TERI: Golly, gee! Not again!

LOGAN: Are you all right, my darling Annie?

ANNIE: I think someone just stepped on my face!

LOGAN: (*As the dummy.*) Well, I think there's someone touching my butt! (*As himself.*) Quiet, dummy! You know that's only me!

PEARL: I don't know where I'm stepping!

TERI: Jean Luc Francois, Georgia, help our diners find a seat.

GEORGIA: I can't see the schnoz on the front of my face! How am I supposed to help anyone?

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: Sacrebleut! Whoever zis person is zat I am carrying is mighty heavy.

COACH CANDY: Hey! Who are you calling heavy?

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: Sorry, Coach Candy. You just have ze big muscles. Zere we are! I found you a nice chair.

*(An electric buzz is heard, and the lights come on. JEAN LUC FRANCOIS places COACH CANDY into a chair. A red substance oozes out of COACH CANDY's mouth and SHE falls to the floor.)*

ANNIE: Coach!

RALPH: Babe!

PAISLEY: Is that blood?

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: (*Dabs COACH CANDY's face.*) No, no! (*Tastes the red substance.*) Zis is merely a bit of ketchup!

PEARL: Oh, that's a relief.

ANNIE: No, it's not! Coach Candy is deathly allergic to tomatoes! Everyone at Knotting Community College knows that. All of the sports fields are official tomato-free zones.

PEARL: (*Touches COACH CANDY's arm.*) No pulse.

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: But Coach Candy was alive just a moment ago! I was holding her in zese arms, and she was speaking.

GEORGIA: How could she have croaked already?

ANNIE: Well, Coach Candy always did like to hustle.

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: (*To MADAM ADELINA.*) This whole mess is your fault!

MADAM ADELINA: My fault?

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: Don't play dumb with me. I can recognize another performer from a mile away. Especially one as lame as you. No one is buying your psychic act. I'd be willing to bet my best wigs that you came here tonight to commit murder and frame someone else. Then you'd claim to figure this whole mystery out yourself.

MADAM ADELINA: I have better things to do with my time. Why would I go through all the trouble?

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: If you solved a big murder case, everyone would believe in your psychic powers. Then you'd be hired for all sorts of events: investigations, séances, bar mitzvahs...

MADAM ADELINA: Pure poppycock! Even if I was the murderer, you would not be the easiest person to frame. Paisley is the only one who had a personal vendetta against all of the cheerleaders.

PAISLEY: Excuse me!

MADAM ADELINA: I believe you held a fashion show in which the cheerleaders wore your clothing.

PAISLEY: Wouldn't that mean I *liked* the cheerleading team if I wished for them to model my designs?

MADAM ADELINA: One would think so. But you also mentioned that the cheerleaders stained the outfits, thus spoiling your hard work. Perhaps you've held animosity in your heart, and decided to murder the team because of this. And by the looks of it, you decided to murder the coach, as well.

PAISLEY: Like everything else coming out of your crazy mouth, Madam Adelina, your accusation is a piece of lowly garbage. Disasters occur all the time in the fashion industry. Designers simply move on. We don't murder anyone.

ALBERT: (*To PAISLEY.*) I don't know. Your nasty remarks about my suit today have proven that you might just be number one on the Naughty List.

PAISLEY: You're one to talk about being naughty, since you are the naughtiest of all, Santa Claus.

SANTA: Ho-Ho-Huh?

PAISLEY: If anyone had a motive to murder the cheerleaders, it was you. It's naughty to tease someone. And isn't that what I overheard you tell Holly a whole team of cheerleaders did to you in high school?

ALBERT: That was many years ago, and it was a different cheerleading team. I have moved on from those days.

PAISLEY: If you're no longer affected by the pain, why did you tell Holly that you chase women because you are insecure? Isn't it funny that the woman you were pursuing tonight was murdered?

ALBERT: It is not funny. It is actually quite tragic. Rudolph did not murder the other reindeer when they laughed and called him names and wouldn't let him join in any reindeer games, so why would I? You're completely forgetting someone else whose spirit has been crushed by those little cheer devils.

PAISLEY: And who might that be?

ALBERT: (*Points to ANNIE who is looking at her cellular phone.*) The walking, talking whale over there! The one who has spent all night staring at either Logan or her cell phone.

ANNIE: \*Special Guest\* updated his blog again. (*Reads from cellular phone.*) "I think it's important to fundraise for charity, so that's what I'm going to do very, very shortly." (*To EVERYONE onstage.*) \*Special Guest\* might show up!

ALBERT: \*Special Guest\* is not going to show up, Flipper! But earlier tonight I watched the entire cheerleading team shove past you as they got their dinner. Coach Candy did nothing to stop this. In fact, Coach Candy was pretty nasty to you, herself. Always yelling at you and hitting you and calling you a non-mammal. Maybe you snapped. I bet you're using that phone to text information to someone in the outside world about the murders you're committing. You seem to like communicating. Have you mailed any threatening packages lately?

LOGAN: Annie would do no such thing.

ALBERT: Or maybe Annie's new boyfriend stepped in and committed the heinous acts himself, defending his new love. What sort of a kook talks to dolls? A murderer?

LOGAN: *(As the dummy.)* Now you've crossed the line. *(As himself.)* I agree, dummy! *(As the dummy.)* I should smack Santa silly! *(As himself.)* You tell him, dummy! *(As the dummy.)* Logan may be a kook. But he's not a *dangerous* kook. *(As himself.)* Quiet, dummy! That hurt my feelings.

ANNIE: Why not point the finger at your own sidekick, Santa! We all know that Holly is in love with you. *(To LOGAN.)* I may not know much, but, after tonight, I know love when I see it. *(To ALBERT.)* Holly was pretty upset that you were hitting on Coach Candy. That sounds like a good reason to commit murder to me.

HOLLY: I was upset, but I wouldn't murder anyone. I didn't even know Coach Candy well enough to have any idea that she was allergic to tomatoes. And the cheerleading team and Hobo Joe were murdered long before I even knew Mr. Claus was interested in Coach Candy. All of the accusations so far have been for the murders of Coach Candy and the cheerleaders, but no one has thought much about who would murder Hobo Joe.

TERI: That's because no one wanted him here in the first place. That scallywag got what he deserved.

HOLLY: Exactly what a murderer would say.

TERI: Golly, gee! I guess that came out wrong. You misunderstood what I meant.

HOLLY: No, I didn't. It was pretty clear you were tired of Hobo Joe squatting in your restaurant. You were going to throw him outside into a terrible blizzard. But you knew he'd likely return and squat some more. Why not just off him and solve the problem once and for all?

TERI: Because if I was going to murder Hobo Joe, I would have done it a long time ago. And I have no reason to murder Coach Candy or the cheerleaders. Dr. Meriwether has the biggest motive to do that.

DR. MERIWETHER: I certainly do. I greatly disliked Coach Candy and those barbaric cheerleaders. They soiled the name of Knotting Community College.

TERI: See?

DR. MERIWETHER: But as a woman with a refined education, I would never commit such a horrific act. I understood that the best way to be rid of Coach Candy and her team was to simply remove their funding.

TERI: Everyone needs a Plan B.

DR. MERIWETHER: With all of these accusations based on motive, no one is viewing the situation logically. Coach Candy was induced into an allergic fit in front of our eyes. Hobo Joe was repeatedly stabbed with shish kabob skewers. The cheerleaders were poisoned by... Well... Something. We do not even know what that something is. Did anyone bring a large amount of a heavily toxic substance to IHOFF this evening?

ANNIE: There's nothing toxic on me.

PAISLEY: Or me.

PEARL: *(Takes large bottle of acetone from THE LOVELY LOLICIA and places it in her tote bag.)* Me neither.

GEORGIA: Well, that was 'bout as slick as a pile of broken glass.

DR. MERIWETHER: There is no use hiding that large bottle of acetone, Pearl.

PEARL: Oh, do you mean this nail polish remover? (*Pulls large bottle of acetone out of tote bag.*) I carry this with me all the time in case I run into a girl who wants to fix her nails. It's always important to carry self-esteem builders for moments of self-loathing. (*Pulls makeup, hair clips, and gold star stickers out of her tote bag.*) Look! I also have makeup, beautiful hair clips, and gold star stickers.

DR. MERIWETHER: You preach about the importance of living a stress-free life and maintaining high self-esteem. Would you not be able to achieve both of these goals yourself if you were a successful therapist?

PEARL: What does that have to do with anything?

DR. MERIWETHER: Perhaps if a large group had suffered post-traumatic stress by witnessing a massacre, you would have a horde of new clients. I believe you murdered the cheerleaders, Hobo Joe, and Coach Candy in an effort to develop the successful therapeutic career you have longed for.

PEARL: Such negative thoughts! It is going to take months to undo all of the tension I have acquired tonight. You know, you can all point fingers at me, but there is one person here who has overstayed his welcome. (*To RALPH.*) Why didn't you leave right after delivering your package?

RALPH: Me? Because I saw the delicious food, of course. I can't turn down falafel, pal.

PEARL: There's food here every day when you deliver the mail. What was different about today? Something new? Or someone new?

RALPH: Of course! I heard that \*Special Guest\* might show up!

PEARL: Besides him. Someone a little closer to you. Perhaps someone like Coach Candy?

RALPH: I'm confused.

PEARL: Let me spell it out for you. I happened to be in the room when you were reunited with Coach Candy. It might be interesting for everyone to know that the two of you used to be an item.

RALPH: I'll admit it, pals. We had a thing awhile back.

ALBERT: (*To RALPH.*) All right! Up top, brother! (*ALBERT gives RALPH a high five.*)

PEARL: Coach Candy left you alone in Idaho while she pursued her cheerleading dream.

RALPH: And you're going to try to say that I searched the world for her, seeking revenge?

PEARL: Exactly!

RALPH: Save your breath, pal. I loved that babe. I'd never hurt her. Or anyone else. I always try to keep the peace. (*Points to AXEL and PETUNIA.*) Unlike the two gangbangers who attack gelatin molds and who knows what else.

AXEL: (*To PETUNIA.*) That fool just called you a gangbanger! He don't know who he's messing with.

PETUNIA: Ya got *that* right!

RALPH: Speaking of gelatin, I thought you were a vegan, Petunia. Vegans follow a strict diet of animal-free foods. Yet you sure seem to enjoy your gelatin.

DR. MERIWETHER: Gelatin, to my knowledge, contains no meat, eggs, or dairy, thus making it a vegan-friendly food.

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: (*To DR. MERIWETHER.*) Sacrebleu! You are a bad, uninformed educator! A very bad, uninformed educator! Gelatin is produced from the bones and hooves of various animals.

RALPH: Petunia is no vegan. She is, however, a liar.

AXEL: (*Grabs RALPH.*) You apologize to my baby pumpkin, right now! Petunia had no idea that gelatin contains animal products.

RALPH: Now, now, pal. Let's not resort to violence.

AXEL: I don't have a violent bone in my body. (*Shoves RALPH to the floor.*) And Petunia wouldn't hurt a fly. (*Points to EMMA and LEIGH.*) Those twins over there are a different story.

EMMA: Us?

LEIGH: What did we do?

AXEL: You attacked Coach Candy right before she was murdered. You were more than just a little ticked off that you almost donated fifteen thousand dollars to a cheerleading team instead of the real Protect the Whales organization.

EMMA: We were very upset.

LEIGH: Well, Emma was very upset, but I was barely perturbed.

EMMA: Don't try to throw me under the bus.

LEIGH: I'm not taking the fall because you have a bad attitude. Everyone knows you're the violent twin, Emma.

EMMA: I just know how to stand up for myself, Leigh. That's why Mother likes me best!

LEIGH: Stop rubbing it in my face!

AXEL: The two of you have been at each other's throats all night. You're angry people. You could be angry enough to commit murder.

EMMA: No! If anyone has an anger problem, it's Georgia.

LEIGH: We heard her say that she can't stand working at this buffet.

EMMA: She said she'd like to see IHOFF burn to the ground.

LEIGH: Why not poison the food?

EMMA: Why not throw around pointy shish kabob skewers?

LEIGH: Why not prey upon food allergies?

EMMA: That seems like a good way for a restaurant to get some bad reviews posted online, and close down.

GEORGIA: I'm here tonight, ain't I? I coulda called out like most of the other employees and be sittin' on my couch watchin' a chick flick on TV! But I cared enough 'bout this job to brave the storm and come to work anyway. So did Gene Luck Frankie, over here.

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: My name Jean Luc Francois!

GEORGIA: Same thing. Yup, Gene Luck Frankie came to work, too, and with his usual sour attitude.

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: Pardon moi?

GEORGIA: Don't pretend like you're an angel. You have a temper like a moose in matin' season. If anyone had the perfect opportunity to poison the food tonight, it was you. You prepared everythin' that's been eaten.

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: Yes, I have prepared all of ze food. And I assure you, it was all set on ze buffet table wiz no poison. But perhaps ze drag queen wiz ze nimble hands has been tampering wiz my delicious recipes.

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: These hands have picked up a buffalo wing or two tonight, but nothing poisonous. And with these nails, how would I ever be deft enough to stab all of those shish kabob skewers into Hobo Joe so quickly? I can hardly pick up my tips at work.

GEORGIA: Tips?

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: From your act at ze piano bar?

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: No... Not that...

DR. MERIWETHER: What then?

MADAM ADELINA: It's time to come clean, my Lovely Lolicia.

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: Oh, all right.

*(THE LOVELY LOLICIA pulls a long balloon, air pump, and permanent magic marker out of his pocketbook. HE blows up the balloon and ties it closed.)*

JEAN LUC FRANCOIS: Oh la la!

LOGAN: Such grace!

PAISLEY: Such artistry!

DR. MERIWETHER: Such technique!

GEORGIA: I don't get it. What's she doin'? Looks like nothin' but a pile of homemade sin.

*(THE LOVELY LOLICIA draws a face on the end of the balloon with the permanent magic marker and holds up the finished product: a balloon animal in the shape of a snake.)*

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: Ta-da! When I'm not performing my drag act, I make balloon animals at children's birthday parties for a little extra cash. Snakes are my specialty. *(Hands ANNIE the balloon.)* There you are, sugar.

MADAM ADELINA: When I first saw those hands, I knew they were made for something special. My psychic capabilities screamed, "Balloon Animal Artist!"

DR. MERIWETHER: They most certainly did not. You are a fraudulent phony.

MADAM ADELINA: I can do many brilliant, un-earthly things if you would just believe! Why, not too long ago, I found an entire gaggle of otherworldly beings. They told me they would inform me if they see anything suspicious. Let me see if I can conjure up their presence now.

TERI: We don't need to witness any more of your nonsense.

MADAM ADELINA: So far, everyone in this room has been accused of committing murder, and not one soul has been proven guilty. A short séance can never make matters any worse. Carry on as you wish. I shall meditate.

TERI: Jean Luc Francois, Georgia, bring Coach Candy's body into the kitchen. The rest of you can help yourselves to some desserts while Madam Adelina pretends to meditate.

*(JEAN LUC FRANCOIS and GEORGIA exit DL carrying COACH CANDY. Everyone else onstage except for MADAM ADELINA selects food and sits at tables. MADAM ADELINA closes her eyes, makes strange noises, and waves arms as if meditating. The lights dim. MADAM ADELINA opens her eyes. The action of eating dessert continues as MADAM ADELINA addresses the AUDIENCE.)*

MADAM ADELINA: *(To AUDIENCE.)* Ah, wonderful. You're all still here. I was worried some of you otherworldly beings might sneak out during intermission. Do any of you have a clue who the vile villain is? Please, your help would do me a world of good. My professional reputation is at stake. *(Prompts a response from AUDIENCE.)* I suppose we cannot yet be certain of who murdered Hobo Joe, Coach Candy, and the cheerleaders. Perhaps not all questions have been answered. I have a brilliant idea. I will gather a list of questions from all of you and return to IHOFF so that I may interrogate the others. *(Pulls pad and pen out of her purse.)* Do any of you have any questions you think I should ask? There must be a great deal of specifics we have missed. *(SHE gathers questions from the AUDIENCE and writes them in the pad.)* This is perfect! Now we'll get some real answers. Oh, I should make this look a little more legitimate. No one seems to believe that I am capable of speaking to otherworldly beings. *(Pulls tarot cards out of her purse, places them on a table, and sits.)* I'll just tell the others that the cards have given me some questions.

*(MADAM ADELINA closes eyes and repeats strange noises. The lights return to normal. JEAN LUC FRANCOIS and GEORGIA enter DL.)*

*(To EVERYONE onstage.)* The cards seem to be asking some very distinct questions. When I call your name, step forward and answer my question. Be truthful!

*(MADAM ADELINA pretends to look at her tarot cards as she reads questions off of the pad. EVERYONE onstage improvises the answers to these questions. If a question is for a specific CHARACTER, that CHARACTER moves downstage and improvises an answer to the question. MADAM ADELINA addresses ALL of the ACTORS onstage if a question is for the entire group.)*

Now then, are we all impressed with the questions I have gathered from the otherworld?

DR. MERIWETHER: Those were very well-conceived and thorough questions.

PEARL: I feel free of tension knowing that new discoveries have been made.

MADAM ADELINA: Don't thank me. Thank the cards. Does everyone believe in my abilities now?

THE LOVELY LOLICIA: Fat chance, old lady. You came up with those questions yourself. I saw you reading off of that pad the whole time.

MADAM ADELINA: *(To AUDIENCE.)* I can never win with these people.

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