

INSPECTOR FINDOUT AND THE LOST CHERRY PIE

By John Donald and Erin O'Shea

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To my daughter, Erin, whose original short story, is the basis for this little play.

CHARACTERS

- MOM: She is bright, witty and perceptive, and always one step ahead of the kids.
- TOM: A precocious sixth or seventh grader with a superior imagination and intelligence. He likes mysteries.
- ERIN: Tom's younger sister. As bright as Tom, but with only a little less education. Doesn't quite trust Tom.
- GIPPER: The family dog, or preferably a kid wearing a dog costume. He specializes in being under your feet.
- AMY & CHRISSY: Seventh or eighth graders. Tom's older sisters. Twins, bright, not inclined to put up with Thomistic nonsense.
- SARAH: Tom's oldest sister. An eighth or ninth grader. Equally bright, and will only indulge her younger siblings to a point.

SETTING

The family home. The set is minimal. All furniture is low so actors can be seen anywhere on stage. Doorways are merely "suggested" by cones or the like.

PRODUCTION NOTES

The stage directions assume use of a thrust stage, or a stage that is round, but can be modified for a traditional stage. The stage is roughly divided into four quarters. The down right is the kitchen. The down left is the living room. The up left is the bathroom and the up right is in the bedroom of Chrissy and Amy. There are doors connecting the kitchen and living room the living room and bathroom and the bathroom and bedroom.

PROPS

Magnifying glass (for TOM)

Flashlight (for TOM)

Five toothbrushes (for bathroom scene)

Five drinking cups (for bathroom scene)

Yellow crime scene tape (about two yards, for bedroom scene)

Pair of girl's panties (for bedroom scene)

Six plates (final kitchen scene-for ERIN)

Six sets of silverware (final kitchen scene- for AMY)

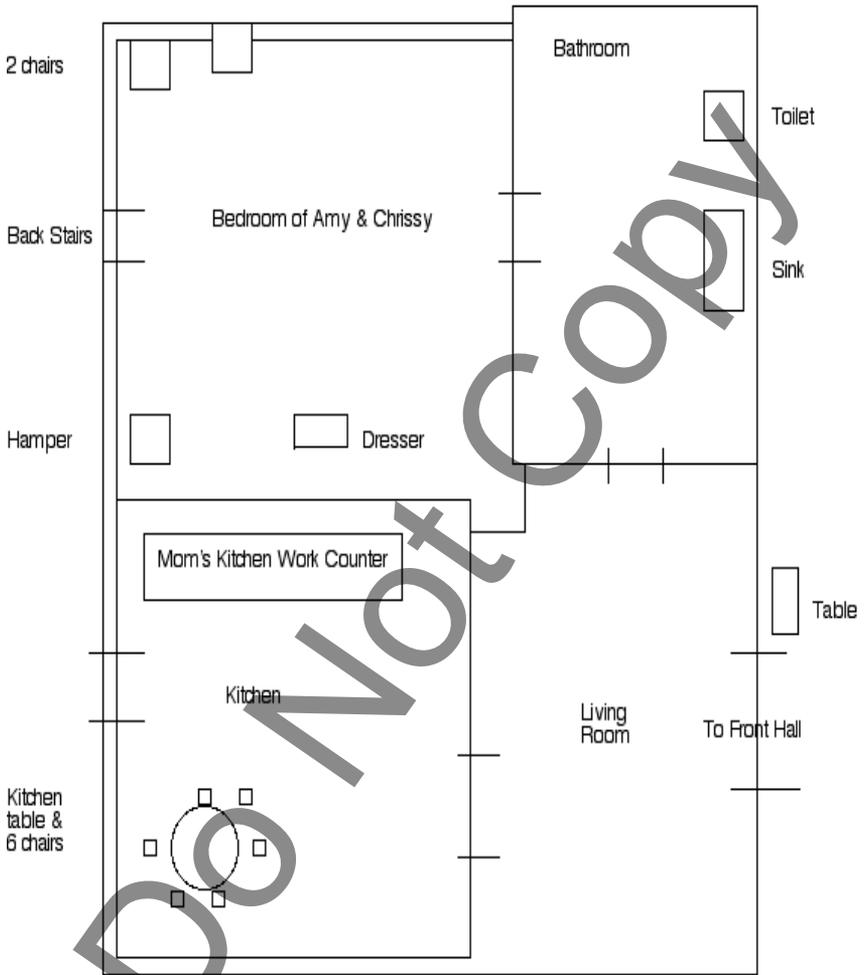
Six drinking glasses (final kitchen scene- for CHRISSY)

Six napkins (final kitchen scene-for SARAH)

COSTUMES

Mom and the kids wear no special costumes. This is a normal family. It is late afternoon. Mom and the kids wear the sort of clothing they would wear after school and before dinner. For example, the kids might wear sweats. The actor, however, who plays the dog, should wear a “dog costume.”

INSPECTOR FINDOUT SET



Audience sits here, and to right & left of stage

NOTE: The set is meant to be very basic. Any furniture used should be low so as to allow a full view of the actors regardless of where they are on stage. When I staged this play, the doorways were merely "suggested." We used soccer cones to show where they were. The play can be staged on a thrust stage, or a proscenium stage. But keep the set simple.

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At Curtain, MOM enters from off Right, as if SHE has just descended the back stairs. SHE circles the counter which is Up Stage Center in the kitchen, and ends up Up Stage of the counter, and closer to Center Stage than to the stairs. GIPPER, the family dog follows her in and crosses to the Down Stage Left corner of the kitchen and lays down just below the door to the living room. MOM is an attractive woman. SHE has five children. The oldest are in Junior High School.

MOM: *(SHE immediately notices that "something" is missing from the counter. SHE quickly checks a couple other places where that "something," a cherry pie, could be. SHE doesn't find it. SHE therefore calls out loudly.)* Thomas Patrick O'Shea, get your fanny in here right now! *(When there is no immediate response, SHE calls out a second time, louder.)* Thomas Patrick, your presence is required . . . now!

TOM: *(Enters, also from the back stairs, and stops at the Right end of the kitchen counter.)* Sorry, Mom. I didn't hear you the first time you called.

MOM: If you didn't hear me the first time, how did you know I called more than once?

TOM: You never call loud enough the first time to make my coke spill.

MOM: Excuse me? Your coke spilled?

TOM: Don't worry, Gipper cleaned it up . . . what do you want?

MOM: *(MOM takes a step to TOM.)* I want my cherry pie.

TOM: *(Innocently)* What cherry pie?

MOM: The one I baked for dinner that was cooling on that counter.

TOM: *(To audience)* Ooooh, that cherry pie . . . *(To MOM)* I haven't seen it. Maybe you left it in the bedroom?

MOM: Why would I leave a cherry pie in the bedroom?

TOM: You're always putting things away. I thought perhaps you might have mixed it up with the clean clothes, and took it in there by mistake.

MOM: And I thought that maybe you took it and ate it by mistake.

TOM: Well, I didn't . . . *(Deeply hurt)* Why would you think such a thing?

MOM: Because yesterday, you took and ate a two pound box of Fannie May chocolates.

TOM: *(TOM turns back to MOM.)* That was different. Chocolate is highly addictive. Once I got started, I couldn't help myself. I was a victim.

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MOM: Of course. I fully understand. And as a victim I thought you might have awarded yourself compensation—my cherry pie!

TOM: I'm deeply wounded by your utter lack of faith in me. Do I look like a crook?

MOM: Now that you mention it, yes! But first appearances can be deceiving. *(To audience)* Because I am an eminently fair person, I think that – before I *(Demonstrating)* lop off your head - I should have at least a modicum of corroborative evidence . . . *(To TOM)* Look me straight in the eyes!

TOM: That's not fair. I assert my Fifth Amendment right against self incrimination!

MOM: I've just declared maternal law.

TOM: What's that?

MOM: It's like martial law, only I make the rules rather than the army. Your right against self incrimination is suspended [for the duration]. Now, look me straight in the eyes.

TOM: Before I do, can I talk to a lawyer?

MOM: You can't afford your father's fees. Look me in the eyes, Buster!

TOM: *(To audience)* I thought they abolished the Spanish Inquisition . . . *(Back to MOM, realizing that SHE is deadly serious.)* Yes, ma'am.

MOM: Thomas Patrick O'Shea . . . *(SHE raises her hand to administer the oath.)* Do you solemnly swear that you did not steal my cherry pie?

TOM: *(HE raises his hand to take oath.)* I so swear. *(Then to audience.)* But I intend to lodge a formal protest about this with the International Court of Justice in the Hague.

MOM: *(Totally unimpressed)* Do you further swear you did not, either personally or with the aid of accessories, before or after the fact, take purloin, embezzle or in any way abscond with my cherry pie?

TOM: I solemnly swear,

MOM: Then who did?

TOM: Probably one of my sisters. They're not as honest as I am. *(HE points to DOG.)* Or maybe Gipper. *(A pause)* Do you want Inspector Findout to ferret out the culprit?

MOM: Who's Inspector Findout?

TOM: It's my nom de guerre.

MOM: *(MOM raises her hand to deputize TOM.)* Okay, raise your right hand.

(HE does.)

By the power vested in me, I hereby license you as my private investigator with the express power to investigate the theft of my cherry pie.

TOM: *(Pulling his hand down)* What's my salary going to be?

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MOM: Do you want dinner?

TOM: Yes.

MOM: Then get to work! I've got to finish dinner.

TOM: I thought the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery?

MOM: (*SHE turns back to the counter to resume getting dinner.*) Do you want to get your own dinner?

TOM: I'm a boy. I can't cook.

MOM: It appears we have reached agreement on your fee. Correct?

TOM: You'd feed me anyway.

MOM: Wanna bet?

TOM: Doesn't the Fourteenth Amendment require mothers to feed their kids?

MOM: It makes you a citizen. The food part is up to you.

TOM: What good is being a citizen, if you starve to death?

MOM: Good question. I suggest you answer it for yourself. (*MOM turns to him, raising her right hand again.*) Now, shall we try again?

TOM: (*Thinks for a minute, raises his right hand and says.*) You drive a hard bargain. Are you sure there isn't some kind of minimum wage law that governs contracts with sixth graders? (*To audience*) Something that protects them against [exactions by] predatory mothers?

MOM: (*SHE turns to resume dinner preparation.*) Nothing. It's an unjust society. You can make it your life's work to pass such laws when you become a parent.

TOM: (*To MOM*) But then my kids will use them against me!

MOM: You have until dinner time to solve the crime.

TOM: You win. I swear. Have no fear! Inspector Findout is here! He will find your criminal! (*HE crosses to door between kitchen and living room, and then turns back.*) Where's my magnifying glass?

MOM: Where did you leave it, last time you had it?

TOM: That's not fair. How can I be expected to look for both my magnifying glass and an arch criminal at the same time?

MOM: (*SHE turns to TOM.*) If you would put things away when you're done with them, you'd know where they were.

TOM: But your memory's better. When I let you put my things away, you always remember where you put them, and all I have to do is ask. It saves a lot of time.

MOM: (*To audience*) Aarg. I may strangle him. (*To TOM*) Look atop your dresser.

(HE goes to his room through the living room and out the front door Stage Left and finds the magnifying glass and a flashlight and then returns into the living room. As HE does, ERIN enters the living room from the door to the bathroom. GIPPER enters from the kitchen and

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plops down just inside the door, Downstage of it. NOTE: Every time TOM leaves a room, GIPPER will follow him, as if to keep an eye on him, and then plop down in a doorway. MOM exits the kitchen to upstairs.)

TOM: Ah ha, a suspect!

ERIN: Me?

TOM: *(TOM takes a step toward ERIN to confront her.)* Yes, you! Mom's cherry pie is gone. You took it. What did you do with it?

ERIN: What did I do with it? You suspect me, your darling little sister, of stealing a pie?

TOM: I suspect everyone and everybody.

ERIN: I think you're being redundant. "Everyone" would include "everybody," and vice versa.

TOM: Do not mince words with Inspector Findout.

ERIN: *(ERIN crosses Down Stage)* I wasn't mincing words. *(To audience)* "Mincing" would imply chopping words into little pieces. Nobody does that. *(Quite pleased with herself)* I was parsing them. *(Turns back to question TOM)* Who's this Inspector Findout, anyway?

TOM: I am he.

ERIN: You look like my big brother. Can I see some identification?

TOM: *(HE takes a step toward ERIN and raises his fist as if to punch her in the nose.)* Is this good enough?

ERIN: *(Taking a step back to avoid his fist)* It's more than adequate. *(To audience)* Someday, I'm going to take karate . . .

TOM: *(Overhearing what SHE said)* It's a serious felony to strike a sworn officer of the law.

ERIN: Is it any kind of felony to hit your little sister?

TOM: Not in America . . . *(TOM crosses to ERIN)* May I see your fingers?

(ERIN holds them out; HE looks and feels for stickiness.)

ERIN: Remember, I take piano lessons. You break any of them and Mom will get mad.

TOM: *(Turning to audience in frustration)* They're not sticky.

ERIN: *(Pursuing him one step.)* Aren't you ashamed of yourself?

TOM: Have you washed them lately?

ERIN: Of course.

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