

# LET'S HANG HIM AND READ THE WILL

A SOAP OPERA MYSTERY SPOOF IN TWO ACTS

By Pat Cook

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**LET'S HANG HIM AND READ THE WILL**

**By Pat Cook**

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(6 MEN, 13 WOMEN)*

- LYE JACKSBORO (m)..... Citizen of Beautyrest Springs, prone to gossip. *(13 lines)*
- THORA LOU BACKCOME (f)..... A busybody with a flair for hair. *(21 lines)*
- MISS SPARROW (f)..... Forever getting her hair done. *(16 lines)*
- MARGO MCMENACE (f)..... A housewife. *(17 lines)*
- MARTHA LYSOL (f) ..... A maid with a secret. *(87 lines)*
- SHERIFF HAROLD TYRED (m)..... A rather lazy law officer. *(125 lines)*
- PERCY WATERYARD (m)..... A gardener who knows where all the bodies are buried. *(87 lines)*
- FREIDA POST (f)..... A reporter. *(107 lines)*
- HERBIE HANDEMAN (m)..... A plumber. *(17 lines)*
- CLEO PATRELLE (f)..... Supposedly the daughter of the late F. Mycroft Tanner. *(146 lines)*
- JEMMY JEAN (f)..... Tanner's downright daffy sister. Loves to watch TV. *(82 lines)*
- BILLY JO (f)..... A hotel switchboard operator. *(3 lines)*
- LAMAR LEE RASCAL (m)..... An attorney, once betrothed to JEMMY JEAN. *(187 lines)*

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- DOC LIVERWORTH (m)..... Old family physician. (15 lines)
- CLEO PATRELLE 2 (f)..... Professes to be the daughter of the late F. Mycroft Tanner. (28 lines)
- BERTHA BABBLES (f)..... MARTHA's older sister. (9 lines)
- TOUR GUIDE (f)..... Leads tours of the Tanner estate. (10 lines)
- PIZZA GIRL (f)..... Delivery person. (2 lines)
- PATIENT (f)..... DOC LIVERWORTH's patient.
- EXTRAS (m/f)..... For the tour and crowd scenes.

**SETTING**

The den of F. Mycroft Tanner's estate, located in the little burg of Beautyrest Springs in Birdeye County.

**TIME:** The present.

**SYNOPSIS OF SCENES**

**ACT ONE**

**SCENE 1:** F. Mycroft Tanner's den.

**SCENE 2:** Solo light on BILLY JO, switches to Tanner's den.

**SCENE 3:** Solo light on DOC LIVERWORTH, switches to Tanner's den.

**ACT TWO**

**SCENE 1:** Solo light on BILLY JO, switches to Tanner's den.

**SCENE 2:** Solo light on BILLY JO, switches to Tanner's den.

**PROPS**

- Newspaper
- Notepad and pen
- Scissors (*SHERIFF/FREIDA*)
- Comb
- Tool box
- Sack of groceries
- Photograph
- Two pistols
- Handkerchief
- Sandwich (*CLEO/RASCAL*)
- Ring
- Several chain necklaces
- Buzzer
- Sponge (*CLEO/CLEO 2*)
- Satchel
- Dollar Bills
- Will
- Operator's headset
- Small megaphone
- Briefcase
- Several pizza boxes
- Ice pick
- Tray of cookies
- Several 3 x 5 notecards
- Punch bowl
- Scalpel
- Several cups
- Portable television set
- Jump rope

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

*The play opens on the den of the late F. Mycroft Tanner, probably the meanest and richest son of a gun in the little burg of Beautyrest Springs. The room is quite comfortable, but most of the furniture is past its prime. A large, overstuffed couch resides DSR, with a matching wingback chair and coffee table close by. A large desk rests against the SR wall. The desk is covered with documents, records, and junk mail. There are other pieces of furniture scattered around the room, such as chairs, a telephone, end tables, etc. Each piece gives the impression of depression.*

*Three doors are utilized in this floor plan. The first, SR, leads to the living room. The second, located on the US wall, leads to the kitchen and the third, located on the SL wall, leads to the garage. This last door is a very new one, with bright new hinges. Before the lights come up on the den, a solitary light comes up DSL on LYE JACKSBORO, who is reading the local newspaper.*

**LYE:** Hidy! You hear the news? Old Tanner done cashed his chips in. The way I git it, he snuffed hisself out. No sir, I ain't wolfing you, that's whut I heard. Rich folks is funny, ain't they? Not so's you'd laugh out loud, though. And he wuz that kinda guy. You know, the kind you don't like at first and then, after awhile, you hate him. 'Course, most of us just hated him outright and saved time. Then he ups and . . . whut do they call it? He shuttled off this mortal coil. Yeah, that's it. Although, I ain't never figgered out what a mortal coil is, or whut part of the human engine it occupies. Now, on a lawn mower, you got your pull start and inside of that, they's this spring and you could probably . . . (*Lights quickly black out on LYE.*) Hey, I wasn't through yet!

*Lights come up DSR on THORA LOU BACKCOMBE, who is arranging MISS SPARROWS' hair. MISS SPARROW is sitting in a chair in front of THORA.*

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**THORA:** *(To the audience.)* MM-mm-MMM! Land's sakes! You could've knocked me over with a feather boa when I heard. One minute Old Tanner's getting repairs done to that mansion a his, and the next . . .

**SPARROW:** Ow!

**THORA:** Sorry. *(Back to the audience.)* And the next, he shoots himself. And why? I tell you what I think.

**SPARROW:** Ow!

**THORA:** Sorry. I think something or somebody done come back to haunt him. You know what I mean. Some sin from his past come up agin and he had to face it.

**SPARROW:** OWW! What are you doing up there?!

**THORA:** Sit still! *(Back to the audience.)* I mean, here he didn't have a friend in the world, least none that ever admitted it, and only one daffy sister, and all of a sudden he goes out into his garage and . . .

**SPARROW:** OWW! *(She turns to THORA.)* Thora Lou! If I didn't know any better, I'd swear you're working with meat hooks and a chisel!

**THORA:** Count your blessings that you found somebody who'll work on this mop who don't have insurance!

**SPARROW:** You don't have insurance?

**THORA:** Turn around! *(MISS SPARROW resumes her original position.)* Anyway, that's how they found him, in his garage like that. I swear, you could've knocked me over with a feather boa.

**SPARROW:** Say, what is a feather boa, anyway?

**THORA:** Oh, you're such a hick! It's one of them long garland-looking things women in show business wear around their necks.

**SPARROW:** And they're made out of boa constrictors?

**THORA:** Yeah. They kill 'em for their feathers. TURN AROUND!

*Lights black out on these two and come up SR. MARGO MCMENACE walks into the light, carrying two sacks of groceries.*

**MARGO:** I know, I know, I jist heard it in the store. What a horrible thing to have happen right here in the big middle of Beautyrest Springs. We ain't never had nothing like that happen here, unless you count back twenty years ago when that cattle truck overturned in the intersection and lotsa folk had steak on the table a long time after that. I always thought that jist proved that old song about ever' cloud havin' a silver linin'. Makes you wonder just what silver linin' is gonna turn up regarding the late F. Mycroft Tanner.

*LYE joins her.*

**LYE:** Afternoon, Mrs. McMenace. That's something about Mr. Tanner, ain't it?

**MARGO:** Mr. Jacksboro, I know. I just heard. I bet the reading of the will is sure gonna stir up some muddy water.

**LYE:** My guess is he'll have it all put in the coffin with him, will and ever'thing.

**MARGO:** Now, you shouldn't say bad about the dead.

**LYE:** Okay, I'll say something that ain't bad. He's dead. That ain't bad.

**MARGO:** Mr. Jacksboro!

*MISS SPARROW walks into the light, still wearing the styling sheet over her shoulders.*

**LYE:** Miss Sparrow.

**SPARROW:** Margo, Lye.

**MARGO:** We were just talking about the regrettable circumstance that has occurred to Mr. Tanner.

**SPARROW:** Talk about regrettable. Look at what Thora Lou did to my hair!

**THORA:** Miss Sparrow! *(She joins the others.)* If you don't stop jumping around, that 'do is going to set and look like a burnt chocolate mousse.

**SPARROW:** Now who would want one a them animals made outta chocolate?

**THORA:** Not the kind you shoot, the kind you eat.

**SPARROW:** Well, how're you going to eat it if you don't shoot it first?

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**THORA:** You're a caution, you know that?

**MARGO:** Say, maybe there ought to be an autopsy.

**THORA:** (*Points to SPARROW's hair.*) This ain't that bad. I can fix it, I promise you. (*She begins working on MISS SPARROW's hair again.*)

**MARGO:** I mean on Mr. Tanner.

**LYE:** Why? We know he's dead.

**MARGO:** I know, Lye, but just to tie up any loose ends and find out exactly what caused his demise.

**LYE:** Well, I figger a pistol held up and fired off at point blank range to his cranium might have something to do with it, ya think?

**MARGO:** Oh, you know what I mean. Say, I wonder what the sheriff is saying about it all?

*Lights black out on the group and come up SL on SHERIFF TYRED.*

**SHERIFF:** I have nothing to say at this time.

*Lights black out on the SHERIFF and come up on the den. MARTHA is sitting on the couch talking to FREIDA.*

**MARTHA:** Oh, I just want to tell you ever'thing I can and ever'thing I know. You just fire away with whatever you want to ask.

**FREIDA:** So, you're the one who found him?

**MARTHA:** No.

**FREIDA:** But you're the one that called the authorities?

**MARTHA:** No.

**FREIDA:** Then you were the one who suspected foul play?

**MARTHA:** No.

**FREIDA:** Were you in the house at the time?

**MARTHA:** No. (*Sighs.*)

**FREIDA:** A sigh. We're making progress.

**MARTHA:** (*Thinks.*) He was a wonderful man.

**FREIDA:** I'll make a note of it.

**MARTHA:** Print what you may, I shall always think of him in a warm light.

**FREIDA:** Knowing Mycroft Tanner as I did, you can rest assured he's going to be in a warm light. May I call my office?



**MARTHA:** The phone is over there. *(Points to the phone.)*

**FREIDA:** *(Rises.)* Thank you, you've given me a wealth of information. Is there a phone I can use in private?

**MARTHA:** There's one in the foyer. *(She rises and moves to the SR door.)*

**FREIDA:** Thank you, dear.

*Just after FREIDA leaves, PERCY looks in through the kitchen door. He sees MARTHA alone and rushes over to her and takes her in his arms.*

**PERCY:** At last! We are alone at last!

**MARTHA:** *(Mock resistance.)* Oh, Percy, not here, not now!

**PERCY:** But we've waited so long for this moment. And now, what with the will reading, I'm sure the old skinflint will leave us enough to finally get married.

**MARTHA:** Oh, if only that were true! Then we could be free! Free, I tell you! *(They embrace again.)*

**PERCY:** But you are right. We must be careful.

**MARTHA:** I'll just be right back. *(She moves to the kitchen door. She stops at the door and blows a kiss to PERCY, he catches it, and then she exits.)*

*FREIDA enters through the SR door.*

**FREIDA:** Martha, before I call in, I . . . Percy!

**PERCY:** Freida! *(They embrace in a lover's clinch.)*

**FREIDA:** At last! We are alone at last!

**PERCY:** I've been waiting for you! I called your office and they said you'd be out here.

**FREIDA:** And soon, as soon as the reading of the will, we can be together.

**PERCY:** Together at last! *(They embrace again.)*

**FREIDA:** And you will no longer have to be just a gardener. *(She breaks from his grasp.)* You're sure you're in the will?

**PERCY:** That old barn owl didn't have nobody 'cept Miss Jemmy and she doesn't know her head from a popcorn ball. Who ELSE would he leave his vast estate to? I'm bound to git a piece of the booty!

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**FREIDA:** And my newspaper will keep running stories until it's all over, so I will have plenty of excuses to pay you a visit out here whenever the mood strikes me.

**PERCY:** My fondest dream, my only reason to live! *(He gives her a great big hug.)*

**FREIDA:** *(Breaks the hug.)* But wait! We must be circumspect until that time.

**PERCY:** I'll take a bath! *(They hug once again, passionately. Then disengage.)*

**FREIDA:** I better view the scene of the crime.

**PERCY:** Yes, my darling, I'll show you. *(He moves to the SL door.)* Wait, I'll get you a pair of gloves.

**FREIDA:** I'll wait here. *(PERCY exits through SL door.)* Soon, it will all be over. This story will get me noticed by the big boys and then it's only a hop, skip and a jump to the big time. I'll show them. I'll show them all.

*SHERIFF TYRED enters through the SR door.*

**SHERIFF:** Miss Freida Post.

**FREIDA:** Oh, hello, Sheriff Tyred. Tying up a few loose ends?

**SHERIFF:** Just doing my job. As I'm sure you're just doing yours. *(He circles her.)*

**FREIDA:** Something like that. News comes in all shapes and sizes, you know?

**SHERIFF:** And comes at all hours on little cat's feet.

**FREIDA:** You sound like you suspect foul play. More to this than meets the eye, huh?

**SHERIFF:** I never take things at face value. Except . . . YOU! *(They fall into each other's arms.)* Alone! At last! We are alone at last!

**FREIDA:** *(Breaks the hug.)* But we must bide our time. And you must tell me everything you know about the case.

**SHERIFF:** Oh, I sometimes think you're just a sly vixen.

**FREIDA:** *(Mock modestly.)* Me?

**SHERIFF:** Just kissing up to the law to get an inside track on the latest crime. More fodder for your ambitious career.

**FREIDA:** You think me some sort of Jezebel?

**SHERIFF:** Only when you're in one of them harem outfits!

*They hug again. Then they break the hug again.*

**FREIDA:** Enough of this. My arms are getting tired.

**SHERIFF:** Oh, you like to toy with my emotions.

**FREIDA:** And I move on little cat's feet.

*MARTHA enters from the kitchen.*

**MARTHA:** Harold!

**SHERIFF:** Martha! *(They hug.)*

**FREIDA:** Just a second. What's this?

**SHERIFF:** She's my sister!

**FREIDA:** Oh, yeah. I lost track there for a minute. I'll just go see if Percy found me a pair of gloves. *(She crosses to the SL door.)*

**SHERIFF:** Don't touch anything in there until you put them on. Evidence, you know.

**FREIDA:** I will move gently . . . *(She leans on the door.)* . . . on little cat's feet. *(She exits.)*

**SHERIFF:** *(Wiping his forehead dramatically)* Shrooo, she's gone.

**MARTHA:** And how long can we keep up this charade?

**SHERIFF:** You mean you pretending to be my sister?

**MARTHA:** People are bound to find out the truth.

**SHERIFF:** Martha!

**MARTHA:** Harold! *(They hug in a lover's embrace.)* Alone! At last, we are alone!

**SHERIFF:** Why does that sound so familiar?

**MARTHA:** I know what you mean. I've had déjà vu six times today. Have you been to the funeral parlor yet?

**SHERIFF:** They're doing what they can to make the old boy look natural. The embalmer tried to get old Tanner to smile and it almost broke his fingers. *(He wags a finger at MARTHA.)* And you, you little pickpocket.

**MARTHA:** What?

**SHERIFF:** Taking the old man's diamond ring. That's bound to come up during the will.

**MARTHA:** I didn't take his ring.

**SHERIFF:** Well, it's missing. And everyone in town knows about it.

**MARTHA:** (*Broadly.*) Maybe somebody ELSE found the body before Percy discovered it.

**SHERIFF:** Yes. (*He crosses to the SL door.*) Or maybe it was somebody who just happens to be that exact person.

**MARTHA:** Percy? Oh, I don't think he would . . . (*SHERIFF shoots her a look and her mood changes instantly.*) Yeah, maybe it was Percy, that rat.

**SHERIFF:** I had better step into the garage and keep an eye on him for a bit. (*He hugs MARTHA one last time.*) I shall count the minutes!

**MARTHA:** And I'll count the silverware.

**SHERIFF:** Adieu. (*He exits through the SL door, shutting it behind him. MARTHA thinks out loud.*)

**MARTHA:** Soooo. The old man's multi-carat diamond ring is missing. And here I am, sitting like the proverbial duck in a pond, ripe to be chosen as suspect number one. (*She thinks as she moves towards SR door.*) I fear I'm being set up. Someone is playing this situation to their own advantage. But who? Yes, who? (*HERBIE HANDEMAN enters through the SR door and MARTHA grabs him and holds him tight.*) Alone! At last, we are alone! I have been waiting breathlessly for you . . . (*She looks at him again.*) Who're you?

**HERBIE:** The plumber. I'm lookin' for a clog.

**MARTHA:** (*Breaks hug.*) She's in the other room.

**HERBIE:** The kitchen?

**MARTHA:** Yes, through there.

**HERBIE:** Right. (*He crosses to the kitchen door and then looks back.*) I guess I ought to tell you somebody pulled up outside. (*With deep meaning.*) In a taxi. (*He exits through the door.*)

**MARTHA:** A taxi? Someone came all the way out here . . . in a taxi? Who could it be? Who in this town would want to spend the money to come out here in a taxi? Who in this town has the money to come out here in a taxi? I thought the old man had all the money. (*CLEO enters through the SR door unnoticed by MARTHA.*) There must be a stranger in our midst. A random element, an unknown person, an uninvited visitor, a cosmic interloper who has wandered . . .

**CLEO:** (*Jumping in.*) Heeey!

**MARTHA:** Oh, forgive me. (*She crosses to CLEO.*) I was talking to myself.

**CLEO:** Talking to yourself?

**MARTHA:** (*Looks around eerily.*) Yes. There's something about this room, this very house, that makes one doubt their senses. You see, we don't get very many visitors and we remain aloof, as an island in the sea, a ship without anchor, a bird that's lost its way, a wombat that has an itch and can't . . .

**CLEO:** (*Interrupts her again.*) Yeah, yeah, yeah! Is your employer here?

**MARTHA:** Well, no. He's . . . in town on business . . . sort of.

*CLEO walks around and looks at the room.*

**CLEO:** When do you expect his return?

**MARTHA:** Well . . . there's a service coming up. I'm sure he'll be there. And you are . . . ?

**CLEO:** Cleo Patrelle. His daughter. (*Waits for this to sink in.*)

**MARTHA:** (*Beyond surprised.*) His da-ugh-ter? (*Stuttering.*) B – but – but – but . . .

**CLEO:** Thought that would get your motor running.

*MARTHA grabs her mouth to regain control and finally tries again.*

**MARTHA:** But . . . Mr. Tanner has no daughters.

**CLEO:** Oh, he just says that for after-dinner conversation. (*She sits on the couch.*) Someone needs to fetch my luggage. Today.

**MARTHA:** Ma'am, I can assure you that . . .

**CLEO:** If you don't believe me, you can ask the old man himself. The thing is, well, many years ago, we had a falling out. And I've been away. But, well, you know . . . affairs of the heart.

**MARTHA:** Sure. Around here, they're more popular than Monopoly.

**CLEO:** I have grown older and wiser and wish to make amends. (*She rises and moves to MARTHA.*) You may ask him yourself. Whether he answers you is another question. He's a little tight-lipped.

**MARTHA:** Now there's a safe bet.

**CLEO:** He may not say a thing about it.

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**MARTHA:** No, I doubt he will. (*A tad jittery, she crosses to the SL door.*) I'll be just a moment. Please, make yourself at home.

**CLEO:** Of course. After all, it is.

**MARTHA:** Ah ha.

*Loud mumbling is heard offstage. CLEO leans in to listen. Then MARTHA and the SHERIFF look in the door. They smile. CLEO smiles. They disappear and more mumbling is heard. Then MARTHA, the SHERIFF and FREIDA look through the door. They smile. CLEO smiles. They disappear again. CLEO looks at her watch and taps her left foot, then her right foot. More mumbling is heard offstage. Then MARTHA, the SHERIFF, FREIDA and PERCY look in and smile.*

**CLEO:** Reminds me of my trip to Mount Rushmore.

*The others enter single-file and amiably move around her.*

**FREIDA:** Sooooo. You're Mr. Tanner's daughter. (*She winks at the others.*) I didn't know old Ephraim Tanner had a daughter.

**CLEO:** His name was Ferdinand Mycroft Tanner and yes, he HAS a daughter.

*FREIDA snaps her fingers and turns to PERCY.*

**PERCY:** Then you probably inherited his large birthmark.

**CLEO:** I inherited no such characteristic since he has NONE. Nice try, though.

**PERCY:** Thank you.

**SHERIFF:** Sooooo, you mean that his brown -

**CLEO:** (*Corrects him quickly.*) Blue.

**SHERIFF:** Eyes and black -

**CLEO:** Blond.

**SHERIFF:** Hair comes from his side of the family, a well-known Irish-

**CLEO:** English.

**SHERIFF:** Family that thrives -

**CLEO:** Has almost died out.

**SHERIFF:** Here in the district -

**CLEO:** County.

**SHERIFF:** Of Bigfoot.

**CLEO:** Birdeye.

**SHERIFF:** Well, I'm stumped.

**MARTHA:** You said your name was Patrelle.

**CLEO:** Oh, that. *(She blithely sits again.)* I was married for a short time, but my late husband . . .

**MARTHA:** Late?

**CLEO:** Yes. You see, he met with an accident. *(She smiles and looks away.)* Yes, a grand accident.

**SHERIFF:** A grand accident?

**CLEO:** *(Catches herself.)* Oh, uh . . . you see, he worked in a piano warehouse . . . and a grand fell on him. *(She smiles weakly and rises.)* Is no one here going to tell me how I can talk to my father?

**PERCY:** Try a Ouija board.

**CLEO:** I beg your pardon?

**SHERIFF:** Maybe you had better sit down.

**CLEO:** There's something . . . something has happened! Something has happened to Papa?!

**PERCY/FREIDA:** Papa?

**CLEO:** What is it? What has befallen such a wonderful man?

**PERCY/FREIDA:** Wonderful?

**MARTHA:** Well, nothing like a piano.

**SHERIFF:** It seems that he . . . he has gone on to seek his reward.

**CLEO:** He won the lottery?

**SHERIFF:** No, we've lost him.

**CLEO:** Well, let's go find him.

**MARTHA:** No, he passed away. Went to meet his maker. Gave up the ghost.

**CLEO:** You mean . . . ?

**PERCY:** Croaked.

**CLEO:** Oh, no! *(She puts her hand to her forehead and gracefully sinks back on the couch. The others roll their eyes and look at each other.)* I had feared that I had waited too long. *(She sobs quietly into her hands.)*

**SHERIFF:** *(Moves to her.)* Ma'am, while I personally don't doubt your word, you can understand that we can't just let anyone walk in here claiming to be a relative without proof.

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**CLEO:** *(Stops sobbing immediately.)* Right. *(She takes a picture from her purse.)* Here. This is a picture of my father.

*The SHERIFF and the others stare at the picture. They nod to each other.*

**MARTHA:** Boy, didn't age well, did he?

**SHERIFF:** Well, this is truly a picture of Mr. Tanner, but he's just standing there alone. How is this proof?

**CLEO:** It's autographed. *(The others look at the picture.)*

**PERCY:** Oh yeah.

**SHERIFF:** Wait, wait, wait. This says, "To my little muffin."

**CLEO:** *(She looks down coyly.)* That's me.

**FREIDA:** Why did he call you his little muffin?

**CLEO:** Oh; he said that when I was born I was just so round and plump that I reminded him of that particular pastry. *(She changes her look to a hard stare.)* Why ELSE would he call me that?

**PERCY:** Cause you're seedy? *(MARTHA elbows him.)* Ow!

*CLEO rises, takes the picture back from the SHERIFF and replaces it in her purse.*

**CLEO:** Now it's my turn to ask the questions. How did Papa die?

**SHERIFF:** Well, he. . . he sorta had target practice, and you know how nearsighted he was.

**CLEO:** What? I don't believe it.

**MARTHA:** Shot himself.

**CLEO:** Likely story. *(She moves to the SL door and suddenly turns.)*  
Get any fingerprints from the gun?

**SHERIFF:** Didn't need to.

**CLEO:** And why not?

**SHERIFF:** He was wearing gloves.

**CLEO:** He put on gloves to shoot himself.

**MARTHA:** He was eccentric but neat.

**CLEO:** I wish to see the garage.

**SHERIFF:** Yes, ma'am. *(He exits into the garage, followed by CLEO.)*

**FREIDA:** Something odd about her. I don't like her.



**PERCY:** Because she dropped in out of the blue?

**FREIDA:** No.

**PERCY:** Because she doesn't have any identification?

**FREIDA:** No.

**PERCY:** Because she's the only heir?

**FREIDA:** THAT'S the one!

**PERCY:** And one other thing. She couldn't have chosen a more convenient time to just show up.

**MARTHA:** Yes, and how did she know THAT was the garage?

*The SHERIFF and CLEO reenter through the SL door. She is holding a handkerchief over her face as if crying.*

**MARTHA:** *(Crosses to them.)* Is she . . . is she all right? I mean, marching her right out to the scene of the crime! It's enough to make your blood run cold.

**SHERIFF:** No, that ain't it. Somebody needs to take out the garbage.

**MARTHA:** Percy!

**PERCY:** Well, I've been kinda busy!

**MARTHA:** Oh yeah, I forgot.

**FREIDA:** What?

**MARTHA:** Well I, for one, am still a bit reticent.

**PERCY:** Have you taken anything? Cabbage does that to me.

**FREIDA:** *(Crosses to CLEO.)* Yes, you do know your way around and YES, you have that nice autographed picture, but things like that are still circumstantial.

**CLEO:** And why should I prove my heritage to you? Or you? *(To MARTHA.)* Or you? *(To PERCY.)* Or . . . you're kinda cute. *(She tickles his ear.)*

**PERCY:** Shucks!

**MARTHA:** Percy!

**CLEO:** I can produce a mountain of evidence on my background, but you'll just have to take my word for it until I can wire for it to arrive. I only have to send word to my solicitor.

**SHERIFF:** Solicitor?

*JEMMY JEAN calls offstage.*

**JEMMY:** Martha! Maaaartha!

**CLEO:** Who's that?

**MARTHA:** Ah HA! NOW, we'll have proof. *(She crosses to the SR door and exits.)*

**FREIDA:** Miss Jemmy!

**CLEO:** Jemmy?

**SHERIFF:** Oh, you should know the name. It's your Aunt Jemmy Jean, poor thing.

**CLEO:** That's an odd last name.

**SHERIFF:** She was left at the altar twenty-five years ago and hasn't been the same since, a poor addeleated woman who's been living here with her brother so that he could hide her from life's cruel realities. She lives in a fantasy world, never leaving the interior of this house, taking comfort from the household staff and a twenty-seven inch remote-controlled color TV.

**CLEO:** Oh, her.

*MARTHA helps MISS JEMMY into the room through the SR door.*

**MARTHA:** Here we are, Miss Jemmy.

**JEMMY:** Thank you. *(She moves to PERCY.)* Hello, Ben. *(She moves to the SHERIFF.)* Hello, Little Joe. *(She moves to FREIDA.)* Hello, Hoss.

**FREIDA:** I gotta stop wearing heels.

*MARTHA moves MISS JEMMY to CLEO.*

**MARTHA:** And look, Miss Jemmy. Know who this is?

**JEMMY:** *(After a slight pause.)* Hop Sing?

**FREIDA:** That's what I thought! She hasn't a clue who you are!

**SHERIFF:** If you recall, she hasn't a clue who ANYBODY is!

**CLEO:** Let's just say she's geographically incorrect.

**PERCY/SHERIFF/FREIDA:** Huh?

**CLEO:** Well, if she was at the Ponderosa, she'd be a hundred percent.

**JEMMY:** I want eggs.

**MARTHA:** What?

**JEMMY:** I want eggs. I still eat, you know. Weren't you on "Bewitched"?

*PERCY laughs out loud but quickly shuts up when MARTHA shoots him a dirty look.*

**SHERIFF:** Miss Jemmy, take another look at this person. You haven't seen her in a long time.

**JEMMY:** My nurse? I haven't seen her in ages.

**MARTHA:** You don't have a nurse.

**JEMMY:** That long?

**SHERIFF:** No, she says she knew you long before.

**JEMMY:** Before what?

**MARTHA:** Don't say it!

**SHERIFF:** Your wedding.

**JEMMY:** *(Stricken.)* My wedding! My wedding! My wedding! *(To MARTHA.)* Wha'd he say?

**MARTHA:** Nothing.

**PERCY:** He said, "Your wedding." *(FREIDA bumps his arm.)* HEY!

**JEMMY:** My wedding! My wedding! *(She moves to CLEO.)* I was a lovely bride, the loveliest ever.

**CLEO:** What was it like?

**JEMMY:** Partly cloudy, low humidity, twenty percent chance of rain.

**CLEO:** The things dreams are made of.

**JEMMY:** And I was lovely. I was wearing my mother's gown. I can't remember what she was wearing. *(She suddenly looks up.)* Stop that dancing up there! *(Back to her memories.)* And brother dear tried to warn me. He tried to keep me from going to the church. He even locked up the garage and wouldn't let anyone in, such was his mania at preventing my marriage, such was his belief that he could prevent me from coming to any harm. *(She takes a deep breath along with everyone else in the room.)* I had to hitchhike to the church. *(She looks confused.)* What was I talking about?

**PERCY:** Your wedding. *(Everyone looks at PERCY. He slaps a hand over his mouth.)*

**JEMMY:** Yes, my wedding! *(She crosses back to CLEO.)* And the church, you should've seen the church.

**CLEO:** Oh, but I did see the church.

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**JEMMY:** What?

**CLEO:** I was there, Aunt Jemmy.

**MARTHA:** (*Moves to MISS JEMMY.*) Miss Jemmy, who was at the church?

**JEMMY:** Well, starting from the back row on the left side . . .

**MARTHA:** Trim it a little. I mean what family members were there?

**JEMMY:** (*Slowly.*) Well, my mother . . . my father . . . and I were there.

**PERCY:** And your brother?

**JEMMY:** Locked in the garage. Pay attention.

**MARTHA:** And who else?

**JEMMY:** Nobody else from the family.

**FREIDA:** Ah HA!

**JEMMY:** Except my niece. I remember that I gave her a charm to wear on her necklace just for that day.

*CLEO pulls up a necklace charm from around her neck.*

**CLEO:** This charm?

*Everyone in the room gasps. MISS JEMMY looks at the charm.*

**JEMMY:** Mmmm . . . nope.

**CLEO:** Oh. What about THIS charm?

**JEMMY:** Mmmm . . . nope.

**CLEO:** How about this one? (*She pulls up another necklace and charm.*)

**FREIDA:** Oh, for crying out loud!

**JEMMY:** You got anything in silver?

**CLEO:** Oh, take a look at this. (*She pulls out yet another necklace and charm.*)

**JEMMY:** That's it. That's the charm I gave my niece. That charm I gave my darling Cleo! My little muffin!

**CLEO:** Aunt Jemmy!

*They hug. Everyone else in the room looks at each other as the lights black out.*

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

*A solo light comes up DSR on BILLY JO, who is wearing an operator's headset and sitting in front of an invisible switchboard.*

**BILLY JO:** So ANYway, this daughter, this Cleo someone-or-other just shows up out of the blue and turns the whole place over like an International House of Pancakes pancake. Well, she sashays in and starts ordering everybody around - *(A buzz sounds.)* . . . just a second, Millie. *(She pushes a button on an imaginary switchboard.)* Beautyrest Springs Royale Hotel, how you? Oh, sis! No, I didn't tell you EVERYthing. Well, you know Martha Lysol, the housekeeper up at Tanner's estate? Well, I get it she's seeing the gardener on the side. That's right, she and Percy Wateryard are a big item now, only it's all on the Q.T. I tell you, my mind is swimming like Esther Williams. Well, it's been going on for . . . *(Another buzz sounds.)* . . . just a sec. *(She flips another switch.)* Beautyrest Springs Royale Hotel, how you? Mom! Oh, let me tell you. You know that Freida Post, that reporter for "The Shining Light"? Well, I get it she and the Sheriff are running patrols together. Listen, it's all over the switchboard here. I tell you, I've been busier than a psychic at the White House. *(Another buzz sounds.)* Hang on a second. *(She flips a switch.)* Beautyrest Springs Royale Hotel, how you? *(Suddenly she gets serious.)* Oh, it's you. What? You want me to-what? I'm sorry, I can't give out information over the switchboard. How much? Okay, as soon as Mr. Rascal checks in, I'll let you know. Yeah, I know, he's that big attorney everybody's always talking about on the news. Right. As soon as I hear. That's right, the usual arrangement. I got it. I said I got it! Of course I know his name. Mr. Lamar Lee Rascal.

*Lights black out on BILLY JO and come up on the den.*

**MARTHA:** *(Announces RASCAL.)* Mr. Lamar Lee Rascal!

**RASCAL:** *(Looks around.)* No need for such an auspicious introduction, considering the room is devoid of any listening proletariat.

**MARTHA:** Huh?

**RASCAL:** There's nobody here.

**MARTHA:** Can't understand it. *(She looks around.)* This place was Grand Central Station earlier. I was thinking about adding a hot dog stand.

**RASCAL:** Well, why don't you endeavor to make my presence known to this Anastasia-like imposter, and then we can proceed into what I immodestly label my particular bailiwick.

**MARTHA:** Do what?

**RASCAL:** Get Cleo down here and we'll frisk her.

**MARTHA:** Uh . . . yeah. *(She moves to the SR door, mumbling to herself.)* I don't know why lawyers can't talk like regular folks, I swear! And you'd think he could afford a new suit . . . *(She exits.)*

**RASCAL:** Suicide in a locked room, eh? *(He crosses to the SL door and looks at it.)* This door was locked from the other side and the garage double-door was locked from the inside as well . . . *(He thinks.)* No windows, no trap doors or . . . *(He sees something under the back of the couch and pulls out an ice pick, being careful to hold the handle with the handkerchief.)* What do you know? An ice pick. *(He suddenly looks at the door.)* I wonder . . . *(Suddenly, he hears something and quickly places the ice pick in his briefcase and shuts it.)*

**PERCY:** *(Off stage.)* I'm not going to bother him, I just want to make sure he knows his way around. Mr. Rascal?

**RASCAL:** *(Hand outstretched.)* Lamar Lee Rascal, attorney at law, at your service. *(PERCY shakes his hand, which still holds the handkerchief. PERCY holds up the hanky.)*

**PERCY:** Boy, you guys really do hate to come into contact with real folks, don't you?

**RASCAL:** *(RASCAL takes the handkerchief back.)* Oh, please excuse my untidiness.

**PERCY:** *(Sits calmly on the couch.)* So, you think you found a clue, eh?

**RASCAL:** And may I inquire how you purloined this hastily arrived at aspersion?

**PERCY:** Do what?

**RASCAL:** How you figger?

**PERCY:** Well, I figger it like this. You get here and are left alone near the scene of the crime. Well, says I, what do you do? (*He stands up and mimics exactly RASCAL'S actions when the attorney first entered the room.*) You look around and then walk over here and examine this here door, this being the one that was locked on the other side. Well, here I come and I find you with your little and awfully dainty hanky out. Why? I doubt you were dusting the furniture. You ain't sweatin' and ain't sniffed once since I come in. So, why the hanky? I do not know, since you did not volunteer nothing.

**RASCAL:** (*Moves to him.*) A double negative, you think, means something positive?

**PERCY:** Obviously, you have come upon something you figger might mean something, something of a criminal nature. (*Exaggerated wink at RASCAL.*) I mean, A equals B, and B equals C, so A . . . must . . . equal . . . (*Thinks long and hard.*) I dunno, you know—

**RASCAL:** A point well-taken and worthy of the literary Mr., Holmes himself. But why, I say to myself, why is this bucolic and boisterous bumpkin exhibiting such deductory tendencies in my presence?

**PERCY:** Yeah, just like you said it.

**RASCAL:** Commendable.

**PERCY:** (*Leans into RASCAL.*) You're gonna need somebody on the inside, ain't you?

**RASCAL:** See here, sir. I am only employed as the executor of the estate. (*He moves away.*)

**PERCY:** Yeah, but that ain't how you work, is it, Mr. Lamar Lee Rascal, Mr. Big Shot Attorney, Mr. I'll Get To The Bottom of This, Mr. Clean, Mr. Goodwrench, Mr. -

**RASCAL:** (*Jumps in.*) I catch your drift.

**PERCY:** Anyhow, you're gonna need somebody like me to dig up the facts. And take it from me, I'm somebody like me.

**RASCAL:** What?

**PERCY:** Ain't nobody more like me than me, you can ask anyone.

**RASCAL:** And that's an accomplishment? So you're the one to dig up the dirt?

**PERCY:** The perfect one. After all, I'm Percy Wateryard, the gardener.

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**RASCAL:** Some gardener.

**PERCY:** And just what do you mean by that, oh bloated barrister?

**RASCAL:** Just that you've had your green thumb in quite a few pies in the past. You used to work for the Dempseys until, just by coincidence, their house was robbed and you were suddenly let go.

**PERCY:** I said I was sorry.

**RASCAL:** And then you found employment with the Barringtons who, just by coincidence, were victims of a house fire that destroyed almost everything.

**PERCY:** I was nowhere near the grounds at the time. I was busy returning some gas cans to the high school.

**RASCAL:** And now you're working here and suddenly, just by coincidence, Mr. Tanner turns up dead. Only I don't think he did it himself. It was murder . . .

**PERCY:** Okay, I did it! I couldn't take it anymore! I did it! I hated the old man, so I waited until I had a chance and then I shot him in the back!

**RASCAL:** Hold it. Tanner was shot in the head.

**PERCY:** Never mind. I was thinkin' of somebody else, anyways.

*RASCAL stares hard at PERCY as MARTHA enters with CLEO through the kitchen door.*

**MARTHA:** Mrs. Cleo Patrelle.

**CLEO:** *(Hand outstretched.)* Mr. Rascal, your reputation precedes you.

**MARTHA:** Yeah, you can smell him from here, too.

**CLEO:** Here to clear up my late father's estate?

**RASCAL:** I shall be both succinct and omnipotent in my judicious dealings regarding the aforementioned last testament, on that and my diligence you may, with the utmost confidence, rely.

**CLEO/PERCY/MARTHA:** Do what?

**RASCAL:** I'll take a shot.

**PERCY:** Not so loud!

**CLEO:** I suggest that we move ahead with the reading as soon as possible. *(She looks at MARTHA.)* I've got a little pruning I want to do.



**RASCAL:** Oh, there might be a few loose ends to tie up before I can proceed.

**CLEO:** Such as?

**PERCY:** Such as Mr. Rascal there thinks that Old Man Tanner was murdered.

**CLEO:** But that's impossible! He was in a locked room, locked from the inside, when he shot himself. And he was alone.

**MARTHA:** Alone, like an island in the sea, an orphan in the storm, a stray calf in a mud wash, a . . .

**CLEO:** Okay, new rule! No more similes!

**MARTHA:** Well, I seem to be the only one showing any feeling for the man.

**CLEO:** What? Didn't you see my crying scene when I first came in here?

**PERCY:** What about me? I've been on the verge of tears for the entire day!

*HERBIE enters from the kitchen.*

**HERBIE:** Where's the bathroom?

**PERCY:** You goin' to be sick?

**HERBIE:** No, I'm looking for a clog.

**PERCY:** Over there. *(Points to CLEO, who glares at him.)*

**MARTHA:** Oh! *(She ushers HERBIE to the SR door.)* Out through the foyer, turn right, third door on the left.

**HERBIE:** Thank you. You've got great pipes.

**MARTHA:** Like I haven't heard THAT before. *(She shoves HERBIE out and shuts the door.)* And just what do you mean you THINK it was murder?

**RASCAL:** Just a pet theory of mine. *(He rises and moves around the room, looking at each person.)* I always suspect foul play whenever several people are involved with a lot to gain. *(To MARTHA.)* Such as a housekeeper who is overly sentimental. *(To CLEO.)* Or a daughter coming out of nowhere and making a timely, once-a-century visit. *(To PERCY.)* Or a gardener who's been out weeding the entire county. *(He crosses to the SR door.)* Or a meddling sheriff with a snoopy knack for listening at doors. *(He swings the door open and the SHERIFF falls into the room.)*

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**MARTHA:** Harold!

**RASCAL:** (*Looks down at SHERIFF.*) Well, Sheriff, you have the floor.

**SHERIFF:** Hey, Martha said if I was ever in the neighborhood, I should drop in. (*He gets to his feet and brushes himself off.*)

**RASCAL:** Still conducting your investigation?

**SHERIFF:** Yep. Conducting my investigation.

**RASCAL:** I'll give you another mystery to work on. I still don't know who hired me.

**SHERIFF:** Huh?

**MARTHA:** You weren't hired by Mr. Tanner?

**RASCAL:** Possibly. I was contacted by mail. Last week. It was as if somebody knew that Mr. Tanner would be leaving us very soon.

**SHERIFF:** Well, he obviously planned it all out before he . . . well, you know.

**PERCY:** But you ain't heard the latest, Sheriff Tyred. Rascal here thinks somebody murdered Mr. Tanner.

**SHERIFF:** You can't be serious.

**RASCAL:** Dead serious. Don't forget, I'm a lawyer. I have no sense of humor.

**ALL EXCEPT RASCAL:** Oh yeah.

**RASCAL:** (*Moves to CLEO.*) Now, Miss Patrelle . . .

**CLEO:** That's Mrs. My late husband met an untimely end.

**RASCAL:** Oh? With a forty-four?

**CLEO:** Eighty-eight.

**RASCAL:** Cannon?

**CLEO:** Piano.

**ALL EXCEPT CLEO:** Ooh.

**CLEO:** (*Moves away from him.*) And don't try wasting any time with any of your tricks to catch me in a lie. (*She looks at the others.*) It's been done. Why, I've been identified by one of the family, in fact.

**RASCAL:** Identified? By whom?

**CLEO:** By Aunt Jemmy.

**RASCAL:** (*Remembering something.*) Jemmy . . . Jemmy . . .

**CLEO:** That's right. (*She opens the SR door quickly.*) Daddy's sister!

*JEMMY falls through the door to the floor.*

**JEMMY:** Happy New Year!

**CLEO:** No, no, Aunt Jemmy, it's not the first. *(She and MARTHA move to JEMMY.)*

**JEMMY:** Of course not. Why am I on the floor?

*CLEO and MARTHA help her up.*

**MARTHA:** You came in to make some big announcement.

**JEMMY:** I did? Oh, yeah. I did. *(She looks at MARTHA.)* Hello, Ethel. *(She moves to the SHERIFF.)* Hello, Fred. *(She looks at PERCY.)* Hello, Ricky. *(She moves to RASCAL and looks up at him.)* Hello, Lamar Lee Rascal.

**PERCY:** Boy, EVERYBODY knows him, don't they!

**RASCAL:** Jemmy Jean Tanner! My dearest Jemmy! My . . . my one and only love!

**SHERIFF:** What?

**MARTHA:** Wait a minute! You mean he . . . *(She points to RASCAL.)* You mean he's the one that . . . ?

**JEMMY:** Left me at the altar all those years ago! *(Everyone in the room gasps.)* Let's kill him! *(She reaches for his throat, but is held off by the SHERIFF, MARTHA, and CLEO as the lights black out.)*

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

*A solo light comes up DSR. A gurney table has been rolled out with a PATIENT on it under a sheet. DOC LIVERWORTH is leaning over the table and is obviously just about to begin an operation.*

**LIVERWORTH:** Oh, I heard all about it. I . . . *(He lowers his mask and moves in front of the table.)* Excuse me, I heard all about it. Can you imagine, after all these years, Miss Jemmy and her jilter reuniting again? Well, you could've knocked me over with a malpractice suit. I mean, first that lawyer admits he doesn't know who hired him and then this? I tell you frankly, I think it's kinda funny. I got to thinkin' about it and started shaking with laughter. *(The PATIENT looks up and over at him in alarm.)* Oh, by the way, I'm Doc Liverworth. I was the one called in to examine Old Tanner the day they found him. Well, he was dead, all right. Take it from me. I mean, one thing I know a lot about FIRSTHAND is dead. And dead is dead. *(The PATIENT sits up suddenly and begins to quietly slide off the table.)* Oh, there wasn't any autopsy, didn't seem to be any need. There was the gun, gunshot wound, locked room, and a dead body, what's the big secret? *(The PATIENT looks out in the audience, a bit embarrassed, she holds the back of her gown and sidles offstage.)* And then this long-lost daughter. I knew it would just be a matter of time before I got called in again. *(He turns and moves back to the table, still talking to the audience.)* See, being a small-town doctor, I pretty much know everything about everybody. And it was in that capacity . . . *(He looks down and sees the PATIENT is gone. He looks under the sheet and then back to the audience.)* That's the problem around here. You can't keep a patient sick long enough to make 'em well. I'm going to install seat belts. *(He walks off stage.)* Nurse? Oh, Nurse?

*The light goes out on him. Lights come up in the den. FREIDA is sitting on the couch, taking notes. RASCAL is pacing behind the couch.*

**FREIDA:** So, after all these years, you came crawling back, is that it?

**RASCAL:** I hasten to remind the fourth estate that it was not in such a toadying position that I returned, but in the bailiwick of my offices required by law when my services are requested by others and acquiesced to by myself.

**FREIDA:** Right. How do you spell "bloodsucker?"

*RASCAL throws his hands in the air as MARTHA enters through the SR door.*

**MARTHA:** I'm sorry, Mr. Rascal, but Miss Jemmy refuses to speak to you and wishes you would leave the premises pronto.

**RASCAL:** Is that what she said?

**MARTHA:** Actually, what she really said was, "Tell the shyster to take a hike and what time is Jeopardy on?"

**RASCAL:** *(Pacing again.)* Oh my. What depths she has plumbed? What fantasies have plagued her since that fateful day? *(He tries again with MARTHA.)* You must make her see me. She must hear my side of the story. You will do that for me, won't you?

**MARTHA:** I am only hired help. I cannot take sides, you disgusting, back-sliding degenerate.

**RASCAL:** On second thought, don't help me.

**FREIDA:** Well, here's your chance, Mr. Rascal. Why not tell "The Shining Light" your story?

**RASCAL:** *(Moves to her.)* And you'll print it word for word?

**FREIDA:** You have my word on it. *(She snickers.)* But then again, I'm a reporter. My word's about as good as yours.

**RASCAL:** *(Sits next to her.)* I'll tell you, then. It all happened so quickly, yet I remember it like it was yesterday. It's all so . . . clear . . . in . . . my . . . mind. *(Slowly the lights dim to half for a medium pause and then come back up again.)* Sorry, I almost had a flashback there for a minute.

**FREIDA:** WHAT was THAT?

**MARTHA:** I think Herbie found the main power lines while searching for the clog. *(She exits into the kitchen.)*

**FREIDA:** You were saying?

**RASCAL:** I was all ready to marry Jemmy Jean. We were two kids, madly in love. I remember getting to the church early, nervous as a bridegroom, which I was, ironically. I was standing in the dressing area, adjusting my cummerbund, when suddenly a bag was shoved over my head and I was knocked unconscious. The next thing I remember, I awoke aboard a steamer headed for Russia.

**FREIDA:** Russia?

**RASCAL:** And worst of all, I couldn't remember a thing. I only knew I was on this ship dressed in a tux.

**FREIDA:** What happened next?

**RASCAL:** The boson's mate came in and told me I was Nils Yontok, the new conductor for the Budapest String Quartet.

**FREIDA:** How horrible!

**RASCAL:** Tell me about it.

**FREIDA:** When you regained your memory you must've wanted to come back here, right?

**RASCAL:** Yes, but by then I had traveled with the Quartet for three years, authored a best-seller called "Kremlin Cuisine," a cookbook for the masses, and had part ownership in a bait shop on Lake Lenin.

**FREIDA:** *(Writing.)* Yeah, I don't think we're going to have to punch this one up.

**RASCAL:** So, as you can see, my story is kind of hard to believe.

**FREIDA:** Not any harder than Cleo whatshername's. Did you know about her?

**RASCAL:** I was totally in the dark on the whole family. Otherwise, I would've known I would meet Jemmy again. I still haven't seen the will.

**FREIDA:** Wait a minute. *(She rises and moves to him.)* YOU don't have the will?

**RASCAL:** That's why I came here, remember? I am the executor. Tanner was going to give me the will and we were to go over the fine points. And I think I better act fast before this tragedy can be turned to somebody's advantage.

**FREIDA:** How do you mean?

A woman TOUR GUIDE enters through the SR door, followed by a group of people, including LYE, MISS SPARROW, THORA LOU, and MARGO MCMENACE.

**GUIDE:** And here we have the Ferdinand Mycroft Tanner den. Right this way, step lively now. I'm sure you will notice the rich fabrics and imported furniture. Mr. Tanner spared no expense in furnishing his estate. *(She moves to the SL door, followed by the group.)*

**THORA:** I heard he had someone come in here and do his hair.

**LYE:** The nerve.

**THORA:** That's why his head always looked like that.

**MARGO:** I bet the embalmer will fix that.

**SPARROW:** Does the embalmer do hair? I might try a new hairdresser. *(She looks at THORA.)*

**THORA:** Yes, give him a try, he works wonders with the DEAD.

**GUIDE:** Please stay with the group.

**FREIDA:** What's going on here?

**GUIDE:** Capitalism, little lady. Single file, one side. *(She indicates the garage door.)* And through this door was where the late Mr. Tanner was found. Notice the hardwood floors and the new brass hinges on the oak door frame.

**RASCAL:** See here, who authorized this circus?

*CLEO enters through the SR door, counting currency.*

**CLEO:** Twenty, twenty-five, thirty, forty, forty-five, fifty-five, sixty—

**RASCAL:** *(Crosses to CLEO.)* Miss Patrelle!

**CLEO:** Missus, remember? The grand? *(She makes a motion like something heavy falling.)* Whump!

**RASCAL:** I protest this intrusion. There is an impending investigation.

**CLEO:** Hey, it's my house! I figured I'd make a few bucks. This place is wearying, you know?

**RASCAL:** Wearying? This is too much.

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**CLEO:** (*Moves to the GROUP.*) Speaking of too much. Listen up, folks. When you pass through the lobby, don't forget to buy souvenirs for your loved ones: t-shirts, bumper stickers, pennants . . . all for sale.

*The CROWD looks at each other and various "OOOHS" and "AAHHHS" are heard.*

**GUIDE:** Now, if you'll follow me, I'll show you where all the meals are prepared. (*She crosses to the kitchen door.*) Please help yourself to punch and chocolate chip cookies, compliments of the house.

**MARGO:** What if we need to leave and come back?

**GUIDE:** Then don't forget to get your hand stamped. This way. (*She exits into the kitchen, followed by the GROUP.*)

**RASCAL:** Well, MRS. Patrelle, it sounds like you've had this planned for some time. Almost like you knew beforehand that your, quote, father, end quote, would depart this life.

**CLEO:** You'd like to prove that, wouldn't you, Mr. Jilter, Mr. Leave-'Em-Crying-at-the-Chapel!

**RASCAL:** Exactly my point! If you were at the wedding, then why didn't you recognize me right off?

**FREIDA:** Ah HA!

**CLEO:** (*After a pause.*) Because you didn't show up! I never saw you, did I?

**FREIDA:** Is that true? You never met Tanner's daughter?

**RASCAL:** (*Turns melodramatically.*) That's . . . true, I'm afraid.

**FREIDA:** (*Writes this.*) Nice take.

*MARTHA enters through the kitchen.*

**MARTHA:** Mr. Rascal.

**RASCAL:** What?

**MARTHA:** I just got a call from the sheriff.

**FREIDA:** Your brother?



**MARTHA:** Uh . . . yeah . . . sure. (*Back to RASCAL.*) Anyway, he just told me that he's on his way over here with what he called "a vital piece of the puzzle." Oh, and one other thing I thought of. (*She pulls RASCAL SL out of earshot of FREIDA and CLEO, who still try to listen.*) One other little thing that might help.

**RASCAL:** Another vital piece of the puzzle?

**MARTHA:** Could be. I just remembered the old family album that Mr. Tanner kept in the attic.

**RASCAL:** The family album?

**MARTHA:** The way he used to talk about it, I figger it goes back four, five generations. Maybe we can find something . . . a picture, at least, of Cleo.

**RASCAL:** Go get it and I'll make it worth your while.

**MARTHA:** I'll be back faster than a greased pig through a -

**RASCAL:** Is that a simile?

**MARTHA:** I'm a ghost. (*She exits, full steam ahead.*)

**CLEO:** So, when is the reading of the will, Mr. Rascal? I've got some renovations and concerts planned.

**RASCAL:** (*Sits on the couch.*) All in good time, little lady. We have a few legal wrinkles to iron out.

*PERCY WATERYARD enters through the SR door.*

**FREIDA:** Mr. Percy Wateryard, surely you know more than you're telling.

**PERCY:** (*Suddenly.*) Okay, I did it! I couldn't take it anymore! All he did was order me around. (*He falls to his knees.*) It kept building until I finally gave in to my harsher tendencies and stabbed him . . . (*He looks over at RASCAL.*) in the head . . . ?

**RASCAL:** But he was shot.

**PERCY:** I gotta start takin' notes.

**CLEO:** He's confessing? (*She crosses to RASCAL.*) Did you hear? He's confessing! Let's hang him and read the will!

**RASCAL:** (*Rises.*) That's EXACTLY what he wants us to do. (*He moves to PERCY.*)

**PERCY:** I ain't too keen on that hanging me part.

LET'S HANG HIM AND READ THE WILL

**RASCAL:** No, but you figure that if you confess, we can wrap up the case and read the will. Then you can admit that you were lying, BUT . . . the will's secrets will be out by that time.

**CLEO:** He's lying? Can we hang him anyway? That would be a crowd-pleaser and I could raise tour prices.

**RASCAL:** Forget it. *(He looks at FREIDA.)* Besides, as long as sensational stories keep happening around here, the press will also keep hanging around here, right?

**FREIDA:** *(Moves to them.)* And just what does that mean?

**RASCAL:** I mean, maybe he WANTS to keep you here. *(He leans in to her.)* Now why would THAT be?

**FREIDA:** I'm sure I wouldn't know. *(Quietly to PERCY.)* Get up.

**CLEO:** And you can start packing right now. As soon as this place comes under new management, namely mine, you are history.

**PERCY:** But you need me here . . . I take care of the grounds.

**CLEO:** Are you kidding? I could replace you with a weed-whacker.

**FREIDA:** *(Again, quietly to PERCY)* Me, too. *(To RASCAL.)* And just what were you implying, Mr. Rascal? Are you hinting that there is something going on between me and Mr. Wateryard?

**RASCAL:** You seem to spend a great deal of time up here.

**FREIDA:** Just doing my job. Investigative reporting. And I get a free lunch.

**CLEO:** Well, we'll soon put an end to THAT.

**FREIDA:** Why? Don't you want the press around?

**CLEO:** No, no more FREE lunches.

**JEMMY:** *(Off stage.)* Martha? Martha?

**CLEO:** It's Aunt Jemmy! It sounds like she's in trouble. *(She rushes to the SR door.)* It sounds like she's in pain. Oh no! *(She throws open the door and JEMMY again falls flat on the floor.)* Oh dear.

**JEMMY:** We need to re-carpet this room. Take it from somebody who knows.

**CLEO:** Oh, let me help you up. *(She, PERCY and FREIDA help JEMMY to her feet.)*

**JEMMY:** That's a good idea. *(She gets up and turns to FREIDA.)* Hello, Wally. *(She turns to PERCY)* Hello, Beaver.

**RASCAL:** You've . . . you've come down to talk to me. Please listen-

**JEMMY:** Sir, you saw fit to leave me on our wedding day 25 years ago and I want you to keep your distance.

**RASCAL:** Then why did you come down?

**JEMMY:** Because I heard that you think that someone knocked off my brother and I want to know where they knocked him to. (*The others help her to the couch, where she plops down.*)

**RASCAL:** It's just a theory.

**JEMMY:** State it, your law-highness.

*RASCAL opens his briefcase.*

**FREIDA:** Yes, just how is it possible to murder someone in a room with no windows and both doors locked from the inside?

**RASCAL:** With the help . . . of an ice pick. (*He takes out the ice pick. Everyone stares at it.*)

**PERCY:** (*After a pause.*) But he was shot . . . in the head.

**FREIDA:** (*To the others.*) NOW he remembers.

**RASCAL:** Exactly. This ice pick was a means of escape for the murderer!

*Suddenly, the lights go out.*

**CLEO:** What in the world?

**PERCY:** I don't believe this.

**FREIDA:** What happened?

**PERCY:** It's probably Herbie the plumber.

**RASCAL:** Don't anybody move! Jemmy Jean, are you all right? (*No answer.*)

**ALL:** Jemmy Jean????

*After a slight pause, loud snoring is heard.*

**FREIDA:** At least she's alright. Mr. Rascal?

**RASCAL:** Present.

**FREIDA:** Percy?

**PERCY:** Here.

**CLEO:** What was that?

**PERCY:** Roll call!

**RASCAL:** What? Oof!

**CLEO:** Someone just ran past me.

LET'S HANG HIM AND READ THE WILL

**FREIDA:** Percy?

**PERCY:** All right, I did it! I cut the electric wires! I couldn't take it anymore!

**ALL:** Shut up!

**CLEO:** Somebody DO something!

*The lights come up again.*

**CLEO:** I think someone is trying to frighten us.

**FREIDA:** But who'd want to do that?

**CLEO:** Yeah, who?

**PERCY:** Well, at least we're all still here. And . . . *(He notices that RASCAL is crawling on the floor.)* What're you doing?

**RASCAL:** Somebody bumped into me.

**CLEO:** I KNEW IT! I knew I felt somebody run past me. *(She points to RASCAL.)* And he came from your direction.

**RASCAL:** Must've been after he hit me.

**PERCY:** A HE? What if it was a she?

*Everyone looks at each other skeptically, broken by JEMMY JEAN's long, loud snore.*

**RASCAL:** Somebody wake her up.

**PERCY:** Why? She makes more sense asleep.

**CLEO:** *(Sits next to JEMMY.)* Aunt Jemmy? Wake up, Aunt Jemmy.

**JEMMY:** *(Wakes.)* Huh! Did the tooth fairy come yet?

**CLEO:** It's all right. We're right here.

**JEMMY:** What day is it? I get a quarter for my molars from the tooth fairy.

**FREIDA:** It's the same day as it was earlier and Mr. Rascal was just explaining the significance of a certain ice pick he found.

**RASCAL:** Which appears to be missing now.

**PERCY:** What?

**RASCAL:** Maybe it was stolen in the dark. *(He looks at the others.)* Of course, somebody knew it would give them away. Somebody here in this room. One of you.

**FREIDA:** And one of us just happened to sneak out while nobody was looking and flip off the lights?

**RASCAL:** Maybe . . . a hired accomplice.

**PERCY:** And maybe that ice pick is just some kind of red herring.

**JEMMY:** I'll have some, with mint jelly.

**CLEO:** Yuck!

**RASCAL:** Well, the facts are that the lights blew and the ice pick is missing.

*A knock is heard on the SR door. Everyone looks at it as MARTHA opens it, carrying a tray with cookies on it. She moves quietly into the room and then plunges face down onto CLEO and FREIDA, dropping the tray. There is an ice pick stuck in her back. CLEO and FREIDA scream.*

**JEMMY:** *(Matter-of-factly.)* There it is.

**PERCY:** *(Emotionally.)* Martha!

**FREIDA:** *(Points to RASCAL.)* He had the ice pick! He ran past me and Cleo in the dark and he stabbed Martha!

**RASCAL:** It wasn't me!

**JEMMY:** Then who stole the cookies from the cookie jar?

**FREIDA:** *(She points to PERCY.)* Okay. He did it! He grabbed the ice pick, ran past Cleo and stabbed Martha in the dark!

**PERCY:** Couldn't be.

**JEMMY:** Then who?

*The SHERIFF enters through the door.*

**SHERIFF:** What's going on here?

**FREIDA:** *(Moves to him.)* Sheriff Tyred, it's Martha! She's been murdered!

**RASCAL:** Because she KNEW something. Of course! She was going to bring me the family album.

**SHERIFF:** Martha? Oh, my poor -

**FREIDA:** Sister.

**SHERIFF:** Ah, right.

*RASCAL grabs the SHERIFF by his shoulders and shakes him.*

*LET'S HANG HIM AND READ THE WILL*

**RASCAL:** Did you hear me, Sheriff! The family album is the key! It holds the secret to our newfound heir, here!

**CLEO:** And just what do you mean . . . *(She pushes MARTHA over so that she can get up. To JEMMY.)* Will you hold this?

**JEMMY:** Sure. We'll take turns.

**CLEO:** *(Rises.)* Just what do you mean? I AM Mycroft Tanner's daughter.

**SHERIFF:** Yeah? Then who is this? *(He indicates for someone to enter. CLEO #2 enters.)* She says she's Cleo Patrelle and she hit town about the same time you did.

**CLEO:** What?

**RASCAL:** Wait a minute. She says SHE'S Cleo?

**SHERIFF:** Yes, and she would've come straight here except for one thing.

**RASCAL:** What was that?

**CLEO 2:** I was robbed. Somebody put a bag over my head and I was knocked unconscious.

**SHERIFF:** And tell them what was stolen.

**JEMMY:** The cookies?

**CLEO 2:** No, the silver charm necklace Aunt Jemmy gave me on the day of her wedding.

*Everyone in the room, except JEMMY, gasps and turns to stare at CLEO. After a pause.*

**JEMMY:** *(Points to the cookies.)* Are those cookies for us?

**BLACKOUT.**

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