

DID SOMEONE SAY MURDER?

By David LeMaster

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ISBN: 1-932404-47-3

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CHARACTERS

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

TIME & PLACE

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

SET

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

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

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

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ACT I

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

JOE: Here we are!

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

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

MARY: It looks very expensive.

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

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

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

MARY: Have you been here before?

JOE: No. But the reviews are excellent.

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

JOE: Miss?

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

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

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

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

MARY: If you're sure...

JOE: Miss? Miss?

(Enter HOSTESS. SHE glares at them.)

.HOSTESS: Yes?

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

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

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

Did Someone Say Murder? – Page 5

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

JOE: Nonsmoking.

HOSTESS: We don't have anything in nonsmoking.

JOE: Do you have anything on the patio?

HOSTESS: How do you know we have a patio?

JOE: I assumed...

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

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

HOSTESS: There's nothing available there, either.

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

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

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

HOSTESS: Yes?

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

HOSTESS: No.

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

HOSTESS: They're all reserved.

MARY: I don't see any reservation markers.

HOSTESS: Maybe they're invisible.

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

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

MARY: I beg your pardon?

JOE: Maybe we *should* go somewhere else—

MARY: Did you say murder night?

HOSTESS: Yes. That's what I said.

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

HOSTESS: Not even close, Toots.

MARY: I beg your pardon?

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

MARY: How intriguing.

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

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

MARY: I like it here.

JOE: But you said yourself—

Did Someone Say Murder? – Page 6

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

JOE: What? Murder?

MARY: I'm intrigued.

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

MARY: Sounds delicious!

JOE: Honey—

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

JOE: Tip?

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

JOE: But murder night?

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

HOSTESS: What?

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

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

MARY: Oh, how delightful!

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

ELSINORE: Table for two. Under Elsinore.

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

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

HOSTESS: Do you have a reservation, sir?

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

HOSTESS: Oh, is it?

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

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

JOE: And we'd like to be seated.

HOSTESS: Mithington, eh? Are you sure?

JOE: Yes.

ELSINORE: Elsinore—

HOSTESS: Just a moment Mr. Elsinore.

ELSINORE: We'd like our table.

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

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

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

MARY: What?

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

JOE: Um. I'm an accountant.

Did Someone Say Murder? – Page 7

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

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

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

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

MARY: I've changed my mind.

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

HOSTESS: Even if you take the Mithingtons' place?

JOE: That's right.

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

ELSINORE: I suppose.

MRS. ELSINORE: How rude.

ELSINORE: How crass.

MRS. ELSINORE: Ridiculous.

ELSINORE: They deserve what's coming to them.

MRS. ELSINORE: Indeed.

MARY: What was that?

ELSINORE: You'll find out.

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

HOSTESS: Right this way, Mr. Mithington.

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

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

JOE: Yes! Yes, we do.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

HOSTESS: Thank you.

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

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

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

BUSBOY: Water?

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

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

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

JOE: Well...

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

JOE: Thanks.

BUSBOY: Bread?

JOE: Yes.

MARY: No.

JOE: Why not?

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

(BUSBOY shrugs and goes to the ELSINORE table.)

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

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

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

BUSBOY: I'll get your waiter.

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

MARY: It's a drink menu.

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