

HOW THE OTHER HALF DIES

By **Eddie McPherson**

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P.O. BOX 248 • CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA 52406
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SYNOPSIS: In a desperate attempt to become a member of Harriet Hammer's posh country club, Sybil Chasteen invites Ms. Hammer to a formal dinner party on the same day that she discovers a dead body in the trunk of her new car. While Sybil waits impatiently for the authorities, the corpse, nicknamed Mr. X, sits propped up on her sofa as the list of murder suspects grows. The police, distracted by a few other cases, finally arrive only to find Sybil's life spiraling recklessly out of control in this door-slamming, phone ringing, ridiculously fun murder-mystery parody that includes backstage ring shots, witty one-liners and a backyard wedding. Easy staging and flexible casting.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(5 males, 7-10 females, 4-12 either; gender flexible, doubling possible)

NON-DOUBLERS

ACTORS CAN'T DOUBLE IF THEY PLAY THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERS

CORPSE (m).....	Murdered man with no lines but remains on stage throughout.
SYBIL CHASTEEN (f).....	Finds a corpse in the trunk of her new car. <i>(274 lines)</i>
OFFICER KNIGHT (m/f).....	Veteran cop who dreams of becoming an inspector. <i>(234 lines)</i>
OFFICER NEWBIE (m).....	Knight's rookie-in-training who discovers cooking. Note: Could be played by a female if absolutely necessary. <i>(101 lines)</i>
APRIL MAY (f).....	A good friend of Sybil. <i>(56 lines)</i>
HYSTERICAL VICTIM (f).....	Is being chased by Jack the Ripper then falls in love with him. <i>(55 lines)</i>

JACK (m).....	Chases Hysterical Victim then falls in love with her. (59 lines)
CORA (f)	Another friend of Sybil. (33 lines)
FANNIE (f).....	Another friend of Sybil. (25 lines)
CAPTAIN DIMPLES (m)	Local neighborhood hero with dreams of bigger things. (65 lines)
MRS. HARRIET HAMMER (f).....	Rich socialite who attends Sybil's dinner party. (37 lines)

DOUBLERS

ACTORS CAN DOUBLE IF THEY PLAY THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERS.

NOTE: THE DOUBLING CHARACTERS MAY BE PLAYED BY 5 ACTORS, 16 ACTORS OR ANYTHING IN BETWEEN

HAPPY HARRY/HAPPY HAZEL (m/f)	Runs a used car lot. (10 lines)
RADIO OPERATOR (m/f).....	Police dispatch. (3 lines)
STRANGER (m).....	Keeps calling Sybil then shows up at her house. (34 lines)
MRS. NABORS (f).....	Sybil's neighbor who just lost her beloved 15 year-old cat. (17 lines)
FIRST SPY (m/f).....	Sticks his/her head through the window spying. (1 line)
SECOND SPY (m/f)	Another. (1 line)
911 OPERATOR (m/f)	Answers a distress call. (4 lines)
DRUMMER (m/f).....	Provides rim shots throughout the play. (10 lines)
THERAPIST (m/f).....	Pays Sybil a house call because she's nervous. (23 lines)
PREACHER (m/f)	Shows up to conduct an impromptu wedding. (2 lines)
BRIDESMAID (f).....	Is paid to be in Hysterical Victim's wedding. (3 lines)

- FLOWER GIRL (f)..... Another. (4 lines)
 DOC (m/f)..... Provides a death certificate for Corpse. (12 lines)
 BODYGUARD ONE (m/f)..... There to “protect” Mrs. Hammer. (7 lines)
 BODYGUARD TWO (m/f)..... Another. (2 lines)
 ANGEL (f)..... Corpse’s ex-girlfriend. (9 lines)

PROPS

ACT ONE

Two phones, contract, to-do list, walkie, head-set microphone or walkie, purses, ladder or step ladder, large plastic butcher knife, feather duster, blood stained sack, two Bingo cards, tray of cheese crackers or puffs, two covered dishes, apron, fishing rod, rubber chicken, handkerchief or tissue, pad and pencil, two or three Thesauruses, yellow tape or roll of crêpe paper, mixing bowl, freezer bags, feather, oven mitts, two small pocket mirrors, digital camera, cooking pot, box of cereal.

ACT TWO

Cigar, sunglasses, lampshade, writing tablet, cell phone, ugly hat, sandwich, handful of confetti, ice cream cone, death certificate, Sharpie, chef’s hat, horseshoe cut from felt, small music device, “fur” wrap, large handkerchief, glasses on a stick, apple, banana, carrot, small bouquet of fake flowers, veil attached to plastic tiara, photograph, toy pistol, bikini top, white glove, newspaper, a will, three socks, fake mustache.

SET

It's the living room of Sybil Chasteen. Stage left is the front door. Stage right is the kitchen door. In the upstage wall is a window. If it's a real window, a few actors appear at it; if it's fake, the actors can peek inside the door instead. A sofa sits center stage. You may add other chairs, bookcases, tables, etc. as you prefer. Somewhere on the upstage wall is a set of footprints glued to the wall. The footprints climb the wall, make an arch then down the wall. (NOTE: This sight gag is optional. If you prefer not to use it, it's easily removed from the script.) You may choose to have a complete living room set with walls or a suggestive set with free-standing doors and windows.

PRODUCTION NOTES

This play parodies murder mysteries and is to be played solely for laughs. Broadly played characters and action that moves at a quick, steady pace is the key to a successful farce.

Captain Dimples' costume needs to look homemade. Perhaps sweat pants or tights with shorts worn on top of them. A long-sleeved shirt is worn to match. Perhaps a wide cardboard belt covered in aluminum foil and a beach towel for a cape. A piece of cloth tied around his head with holes cut out for the eyes could be used for his mask. A piece of white paper has been attached to his chest but no letter "C" underneath the paper. Captain Dimples' stand-in Roger is dressed identically to Captain Dimples except that he has the letter "C" attached underneath his piece of paper.

In the same homemade fashion, Jack the Ripper in the first act may wear black attire, a plastic or cloth black cape and a store-bought or homemade black top hat.

ACT ONE**AT RISE:**

SYBIL is on the phone waiting patiently for someone to pick up in answer to her call. A dead man, let's call him CORPSE, is propped up sitting on her sofa. He's dressed in nice attire, but wears a ragged coat on top of his clothes.

SYBIL: Someone please hurry and answer the phone.

HAPPY HARRY: *(Enters holding a phone.)* Happy Harry's Used Cars, please hold. *(Receiver to his chest and yelling.)* Hey, is somebody going out for tacos?

SYBIL: Hello? Hello? Is anyone there?

HAPPY HARRY: Sorry, lady, I'm back. What can I do you for?

SYBIL: Well, you see, I bought a car from you yesterday and—

HAPPY HARRY: I remember you, the sweet little lady from Pasadena.

SYBIL: I'm from Greenville.

HAPPY HARRY: How's that beautiful car workin' out for ya? 'Scuse me. *(Yelling.)* Hey, Lenny! Get the tacos and it's your turn to buy!

SYBIL: The car is doing just fine, but—

HAPPY HARRY: Good, good. Like our motto says: If you're not pleased, we don't give a rip.

SYBIL: Sir, I'm afraid this is important. You see, I drove to the market this morning and when I opened the trunk to place my groceries inside, there it was. Right there. In my trunk!

HAPPY HARRY: Yes ma'am...that's usually where you find your spare tire.

SYBIL: It wasn't a spare tire I found at all, it was a dead body.

HAPPY HARRY: Ma'am, need I remind you that you bought the car "as-is." Now, it says so right there on your contract. Did you read your contract?

SYBIL: I did.

HAPPY HARRY: The fine print at the bottom?

SYBIL: Well, no, but—

HAPPY HARRY: I'll wait.

SYBIL: Sorry. (*Holds the paper only three inches from her nose.*) I, the above signed, understand I am buying this car as-is including possible bald tires, sawdust in the engine, murdered corpse, cracked windshield or leaky radiator.

HAPPY HARRY: I must say that out of forty years we've been in business, this is our first murdered corpse. But it was bound to happen sooner or later. If you go online and fill out the customer survey, we will send you a free calendar with me on the cover posing in nothing but a toga and designer sunglasses. (*He exits.*)

SYBIL: But I'm throwing a very important dinner party this evening. Hello? Hello? (*She hangs up and speaks to CORPSE.*) Now, what am I supposed to do with you? (*Doorbell.*) Oh, dear. (*She answers the door.*)

OFFICER KNIGHT: Excuse me, ma'am, I'm sorry to bother you, but would you happen to have a tall ladder?

SYBIL: (*Hand to her chest.*) Thank goodness you're here. I have something to show you.

OFFICER KNIGHT: Sorry, ma'am, but we're in the middle of an emergency.

SYBIL: (*Rushing to the CORPSE.*) I have an emergency of my own! See?

OFFICER KNIGHT: (*Holding up a piece of paper.*) Do you see this, ma'am? This is called a list of things we must do before our shift is over. Now, we have only two things left to do on this list. Two things. And then it's home to a bubble bath and bowl of Capt'n Crunch.

SYBIL: But I found a dead body in the trunk of my new car.

OFFICER KNIGHT: And your neighbor's fifteen-year-old cat is in the top of a tree with only two hours of daylight left, now which do you think is priority?

SYBIL: The dead body.

OFFICER KNIGHT: Did you hear what I said? Cat. In tree. Two hours 'til nightfall.

OFFICER NEWBIE: (*Running in.*) Did you find a ladder?

OFFICER KNIGHT: It seems we have someone here who isn't too excited about helping out the local police department.

NEWBIE: Oh, really? Well, well, well, aren't we Ms...Ms... (*For lack of better words.*) naughty pants?

SYBIL: (*Pleading to NEWBIE.*) Perhaps you can help me. (*Heads to CORPSE.*) Let me show you something.

NEWBIE: Unless it's a tall ladder, I'm not interested.

SYBIL: But someone's been murdered.

NEWBIE: Lady, we have a priority list—

OFFICER KNIGHT: I showed her the list.

NEWBIE: And that didn't matter to her? (*To SYBIL.*) What kind of weirdo are you?

SYBIL: I, sir, am no weirdo. I'm a concerned citizen who bought a car and happened to find a dead body in the trunk. It's right here!

NEWBIE: (*Into his walkie.*) Possible backup needed at 123 Skeeter Street. Hysterical woman giving me dirty looks, over. (*Beat.*) She just did it again, over.

RADIO OPERATOR: (*Stepping out with a radio.*) Has she used physical force? Over.

SYBIL: (*Shouting toward the radio.*) Not yet, over!

RADIO OPERATOR: She sounds mean? Over.

NEWBIE: Mean and old, over.

RADIO OPERATOR: My God, you stay strong. You hear me? Stay strong! Over and out. (*Exits.*)

OFFICER KNIGHT: (*To SYBIL.*) Now that you've destroyed my partner's self-confidence, may we please borrow a ladder?

SYBIL: Good heavens, it's in the shed out back. (*She sits and cries into her hands.*)

NEWBIE: Ma'am, are you upset about something?

SYBIL: There's a dead man on my sofa, the car dealership won't come get him, you're too busy to do anything about it and I'm giving a dinner party tonight for a very important socialite. I'm a nervous wreck.

OFFICER KNIGHT: (*Sarcastic.*) Not that we asked for a summary of your day, or anything.

SYBIL: Can't you at least look for his murderer?

OFFICER KNIGHT: (*Sighs, turns to NEWBIE.*) So, what we got left on our list for today?

NEWBIE: (*Reading.*) Get cat out of tree and a lady called about being chased by some Jack the Ripper copycat.

OFFICER KNIGHT: (*To SYBIL.*) I tell you what I'm gonna do. Let us take care of these two little items and then we'll see if we can help you out.

SYBIL: Thank you, Mr. Policeman. Thank you ever so much.

OFFICER KNIGHT: (*Offers his hand.*) The name is Knight, ma'am. Officer Jed Knight.

NEWBIE: (*Elbows KNIGHT, giggling.*) Tell her your middle initial.

OFFICER KNIGHT: (*Defensive.*) It's not important.

NEWBIE: (*To SYBIL.*) His middle initial is I. His first name is Jed. Get it? (*Laughs.*)

OFFICER KNIGHT: That's enough out of you.

SYBIL: (*Thinking.*) Jed I. Knight. I don't get it.

OFFICER KNIGHT: Good. This is my rookie partner, Officer Newbie.

SYBIL: (*Laughs out loud.*) Officer Newbie...you're a rookie...that's funny!

NEWBIE: (*Offended.*) That is not funny! Let's go get that ladder.

SYBIL: Please hurry. Harriet Hammer is one of my guests. (*In spotlight - if possible - as she turns as though delivering a great soliloquy.*) I've been trying to become a member of her exclusive country club for years. You know, so I can finally be somebody in this world. After years of sending her invitations to come to a dinner party, she finally accepted. My goal is to impress her to the point she invites me to join her highly exclusive club. If I don't impress her tonight, I'll never get another chance. So, you see, gentlemen, that's why it's so important this body is taken care of today. (*Lights back up as we see the cops are gone.*) Hello? (*The phone rings.*) Oh, dear. Hello?

STRANGER: (*Enters extreme left or right.*) Is this the lady who lives alone, and never locks her doors at night and doesn't have weapons in her house in case someone breaks in unexpectedly?

SYBIL: Yes, that's me.

STRANGER: Listen to me, old woman—

SYBIL: I'm not that old!

STRANGER: You have something of mine.

SYBIL: I do? What would that be?

STRANGER: Don't you worry about what.

SYBIL: Okay, good, because I have a great deal on my mind already, so if you'll excuse me—

STRANGER: Don't you dare hang up on me. Do you know what I did the last time somebody hung up on me?

SYBIL: What?

STRANGER: Well...it really bothered me, you know? I couldn't sleep that night wondering what I had done to make them upset with me. It was really sad.

SYBIL: Anyway.

STRANGER: Anyway!! I have something I want to say to you.

SYBIL: Well, please hurry.

STRANGER: I am coming to see you tonight and claim what is rightfully mine!

SYBIL: (*Becomes suddenly alarmed.*) Who is this? What do you want?

STRANGER: I'm coming to see you reeeeeaaal soon.

SYBIL: No. NO! Please! (*He backs up and exits.*) Hello? Hello? Dear God, I'm as good as dead. I don't know what he wants and I betcha he's coming over to murder me. (*She cries. The phone rings again.*) I don't have time to be murdered. Hello?

STRANGER: (*Reenters.*) Uh, yeah, I just called and forgot to ask you a question: what is your address?

SYBIL: 123 Skeeter Street.

STRANGER: (*Friendly.*) Okay, cool, I'll put it in my GPS. (*Suddenly ominous.*) I'm coming to see you reeeeeal soon. (*Exits.*)

SYBIL: (*Hanging up.*) Dear God, what have I done?

APRIL MAY: (*Peeping her head through the front door.*) Knock, knock. (*SYBIL rushes over and stands in front of the dead body as though trying to hide it.*)

SYBIL: April May, you're early.

APRIL MAY: I know how important this dinner party is to you so I've come to help. So, where do we start cleaning?

SYBIL: Don't clean over here. Clean over there.

APRIL MAY: I have a feeling you're hiding something.

SYBIL: I suppose you'll find out sooner or later. (*She moves, revealing CORPSE.*)

APRIL MAY: Good gracious, what is that? (*She rushes to the end table and runs a finger across it.*) Sybil, you are using the wrong kind of furniture polish.

SYBIL: Didn't you see the dead body? Someone murdered him and placed him in the trunk of my new car.

APRIL MAY: Well, he will have to go. I'm afraid Harriet Hammer frowns upon dead corpses dressed like that in the living room.

SYBIL: That's what I was afraid of.

APRIL MAY: Now, about this dusty furniture. (*HYSTERICAL VICTIM runs in.*)

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: He's after me! Please hide me! Please!

SYBIL: Good heavens, now what? Who's after you?

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: I can't remember his name. You know, that man! Jack something-or-other.

APRIL MAY: Let's see. Jack Sprat? Jack and the Beanstalk?

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: What? No!

SYBIL: Jack the Giant Killer? Jack Sprat could eat no fat?

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: (*Offended.*) He's not a fairy tale character, he's real. He wears a black cape and a top hat, and carries, like, this huge butcher knife.

APRIL MAY: Ripper! Jack the Ripper!

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: That's it! (*The three of them clap excitedly.*)

APRIL MAY: I guessed it! Yay! (*JACK runs in holding his knife up in the air.*)

JACK: Aha! I have found you at last! (*HYSTERICAL VICTIM screams and hides behind APRIL MAY.*)

SYBIL: Didn't your mother raise you better than that? A gentleman always knocks before entering a lady's abode.

JACK: Sorry. (*He knocks on the wall.*)

SYBIL: (*Friendly tone.*) Who is it?

JACK: A murdering lunatic.

SYBIL: Come in, come in. (*He charges toward HYSTERICAL VICTIM who screams as he chases her around the sofa. She ends up on one end of the sofa and he on the other.*)

APRIL MAY: Could you two please hold it down, we're trying to plan a dinner party. *(The POLICEMEN enter from the kitchen, each holding one end of a ladder, or short step ladder.)*

OFFICER KNIGHT: Here we go.

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: Police! Police! This man is trying to murder me!

NEWBIE: We know, we know. You're on our list. *(They exit through the front door.)*

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: *(Turns quickly to JACK.)* Listen you, you heard what they said, I'm on their list!

JACK: I have you trapped! You'll never get away!

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: Just watch me! There's a trap door behind this sofa that leads to a secret place.

JACK: There is not!

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: Okay, don't believe me. See if I care. Here I go. Walking down the stairs. *(She makes it look as though she's going down the stairs behind the sofa.)*

JACK: *(Turns to SYBIL.)* Quick! How do I get to your basement?

SYBIL: Through the kitchen, but—

JACK: Thanks! Ha ha, she thinks she's so smart! *(He runs out. HYSTERICAL VICTIM pops her head up.)*

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: Is he gone? See you later. *(She runs out the front door. The phone rings.)*

SYBIL: Hello?

STRANGER: *(Stepping out.)* Hey, just reminding you that I'm coming to reclaim what is rightfully mine.

SYBIL: *(Rolls her eyes.)* Okay, okay.

STRANGER: And if you'll have some snacks ready, I haven't eaten all day.

SYBIL: *(Becoming impatient.)* I'll see what I can do.

STRANGER: I really appreciate your cooperation. If traffic's not bad, I should get there within the hour. *(He exits.)*

SYBIL: I'll leave the light on for you. *(She hangs up.)* Oh, God! What have I done?!

APRIL MAY: *(Feather dusting the back of the sofa.)* Sybil, this body has got to go.

SYBIL: Maybe we could cover it up so no one would notice.

APRIL MAY: It's a corpse, not a hole in your rug.

SYBIL: Speaking of rugs, I've got to get my cheese puffs started. Will you help me?

APRIL MAY: What about the body?

SYBIL: It's not going anywhere. *(They exit to the kitchen. KNIGHT and NEWBIE enter. KNIGHT holds something in a canvas bag that looks as though it's stained with blood.)*

NEWBIE: *(Sarcastically, he's upset.)* Great. Just great! Now, what are we supposed to do?

OFFICER KNIGHT: It's your fault! You told me you've shot a BB gun before.

NEWBIE: When I was twelve! I was only trying to scare it. *(Hands KNIGHT the bag.)* Here, take this.

OFFICER KNIGHT: *(Holding his hands up.)* You shot the cat, you hold the cat. We've got to figure out how we're going to break the news to the poor cat's owner.

NEWBIE: Do we do that before or after looking for Jack the Ripper? *(HYSTERICAL VICTIM runs in from the outside door screaming bloody murder being chased by JACK whose knife is high in the air. She runs out through the kitchen door followed by JACK. KNIGHT and NEWBIE watch this rather calmly.)*

OFFICER KNIGHT: Does that answer your question?

NEWBIE: You're right, cat then Jack. *(There's a knock at the door.)*

OFFICER KNIGHT: Come in, the door's open. *(MRS. NABORS runs in. KNIGHT hides the sack behind his back.)*

MRS. NABORS: There you are. Well, did you get my Fluffy out of the tree?

NEWBIE: Yes, ma'am. *(KNIGHT hits NEWBIE in the stomach.)*

OFFICER KNIGHT: What he means is, yes, ma'am we got Fluffy out of the tree...but...then she ran away.

MRS. NABORS: *(Looking around.)* You mean she ran in here?

OFFICER KNIGHT: No, ma'am...uh...she ran out into the street.

NEWBIE: Right in the path of an eighteen wheeler.

MRS. NABORS: *(In shock.)* What? Oh my!

OFFICER KNIGHT: But the truck missed and your little cat is fine.

MRS. NABORS: Thank goodness. Where is she?

OFFICER KNIGHT: After the truck missed her, she ran into the yard across the street and fell into a deep well.

MRS. NABORS: (*Shocked.*) She fell into Mrs. Jackson's well?

NEWBIE: Don't worry, we'll get her out!

MRS. NABORS: Good gracious, my little fur ball stuck in that deep, dark well. Fluffy!!! (*She runs out.*)

NEWBIE: (*Panicked.*) Why did you tell her Fluffy fell into the well?

OFFICER KNIGHT: It sounded a little better than, "Ma'am, we shot your cat!" Come on!

NEWBIE: (*Stopping him.*) What are we going to do?

OFFICER KNIGHT: We have got to somehow sneak the dead cat into the well and then fish it out so we'll look like heroes.

NEWBIE: Good idea. (*NEWBIE opens the door and HYSTERICAL VICTIM falls into his arms. She's weak and sobbing.*)

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: Please, you have got to help me. I'm too tired to run anymore.

NEWBIE: (*Literally dragging her into the room.*) Give us a few more minutes; we're almost done with the cat.

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: But he wants to kill me.

OFFICER KNIGHT: Lock the door behind us and he won't be able to get in. When we return, we'll knock three times so you'll know it's us.

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: Thank you. I'm just so bushed.

NEWBIE: Yes, we know, you've told us like a hundred times.

OFFICER KNIGHT: Don't forget to lock the door. (*They exit.*)

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: (*Locks the door and leans against it breathing heavily. She looks around and crosses slowly to the sofa beside CORPSE.*) Do you mind if I sit down? I sure wish they would hurry with that darn cat. (*There are three knocks at the door. She sits straight up and glances nervously at the door.*) Who is it? (*Three more knocks. She stands and crosses to the door. NEWBIE quickly pushes the door open and HYSTERICAL VICTIM screams.*)

NEWBIE: Ahhhhhhhhh! (*NEWBIE and KNIGHT laugh.*)

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: You scared me to death.

NEWBIE: Sorry, it was his idea.

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: Will you please go after that man?

OFFICER KNIGHT: Give us one second. We forgot something.

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: But –

NEWBIE: We've got to find a fishing pole. (*Entering the room and looking around.*) If I were an old woman-

SYBIL: (*Backstage.*) I'm NOT old!

NEWBIE: ...Where would I keep my fishing pole?

OFFICER KNIGHT: You look over there, I'll look over here.

NEWBIE: (*Looking behind the sofa talking to himself.*) Fishing pole.
Fishing pole. Bingo!

OFFICER KNIGHT: You found one?

NEWBIE: (*Holds up a BINGO card.*) No, but I love this game.

OFFICER KNIGHT: Hopefully that fishing pole will be the first place I look. (*Enters the kitchen and reenters immediately with a fishing pole.*) Found one!

NEWBIE: Let's go.

SYBIL: (*Sticking her head through the kitchen door.*) Please hurry back.

OFFICER KNIGHT: We will just as soon as we drop the dead cat down a well and fish it out with a hook.

NEWBIE: Piece of cake. (*SYBIL disappears as they exit. After a few seconds there are three knocks at the door.*)

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: (*Crossing to the door and opens it.*) What did you forget this time?

JACK: To stab you in the back!

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: Really? Are we going to keep doing this?

JACK: After all, my name is is Jack the Ripper.

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: Touché. Will you at least give me a head start?

JACK: Fine!

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: Close your eyes and count to ten.

JACK: (*Closing his eyes.*) One, two, three, four, five, six –

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: (*Looking around for a place to hide.*) Four!

JACK: —five, six, seven, eight, nine —

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: Four!

JACK: —five, six, seven, eight —

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: Four! (*She hides behind the sofa.*)

JACK: —five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. Ready or not, here I come!
(*He looks around.*) Come out, come out, wherever you are. (*He runs out to the kitchen.*)

CORA: (*Peeping her head inside the front door.*) Knock, knock?
(*SYBIL enters from the kitchen carrying a tray of cheese puffs.*
CORA enters followed by FANNIE. They each hold a covered dish.)

SYBIL: Cora, Fannie! Thank goodness you're here! It has been a dreadful, dreadful day. I'm afraid this party is heading down a road of disaster.

CORA: Don't worry, we're here to help. This will be your one and only chance to impress Harriet Hammer.

FANNIE: Your last chance to be noticed in the world.

CORA: To be somebody.

FANNIE: To finally find purpose in life.

CORA: You're the only one in our circle of friends who isn't a member.

FANNIE: If you don't become a member tonight, we will have to...how do I say this delicately? We'll have to ditch you.

SYBIL: You would really do that?

FANNIE: You're lucky we're talking to you right now.

SYBIL: I'll do anything to be part of that country club. Anything!

CORA: Then you'd better impress Harriet Hammer tonight.

FANNIE: (*Spying the CORPSE.*) Oh, look, a dead body. How quaint.

SYBIL: Yes, he's been murdered and I can't seem to get anyone to help me get rid of it.

CORA: (*Crossing to CORPSE.*) Wait a minute. That face looks familiar. Where have I seen that murdered face before?

SYBIL: Are you sure? Think, Cora, think.

FANNIE: What's his name?

SYBIL: There was no identification on him.

CORA: I think we should call him Mr. X.

SYBIL: Mr. X. I like that. He looks like a Mr. X. I wonder why he's dressed so shabbily.

FANNIE: (*Looks closely at his face.*) Wait a minute, look.

SYBIL: What is it?

FANNIE: (*They huddle around CORPSE.*) Look very closely.

CORA: Why, it looks like tear stains.

SYBIL: As if Mr. X was crying at some point.

FANNIE: Maybe begging for his life?

CORA: Wait a minute, it's all coming back to me. It was in a parking lot in town. At the market. He was arguing with someone. The person he was arguing with was hidden in shadow.

FANNIE: Which market was it?

CORA: I can't remember.

SYBIL: Did you see Mr. X crying?

CORA: I couldn't tell, but the person in shadow appeared very angry and grabbed something Mr. X was holding.

FANNIE: Didn't you find that to be a little odd?

CORA: (*Finger in the air.*) Yes! Yes I did! And that is when something very important caught my eye.

FANNIE: A gun?

CORA: A sign in the window of the market! Creamed corn 99 cents a can! So, I whipped into the parking lot, ran inside and grabbed all the creamed corn I could before they sold out. When I returned to my car the two were gone.

FANNIE: I just noticed something else odd. He's wearing the coat of a hobo, but look at his shirt. It's a shirt made of the finest Italian silk.

CORA: This gets stranger and stranger.

SYBIL: Speaking of stranger, I keep getting phone calls from one. (*STRANGER steps out with a phone receiver as SYBIL'S phone rings.*) Hello?

STRANGER: Look, I hate to keep bothering you, but I think I'm lost. Do you know anything about the Jonesborough area?

SYBIL: A little.

FANNIE: (*To CORA.*) We must get started in the kitchen. (*CORA and FANNIE exit.*)

STRANGER: Does highway eleven go through your town?

SYBIL: Yes, but there's a lot of construction on that road. I would take County Road Five.

STRANGER: County Road Five, got it. See you in a bit. (*Exits.*)

SYBIL: (*Hangs up.*) Oh, God, what have I done?

APRIL MAY: (*Running in tying on an apron.*) Sybil, are you alright?

SYBIL: It was the stranger again. He says he's coming over to claim what's rightfully his.

APRIL MAY: Have you called the police?

SYBIL: They're out throwing a dead cat down a well. (*JACK storms in, slams the door, sits on the sofa, crosses his arms and pouts like a child.*) What's wrong with you?

JACK: I've never tried to murder a more stubborn female in my life. She won't be still long enough for me to give her one good stab in the back. Maybe I just wasn't cut out for a murderer's life.

SYBIL: (*Sits on arm of sofa and puts a hand on his shoulders.*) Ahhhh, now I bet you're a good Jack the Ripper.

JACK: Oh yeah? You know how many times I've used this knife? Once! And that was to slice a tomato for my grilled cheese sandwich, but the point is I'm a failure.

SYBIL: Don't say that. No one's a true failure in life who gives his very best. You're just in a little slump, that's all. Did you have a happy childhood?

JACK: No, ma'am, my parents hated me.

SYBIL: Ahhhh, what makes you say that?

JACK: Once I asked my dad if I could go ice skating on the lake; he told me to wait 'til it got warmer. (*Rim shot offstage.*)

SYBIL: Oh my. Did you go to church as a child?

JACK: Yes, ma'am. The church taught me that Jesus is my friend.

SYBIL: Did you believe them?

JACK: No, ma'am. If Jesus is my friend, why won't he lend me money? (*Rim shot backstage.*)

SYBIL: Where is that rim shot coming from?

JACK: A friend of mine outside. He follows me wherever I go in case I say something funny.

SYBIL: How thoughtful.

JACK: Look, I don't want to bother you with all my problems. I'll just go to a nice, quiet place and...well...it's been nice knowing you.

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: (*Pops up from behind the sofa.*) Wait! (*Crossing around the sofa.*) That was the saddest story I have ever heard. With a childhood like yours, it's no wonder you're a raving lunatic.

JACK: *(Wiping away a tear.)* Really?

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: *(Sitting to comfort him.)* Look, would it make you feel better if I let you catch me?

JACK: That wouldn't be much fun, now would it?

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: Okay, then what if I just ran a little slower.

JACK: *(Wiping another tear.)* I guess that sounds fair. But no tripping and falling just so I can catch up like they do in those low-budget slasher movies.

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: It's a deal. *(She heads for the door.)* Don't forget your knife.

JACK: *(Taking the knife from SYBIL.)* Thank you, lady. I enjoyed our talk. Oh, before I leave. What do Jack the Ripper and Winnie the Pooh have in common?

SYBIL: I don't know. What do Jack the Ripper and Winnie the Pooh have in common?

JACK: Our middle name. *(Rim shot as JACK exits.)*

SYBIL: That was a good one. *(Laughs and then speaks to herself.)* I think they make a lovely couple. *(Snaps out of it.)* Oh, goodness, my dinner party. *(She rushes to the kitchen as MRS. NABORS enters through the front door followed by OFFICER KNIGHT and OFFICER NEWBIE. NEWBIE is holding the fishing pole with the bloody sack attached to the hook.)*

MRS. NABORS: Sybil! Sybil! Come in here, quickly!

OFFICER KNIGHT: Look, lady, it was an honest mistake.

MRS. NABORS: You killed my cat!

NEWBIE: It fell into the well. *(SYBIL enters quickly plucking a chicken.)*

SYBIL: What's the matter, Mrs. Nabors?

MRS. NABORS: Sybil, I want you to call the police.

OFFICER KNIGHT: We are the police!

MRS. NABORS: *(Points to the sack and speaks to SYBIL.)* They murdered my Fluffy!

SYBIL: Honey, I'm just as sorry as I can be, but I have troubles of my own. *(Heads to the kitchen.)*

MRS. NABORS: *(Rushing over and stopping her.)* But, Sybil, we've been neighbors for years. I would help you in a time of need.

SYBIL: You would, would you? What about that time we went hiking and I slipped and fell off a cliff and was hanging on for dear life to a limb sticking from the rocks and I asked you to go get help and you ran away and never came back and later that week when I asked you why you didn't come back with help you said, "Oh my goodness, I forgot all about you."

MRS. NABORS: *(Hands on her hips.)* Goodness, gracious, are you going to hold that against me for the rest of my life?

NEWBIE: You left her hanging there?

MRS. NABORS: There was water beneath her, geez!

SYBIL: And you want me to help you? With a dead man on my sofa and Laurel and Hardy as my detectives and Harriet Hammer coming to my dinner party and some mysterious stranger calling me every five minutes and Jack the Ripper chasing some poor victim around the neighborhood and you want me to help you?

MRS. NABORS: *(Beat.)* Only if you have time. *(STRANGER steps out as SYBIL'S phone rings.)*

SYBIL: I can't talk to you right now!!

STRANGER: Sorry. *(He exits.)*

SYBIL: *(Throwing up her hands.)* Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhh! *(She exits to the kitchen as MRS. NABORS crosses to the phone.)*

OFFICER KNIGHT: Who are you calling?

911 OPERATOR: *(Stepping out wearing a head microphone.)* 911, what's your emergency?

MRS. NABORS: Please help! My cat was just murdered!

NEWBIE: She's calling 911, grab the phone!

MRS. NABORS: *(Holding the receiver high in the air.)* How did you know I was calling 911?

OFFICER KNIGHT: *(Points to OPERATOR.)* She's standing right over there. *(Into the phone.)* Excuse me, this call was a mistake.

911 OPERATOR: Jed, is that you?

OFFICER KNIGHT: Yeah, it's me.

911 OPERATOR: What have you done this time, decapitate somebody's teddy bear?

OFFICER KNIGHT: Never mind, go back to work.

911 OPERATOR: If you get one more demerit, you'll never become an inspector.

OFFICER KNIGHT: I will become an inspector! I'll show you! I'll show all of you!! Goodbye!!! (*OPERATOR exits as KNIGHT slams down the receiver.*)

MRS. NABORS: My poor, poor Fluffy. I'll miss her so! (*MRS. NABORS takes the bag and cries as she exits with her cat.*)

NEWBIE: (*Shouting after her.*) Cats have nine lives. I'm sure she will be fine in the morning! (*He slams the door.*)

OFFICER KNIGHT: Newbie, that cat is dead.

NEWBIE: But, when I was a boy I had a cat. It was bitten by a rattle snake, mauled by a grizzly bear, ran over by a steam roller, thrown from an airplane, caught in the exhaust of a NASA rocket booster, dropped in the ocean with a brick tied around its neck and it still lived to be nineteen years old.

OFFICER KNIGHT: How did it finally die?

NEWBIE: Mosquito got him. (*Rim shot.*)

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: (*Enters dragging one of her feet behind her as she pretends to be injured.*) Oh my, it seems I have injured my foot and can't run very fast and Jack the Ripper is hot on my trail.

JACK: (*Enters slowly, his knife down by his side.*) You do realize this whole thing has lost its challenge.

OFFICER KNIGHT: (*Standing between them.*) Whoa, whoa, what seems to be going on here? Is this hoodlum bothering you, ma'am?

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: It's okay, officer, really.

NEWBIE: (*Taking JACK'S knife.*) Well, well, well.

OFFICER KNIGHT: Do you realize what we have here, Officer Newbie? This is that Jack the Ripper copycat that has been terrorizing the neighborhood.

NEWBIE: I do believe you're right. Looks like we're going to show up in the morning paper twice as heroes. Once for pulling the cat from a well, and once for catching Mr. Ripper here.

JACK: Ripper is NOT my last name.

OFFICER KNIGHT: One more step to realizing my dream of becoming Inspector Jed I. Knight.

JACK: Fine, fine, take me in. This dame has worn me out.

- HYSTERICAL VICTIM:** Officer, can't you give the poor man a break? He had it rough as a kid. Tell them, Jack.
- JACK:** I asked my dad once if I could go ice skating on the lake and he told me to wait 'til it got warmer. *(There's no rim shot.)* WARMER! *(Nothing.)* Where's my rim shot!?
- DRUMMER:** *(Sticks his head in.)* You guys have got to speak up, I can't hear you.
- JACK:** Sorry. *(DRUMMER disappears.)*
- NEWBIE:** *(Wiping his eyes.)* That's the saddest story I ever heard.
- JACK:** My dad carried around the picture of the kid who came with his wallet *(Rim shot.)* My bath toys were a toaster and a radio. *(Rim shot.)*
- OFFICER KNIGHT:** *(Crying into a handkerchief.)* Stop it! Stop it! No more Rodney Dangerfield jokes!
- NEWBIE:** You poor, pathetic, deplorable, *(Pulls out a pocket Thesaurus.)* inadequate, miserable, pitiful, useless, worthless and wretched man, you.
- JACK:** *(Starts to cry himself.)* Yes I am.
- OFFICER KNIGHT:** If we let you go free, do you promise never to bother this poor lady again?
- JACK:** *(Wailing.)* I proooomise! *(They all group hug as SYBIL enters. JACK hands SYBIL the knife.)* Here, lady, I'm giving up my life of crime.
- SYBIL:** Wonderful. *(Taking the knife and turning to KNIGHT.)* Does this mean I'm next on your to-do list?
- OFFICER KNIGHT:** You're next, you're next.
- SYBIL:** Perhaps you should bring in an inspector.
- OFFICER KNIGHT:** Never! Don't you see? This is my chance to prove myself. I solve this case and I'll be promoted to *(Deepens his voice.)* Chief Inspector.
- SYBIL:** Whatever you do, please hurry.
- OFFICER KNIGHT:** Wait, I've got to find my inspector voice. *(Changes his voice.)* Testing, testing.
- SYBIL:** My first request is that you please remove this corpse from my living room.

OFFICER KNIGHT: *(In his new voice.)* Not so fast, lady. A thorough investigation must first take place.

SYBIL: Can't you at least take him outside?

OFFICER KNIGHT: *(Finger quickly in the air.)* No! We cannot move the body. Besides, the mosquitoes are terrible this time of day.

NEWBIE: Ma'am, could you please take us to the poor, murdered victim.

SYBIL: *(Pointing.)* He's right there.

OFFICER KNIGHT: Yes, so he is. *(Looking over the CORPSE.)*

Hmmmmmm. The first thing I will do is search his pockets for any clues. If you see him giggle, that means he isn't really dead at all, but only an actor playing a murdered man. *(He searches his pockets.)* A-ha! A clue! *(Turns to JACK and HYSTERICAL VICTIM.)* Excuse me, I do believe your scene is over, would you like to go out on the porch or something?

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: Oh, sorry. Come on, Jack. You can tell me more sad stories from your childhood.

JACK: I was so ugly as a child, my mother used to feed me with a slingshot. *(Rim shot as they exit.)*

OFFICER KNIGHT: *(Shouting after them.)* But don't go far, everyone in the play is a suspect. *(To SYBIL.)* Kindly tell us how this dead man wound up in your home. *(Turns to NEWBIE, handing him a notepad.)* Write this down.

SYBIL: Well, you see, it all started when I bought a car.

NEWBIE: *(Writing in a pad.)* Bought a car.

SYBIL: This morning I drove to the market.

NEWBIE: *(Writing.)* She drove to the market.

OFFICER KNIGHT: *(To NEWBIE.)* I'm not deaf.

SYBIL: When I opened my trunk to set in my groceries, there he was.

NEWBIE: *(Writing.)* There he was.

OFFICER KNIGHT: Tell me, old woman –

SYBIL: My name is Sybil and I'm not that old.

OFFICER KNIGHT: Just how long have you known the victim?

SYBIL: I didn't know him.

NEWBIE: Then how could you know he was dead?

SYBIL: He wasn't breathing.

NEWBIE: (*Writing.*) Wasn't breathing.

OFFICER KNIGHT: (*Crosses and stands behind the sofa.*) Ma'am, have you noticed any clues that might lead to finding the poor murdered man's murdering murderer?

SYBIL: Clues?

NEWBIE: Yeah, clues. (*Grabs the Thesaurus and flips it open.*) You know, signs, tip-offs, hot leads.

SYBIL: Why, no. I haven't noticed anything like that. Just the dead body.

NEWBIE: (*Referring to the footprints on the wall.*) What about these footprints here?

SYBIL: Oh, those are from the time my ex-husband drove me up the wall. (*Rim shot.*)

OFFICER KNIGHT: I see, a sight gag. (*Shaking this off.*) We have a mystery to solve! We must look for clues.

SYBIL: Got it, clues. (*Sarcastically.*) As in signs, tip-offs, hot leads.

OFFICER KNIGHT: (*Finger in the air.*) Exactly, except withOUT the sarcasm! If only I had a magnifying glass. (*SYBIL hands him one from earlier.*) Oh, look I happen to have one right here. (*Begins looking around CORPSE.*)

APRIL MAY: (*Enters with flour on her face and wearing an apron.*) Sybil, where's your breast?

SYBIL: My breast?

APRIL MAY: How am I supposed to make chicken salad without a chicken breast?

SYBIL: I plucked it and put it in the bread box.

APRIL MAY: How's the mystery going?

SYBIL: They're looking for clues.

APRIL MAY: As long as Mr. X is out in time for the party. (*NEWBIE has been studying APRIL MAY closely.*) May I help you?

NEWBIE: Like the Inspector said, everyone in the play is a suspect. How do we know you didn't commit this heinous crime?

APRIL MAY: Me? Don't make me laugh.

NEWBIE: Knock, knock.

APRIL MAY: Who's there?

NEWBIE: Noah.

APRIL MAY: Noah who?

NEWBIE: Noah good place to eat around here?

APRIL MAY: (*Giggles then stops abruptly and slaps his arm.*) I said don't make me laugh.

FANNIE: (*Rushes in wearing an apron holding two cantaloupes.*) April May, I need you in the kitchen.

APRIL MAY: Fannie, this is so exciting. I was a suspect in a murder case.

FANNIE: That's nice. Now, get in here and thump my melons. I can't tell if they're ripe. (*Exits again.*)

NEWBIE: (*Yelling off to her.*) Wait a minute, I got to ask you a few questions, lady. (*He exits behind her.*)

APRIL MAY: Now she's a suspect. This is getting more fun by the minute. (*Rushes out to the kitchen.*)

OFFICER KNIGHT: (*Crosses behind CORPSE.*) I need complete silence while I search for clues. Bingo!

SYBIL: (*Rushing to him.*) You found a clue?

OFFICER KNIGHT: No ma'am, just another card. (*Holds up another BINGO card.*)

SYBIL: Oh yes, we play here every Wednesday. (*Phone rings.*) Excuse me. (*Into the phone.*) Hello?

STRANGER: (*Stepping out with his phone.*) Me again.

SYBIL: What do you want this time?

STRANGER: Well, I'm getting pretty close to your place, you know so I can come claim what is rightfully mine?

SYBIL: Yes, yes.

STRANGER: Well, I was wondering. What is parking like on your street? The last thing I need is a parking ticket.

SYBIL: Park anywhere but in front of the fire hydrant.

STRANGER: So, the curb is marked?

SYBIL: In front of the fire hydrant, yes.

STRANGER: Thanks. Give me ten minutes. (*Exits.*)

SYBIL: (*Hanging up.*) Oh, dear God, what have I done?

OFFICER KNIGHT: Bingo!

SYBIL: Another card?

OFFICER KNIGHT: No ma'am, a clue.

SYBIL: (*Rushing to him.*) Wonderful. What did you find?

OFFICER KNIGHT: This feather in the victim's coat pocket.

SYBIL: A feather? That's odd.

OFFICER KNIGHT: (*Shouting.*) Officer Newbie! (*NEWBIE enters wearing an apron with flour on his nose.*)

NEWBIE: Yeah?

OFFICER KNIGHT: What are you doing?

NEWBIE: They needed help in the kitchen.

OFFICER KNIGHT: I need a freezer bag.

NEWBIE: Freezer bag, got it. (*Exits.*)

SYBIL: (*Shouting off to NEWBIE.*) They're in the cabinet over the stove! (*CAPTAIN DIMPLES enters quickly through the front door and stands against it breathing hard.*) Oh, my. Who are you?

CAPTAIN DIMPLES: I'm your friendly local neighbor hero. Captain Dimples is my name. (*Takes a super hero stance.*) My cape's so thin it flaps freely in the wind, my heroic stare turns enemy into friend, my muscles break necks with one snap and a bend and if all else fails, I'll spray mace in yo face.

SYBIL: Why are you breathing so hard, Captain Dimples?

CAPTAIN DIMPLES: One of my duties as your local neighbor hero is to help little old ladies cross the street.

SYBIL: And?

CAPTAIN DIMPLES: I took this ninety-five year old woman's arm and proceeded to help her across 8th avenue. That's when she slapped me.

SYBIL: Why did she slap you?

CAPTAIN DIMPLES: She didn't want to go.

SYBIL: Oh.

CAPTAIN DIMPLES: So, I picked her up and carried her across. She's been chasing me ever since. (*There's banging on the door.*) I said leave me alone, old woman! (*To SYBIL.*) Do you mind if I hang out here for a while? Just 'til the coast is clear?

SYBIL: Well, you see, we're a bit busy in here.

CAPTAIN DIMPLES: (*Walking in.*) I see you have a dead body on your sofa.

SYBIL: Yes, I found him murdered in the trunk of my new car.

CAPTAIN DIMPLES: A murder investigation. That's the excitement I've been looking for. Officer, never fear, I'm here to take this case off your hands.

OFFICER KNIGHT: Aren't you the nut I read about in the paper? Thinks he or she is some type of super hero?

CAPTAIN DIMPLES: Oh, but I am a super hero! (*Faces the audience in stance again.*) My cape's so thin it flaps freely in the wind, my heroic stare turns enemy into friend, my muscles break necks with one snap and a bend and if all else fails, I'll spray mace in yo face. (*More banging on the door.*) I said GO HOME!

OFFICER KNIGHT: I'm sorry, Captain Dimples, but a murder must be investigated by an official man of the law.

CAPTAIN DIMPLES: But I'm tired of being beat up by old women with blue hair.

OFFICER KNIGHT: (*He starts wrapping the yellow ribbon around CORPSE.*) No exceptions, so if you don't mind.

SYBIL: (*To KNIGHT.*) Can't the poor, pathetic strange little man assist you in some small insignificant way, officer?

OFFICER KNIGHT: That's what my partner's for. (*NEWBIE runs in with a mixing bowl.*)

NEWBIE: Hey, Officer Knight, I'm making my first upside down pineapple cake. I never knew cooking could be this much fun. (*Runs back to the kitchen.*)

OFFICER KNIGHT: (*To CAPTAIN DIMPLES.*) Okay, you can help.

CAPTAIN DIMPLES: Sweet! Where do I start?

OFFICER KNIGHT: Go to the kitchen and bring me some freezer bags.

CAPTAIN DIMPLES: Freezer bags, got it. (*Exits to the kitchen.*)

SYBIL: (*Shouting after him.*) They're in the cabinet over the stove!

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: (*Sticking her head through the front door.*)

How long are we going to have to wait out on the porch? There's no furniture out here.

OFFICER KNIGHT: As long as it takes.

SYBIL: (*To VICTIM.*) I'll bring you some warm milk in a bit.

JACK: (*Offstage.*) Ask her if she has chocolate syrup.

SYBIL: No, but I have hot cocoa.

- HYSTERICAL VICTIM:** She says she's got hot cocoa. (*She exits. CAPTAIN DIMPLES enters from the kitchen.*)
- CAPTAIN DIMPLES:** One freezer bag, kind sir.
- OFFICER KNIGHT:** Hold it open for me, will you?
- CAPTAIN DIMPLES:** (*As he does.*) Wow, a true-to-life murder mystery. This is the kind of action I've been looking for.
- OFFICER KNIGHT:** (*Dropping the feather in the bag.*) And this feather is our first clue.
- SYBIL:** (*Points to the piece of paper glued to CAPTAIN DIMPLES' chest.*) What happened, Captain Dimples?
- CAPTAIN DIMPLES:** It's personal.
- SYBIL:** An injury?
- CAPTAIN DIMPLES:** You could say that.
- SYBIL:** A bullet wound? A knife wound? The claws of a grizzly bear?
- CAPTAIN DIMPLES:** Close. Old Lady Wilcox poked me pretty hard with the tip of her umbrella. Made a bruise.
- SYBIL:** And what beautiful dimples you have. (*A closer look.*) Wait a minute, did you draw those on with a marker?
- CAPTAIN DIMPLES:** (*Turning away.*) Mind your own business.
- OFFICER KNIGHT:** (*Holding the bag up to the light and examining the feather.*) We should start questioning our suspects. (*Shouts.*) Newbie!
- NEWBIE:** (*Entering, wearing two oven mitts and a chef's hat.*) Yeah?
- OFFICER KNIGHT:** Take off that garb; we must prepare for questioning.
- NEWBIE:** But I have a cake in the oven.
- OFFICER KNIGHT:** And I have a murdered man on the sofa!
- CAPTAIN DIMPLES:** I'll do it for you, Detective.
- NEWBIE:** Whoa, whoa, whoa. If anyone gathers up the suspects, it will be his partner. And that is me.
- CAPTAIN DIMPLES:** (*Holding up his hands in surrender.*) Just trying to be helpful, Betty Crocker.
- NEWBIE:** (*In his face.*) That's mister Betty Crocker to you. (*Heads to the kitchen, but turns for one more jab.*) Oh, and your dimples are uneven. (*He exits to the kitchen as CAPTAIN DIMPLES quickly pulls a small mirror from his pocket and examines his dimples.*)

OFFICER KNIGHT: I will now search for another clue on Mr. X's person, so be sure to watch carefully that the corpse doesn't giggle in case he's just an actor playing a dead man. Aha, a clue!

SYBIL: A clue? What is it?

OFFICER KNIGHT: You know, a sign, tip-off, hot lead?

SYBIL: (*Frustrated.*) I know what a clue is!

OFFICER KNIGHT: (*Holding up a camera.*) I found a digital camera clasped tightly in his hand.

SYBIL: That seems important.

OFFICER KNIGHT: Ya think?

CAPTAIN DIMPLES: Perhaps there are some important pictures that could lead us to the murderer.

OFFICER KNIGHT: (*Holding the camera away from CAPTAIN DIMPLES.*) If you don't mind, this is my murder case. (*Looking through the pictures.*) Hmmmmmmm. Very interesting. Plastic bag, please. (*Slipping the camera into the bag as CAPTAIN DIMPLES holds it open.*)

SYBIL: Well, were there any pictures?

OFFICER KNIGHT: Sorry, ma'am, that's classified information.

SYBIL: It was empty, wasn't it?

OFFICER KNIGHT: Yep.

CAPTAIN DIMPLES: But that camera must be at least three years old; there should be hundreds of pictures on it.

OFFICER KNIGHT: (*Stepping closer to CAPTAIN DIMPLES.*) This camera's memory has been erased, my good man...or woman.

SYBIL: The killer must have erased all the pictures.

OFFICER KNIGHT: Perhaps Mr. X took a picture of his murderer and so all evidence had to be erased.

SYBIL: (*Holding them up.*) A feather and a digital camera that has been erased of its memory. Hmmm.

OFFICER KNIGHT: (*Taking the items from her.*) Uh, ma'am, please don't fiddle with the evidence.

CAPTAIN DIMPLES: (*Pondering.*) Feather and digital camera. Feather and digital camera. (*Snaps his fingers.*) Of course.

SYBIL: What? What?

CAPTAIN DIMPLES: Two plus two?

SYBIL: What's two plus two?

CAPTAIN DIMPLES: Four! (*He points to the front door and we hear a rim shot.*) Thank you!

DRUMMER: (*Backstage.*) No problem!

SYBIL: (*To KNIGHT.*) What do these clues mean, detective?

NEWBIE: (*Entering, still wearing his mitts and this time holding a pot.*) Let's go! Let's go! (*As APRIL MAY, CORA and FANNIE enter from the kitchen.*) Everybody in! (*HYSTERICAL VICTIM, JACK and MRS. NABORS enter through the front door.*)

APRIL MAY: I hope this is important.

OFFICER KNIGHT: It is.

CORA: After all, we have a dinner party to prepare for.

OFFICER KNIGHT: This is more important.

FANNIE: Even though Harriett Hammer is coming over?

OFFICER KNIGHT: Even though.

SYBIL: Ladies, please, he must do his job so we can get Mr. X out before the dinner party.

APRIL MAY: You're right, Sybil. (*To KNIGHT.*) Officer Jed I. Knight. (*Beat.*) May the force be with you. (*Everyone erupts with laughter.*)

OFFICER KNIGHT: (*Sarcastically.*) Oh, I haven't heard that one before.

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: It's about time you brought us in. I still have to go home and cook dinner.

JACK: Before these questions begin, let me say I'm innocent. And if anyone says otherwise, I will – (*Raises his knife and stabs the air three times.*) Keey! Keey! Keey! Ha, just kidding, I wouldn't really do that with all these witnesses standing around.

OFFICER KNIGHT: As everyone can see, I have found two important clues on Mr. X's person. A feather and a digital camera erased of its memory.

CORA: Which has been erased of its memory, the feather or the camera?

OFFICER KNIGHT: I'm surrounded by imbeciles. Someone, please put me out of my misery.

JACK: Okay. (*Holds his knife up in the air.*)

OFFICER KNIGHT: *(Losing his patience.)* That was a figure of speech! Sit down!

SYBIL: Would everyone please allow the Inspector to get on with his boring speech?

JACK: *(Backing away and speaking like a child.)* Well, he said.

OFFICER KNIGHT: *(Regaining his composure.)* Now, let us consider the feather. How can a stray chicken feather in the middle of town lead us to the location of a murder scene? I have some ideas. And why would a three-year-old camera not have any pictures on it?

APRIL MAY: And don't forget about the dried tear stains on Mr. X's face.

OFFICER KNIGHT: *(Getting a closer look.)* So there is. *(Sarcastically.)* Thank you for bringing that to my attention.

CORA: Sorry, it slipped our minds, what with preparing the dinner party and all.

OFFICER KNIGHT: *(Turns quickly.)* Ms. April May!?

APRIL MAY: *(Hand to her heart.)* Oh, you scared me.

OFFICER KNIGHT: I understand you were in a hurry to get things dusted as soon as you arrived today.

APRIL MAY: Yes, I wanted the house clean for the party.

OFFICER KNIGHT: Or, could it be you were anxious to clean your fingerprints from the corpse because perhaps, oh, I don't know, you murdered him?

APRIL MAY: Of course not. Sybil, tell him.

SYBIL: *(To APRIL MAY.)* I did think it a bit strange that the first thing you dusted was Mr. X's head.

APRIL MAY: Sybil! *(Turns to KNIGHT and points to JACK.)* What about Jack Sprat over there?

JACK: That's Ripper.

APRIL MAY: He could have done it and now he's on to his next victim. Perhaps he's one of those serial killers.

JACK: Serial killer? Serial killer? I'll show you a serial killer. *(JACK reaches behind the sofa.)*

OFFICER KNIGHT: Please don't bring out a box of cereal – *(JACK brings out a box of cereal.)* Come on, that's just lame.

JACK: (*Sarcastically.*) Oh look everybody, I'm a cereal killer! (*He pretends to stab the box with his knife.*) Oooooo, let's blame the guy with the big butcher knife. Ooooooooooo! (*He throws the box across the stage, sits and pouts.*)

OFFICER KNIGHT: Okey dokey then, moving on. (*Turns quickly to HYSTERICAL VICTIM.*) Next we have Jack's poor, helpless (*Finger quotes.*) "victim." You've been running around here like a chicken without a head. But what are you really running from?

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: I've been running from him and his butcher knife. (*Points to JACK.*)

OFFICER KNIGHT: Or, perhaps you're fleeing something less concrete. Perhaps a dark past. Perhaps you're running to lose weight. (*Offended, HYSTERICAL VICTIM puts her hands on her hips.*)

HYSTERICAL VICTIM: That isn't very nice.

OFFICER KNIGHT: (*Turns quickly to CORA.*) And what about you, Ms. Cora? I think it's a little strange that you just happened to be in the parking lot of a market at the precise time Mr. X was arguing with someone in the shadows.

CORA: It was a coincidence. I was only there for the creamed corn.

OFFICER KNIGHT: Right, and I'm Santa Claus. (*Turns quickly.*) And then there's Ms. Fannie here. First of all, allow me to apologize for your parents for your unfortunate name.

FANNIE: Thank you.

OFFICER KNIGHT: How did you know, Ms. Fannie, that Mr. X was wearing a very nice silk shirt underneath the hobo jacket?

FANNIE: I just happened to see it when we were getting a good look at the tear stains.

OFFICER KNIGHT: It's strange you didn't say *nice* shirt or *new* shirt. No ma'am, you specifically said, and I quote, "It's a shirt made of the finest Italian silk." How would you know that, Ms. Derriere?

FANNIE: Fannie!

SYBIL: Yes, Fannie, how would you know that?

FANNIE: Sybil!

SYBIL: But Officer Knight, you weren't in the room when we discussed those things. How could you have known.

OFFICER KNIGHT: A good investigator always knows. (*Turning quickly to CAPTAIN DIMPLES.*) And I also find it strange that you, Captain Dimples, just happened to show up as soon as the murder investigation started.

CAPTAIN DIMPLES: I was seeking refuge from Methuselah's mother, that's all.

OFFICER KNIGHT: Yet there were plenty of other places you could have hidden. And I'm not so sure I believe your chest wound story.

CAPTAIN DIMPLES: You keep my chest out of this or I'll poke you with an umbrella.

SYBIL: Excuse me, Inspector?

OFFICER KNIGHT: Yes?

SYBIL: I hate to interrupt your little moment here, but it's getting late and we still have plenty to do for the party?

OFFICER KNIGHT: I'm afraid I'll have to call the dinner party off, Ms. Sybil. This is an official crime scene now.

APRIL MAY: But Ms. Hammer is coming.

CORA: We've cooked all this food.

OFFICER KNIGHT: Sorry, but I can't allow it.

SYBIL: Look, buddy, this is my one and only chance to be somebody in this world. (*Heads for the door.*) If you don't allow me to have my party, I'm walking next door and telling Mrs. Nabors you shot her cat and threw it down a well.

OFFICER KNIGHT: (*Rushing to stop her.*) Okay, okay, you have a deal. You can have your dinner party. But I still have to continue with my investigation.

SYBIL: Deal. Let's shake on it. (*They both shake their hips rapidly. The phone rings as STRANGER steps out.*) Hello?

STRANGER: Guess who just got heeeeeere.

SYBIL: Oh, it's you. We're pressed for time. You'll just have to wait until Act Two.

STRANGER: I'll be waiiiiiiting. (*He backs out and disappears.*)

OFFICER KNIGHT: (*Shouting toward the kitchen.*) Newbie!

NEWBIE: (*Standing behind him, speaks calmly.*) I'm right here.

OFFICER KNIGHT: We'll need more crime scene tape.

NEWBIE: But I have this cake. (*KNIGHT shoots him a look.*) I'll make a run to the dollar store. (*He rushes out to the kitchen.*)

OFFICER KNIGHT: Everyone get comfortable. You may be here for a while. (*Everyone groans. There's a knock at the front door.*)

SYBIL: Who is it? (*STRANGER sticks his head through the door, meekly.*)

STRANGER: Excuse me?

SYBIL: What is it now?

STRANGER: I hate to mention it, but I've been on the road for an hour and I've really got to go to the bathroom. (*Rim shot offstage.*)

SYBIL: (*Laughing.*) Oh, stranger. (*Everyone laughs a silly, cheesy laugh and the lights fade quickly to a...BLACKOUT.*)

End of ACT ONE.

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