

# MANOR OF DEATH

## By Craig Sodaro

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## **CHARACTERS**

*(7 male, 8 female):*

ARVID JUDD	A gardener at the Killgore estate
ARCHIE CONRAD	30's, owner of the bookstore
RACHEL CONRAD	30's, his wife and partner
NEPTUNE	19, a tough street kid
KEELY	Late teens, his girlfriend
SCORPION	Late teens, their friend
FAWN BUTTERFIELD	40's, a police detective
PEG PARKER	30's, a police sergeant
ROSALIE SCOTT	50's, Rachel's overprotective mother
EDMUND SCOTT	50's, Rachel's father
SEBASTIAN KILLGORE	30's, nephew of a famous writer, Preston Killgore
RENEE KILLGORE	40's, the writer's ex-wife
CLINT DANZINGER	30's, Renee's latest boyfriend
IRENE CROFT	50's, housekeeper at the Killgore estate
EVELYN DUPREY	50's, secretary to Preston Killgore

NOTE: The parts of FIGURE and OLD LADY are played by two characters listed above. The parts of ARVID and EDMUND can easily be played by the same actor. Thus 6 males and 8 females are needed for the show.

## **SETTING**

Manor of Death Mystery Bookstore, late one night. Wing entrance down right leads to outside. If desired, there can be a door. Wing entrance left leads to back room and rear exit into an alley. Counter up right holds a cash register, computer, telephone, small lamp, and a bust of a famous author such as Poe or Shakespeare. Bookshelves stand against upstage wall, with mystery posters decorating the wall. A sign near counter can read “Manor of Death Mystery Bookstore.” Bookshelf up left down far enough from upstage wall so characters can hide behind it and be unseen by the audience. Several comfortable mismatched chairs sit down right with a small, low table in front of them. A poster up center advertises “Book Signing by local mystery writer Preston Killgore.” “Book Signing” is covered over with “Tribute to.” The room is decorated to look as much like an old-fashioned mansion library as possible. Decorations might include a stuffed raven, skull, pictures of Edgar Allan Poe, and so on.

## **DESIGN NOTE**

There is no need to cart hundreds of books to the stage. Paint the majority of books on strips that “fill” shelves or just paint bookshelves to place here and there on stage. Have one or two real bookshelves holding real books that can be used by the actors. Since this is a bookstore, plants, posters, objects d’art, and so on can be added to break the monotony of books standing on shelves.

## **SYNOPSIS OF SCENES**

### **ACT I**

Scene One      The Manor of Death Mystery Bookstore, late one night.

Scene Two      The same, early the following morning.

Scene Three     The same, that afternoon, just before four o’clock.

## ACT II

Scene One      The same, the following afternoon.

Scene Two      The same, the following evening.

## COSTUME NOTES

Everyday casual clothing for all as befits the character.

Neptune, Keely, and Scorpion should dress as “punk” as possible so that their change in Act II, Scene 2 is all the more noticeable. Since their change needs to be fast, it might be a good idea if possible to wear the “punk” clothes over the nicer costumes. Neptune needs a trench coat and fedora for the last scene when he plays the role of detective.

Older characters such as Irene and Evelyn should dress accordingly. Irene might wear a patterned housedress and an apron (gone in Act II, Scene 2), while Evelyn should dress as a professional, a suit or a skirt, blouse, and jacket.

Renee should dress with as much color and flair as possible. Cliff should likewise be fashionable and colorful.

Rosalie dresses dramatically, with a flowing cape, a colorful hat, and lots of costume jewelry. By contrast, Edmund wears a dark sweater along with earth-tone slacks. A bow tie might be a nice touch.

Since they're detectives, Fawn and Peg do not wear uniforms. They should dress according to character. Fawn does need to wear a jacket or coat that can hold her radio on her shoulder and have pockets for the handcuffs.

## SOUND EFFECTS

Glass breaking  
Door creaking open  
Gunshots (as indicated in script)  
Cell phone ringing  
Regular phone ringing

**PROP LIST**

PRESET

Books on shelves  
Bust on the counter

PRESET FOR ACT II, SCENE 2

Punchbowl and glasses  
Podium

FOR ARVID

Book from shelf  
Will—folded paper

FOR ARCHIE

Jacket  
Cell phone  
Stacks of books  
Large book  
Box of books  
Plastic bag holding two pens

FOR RACHEL

Books  
Papers

FOR NEPTUNE

Badge

FOR FAWN

Cell phone  
Handcuffs

FOR PEG

Latex gloves  
Pen & small notebook  
Book from shelf  
Cell phone  
Large fishnet

FOR ROSALIE

Feather duster  
Books  
Tray holding several mugs

FOR EDMUND

Bags  
Key  
Stacks of books  
Receipt

FOR CLINT

Paper  
Gun

FOR IRENE

Rolling pin

FOR EVELYN

Pen  
Large fishnet

FOR OLD LADY (EVELYN)

Pen & small notebook

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## ACT I

### SCENE ONE

**SETTING:** Manor of Death Mystery Bookstore, late one night. Wing entrance down right leads to outside. If desired, there can be a door. Wing entrance left leads to back room and rear exit into an alley. Counter up right holds a cash register, computer, small lamp, and a small bust of a famous author such as Poe or Shakespeare. Bookshelves stand against upstage wall, with mystery posters decorating the wall. A sign near counter can read "Manor of Death Mystery Bookstore." Bookshelf up left down far enough from upstage wall so characters can hide behind it and be unseen by the audience. Several comfortable mismatched chairs sit down right with a small, low table in front of them. A poster up center advertises "Book Signing by local mystery writer Preston Killgore." "Book Signing" is covered over with "Tribute to." The room is decorated to look as much like an old-fashioned mansion library as possible. Decorations might include a stuffed raven, skull, pictures of Edgar Allan Poe, and so on.

**AT RISE:** *The set is dimly lit by the single lamp on the counter. We hear the sound of glass breaking off left, then a door creaking open. A moment later ARVID enters left nervously. HE holds a paper in his hand.*

ARVID: Hello? You here? It's eleven. I'm right on time! And look what I got! *(Waves paper)* Thought you just might want to see what you're up against. Makes it so much easier to pay my ... asking price. *(Looks around the room, sees the poster, laughs)* No wonder you wanted to meet here. Poor Preston ... but rich us! Very, very rich us! *(To himself)* Let's just get this baby hidden 'til the right moment. Eenie, meenie, minie moe!

*(ARVID pulls a book or two from shelf left. When HE finds one HE likes, HE sticks the paper in it and re-shelves the book. HE moves to the counter just as we hear the door off left creak open. ARVID looks up nervously, then slips behind the counter. FIGURE, completely covered in black wearing a ski mask enters cautiously left. FIGURE looks around the room, hears a noise behind the counter, moves around and grabs ARVID.)*

Hey! You're not—

*(THEY struggle. FIGURE grabs bust from the counter. Their struggle moves behind the bookshelf left out of the audience's view. FIGURE staggers from behind the bookshelves, sets bust back on the counter, shakes off what has happened. FIGURE hears ... )*

ARCHIE: *(Off left)* Hey! Hey! What're you doing?

NEPTUNE: *(Off left)* You talking to me?

ARCHIE: *(Off left)* Yeah, I'm talking to you!

*(FIGURE exits left quickly just as ARCHIE and RACHEL enter right. ARCHIE holds a jacket. NEPTUNE, KEELY, and SCORPION follow on left.)*

NEPTUNE: Hey, man, give that back!

KEELY: *(To ARCHIE)* It ain't your jacket!

ARCHIE: You were soaping our windows!

SCORPION: *(Sarcastically)* Just washin' 'em! They're ... dirty.

RACHEL: I washed them this afternoon.

KEELY: Yeah? Well, you missed a spot.

ARCHIE: I'm calling the police.

RACHEL: Archie, Archie ... they're just kids.

NEPTUNE: Who are you callin' a kid? I'm nineteen!

KEELY: Yeah! And I'm ... he's nineteen!

ARCHIE: Do your parents know where you are?

*(NEPTUNE, KEELY, and SCORPION convulse with laughter.)*

NEPTUNE: Man, what century do you live in?

KEELY: *(Sarcastically)* Sure, man, they know.

SCORPION: *(Laughing)* They know we're not at home!

RACHEL: So you get your kicks by soaping windows up and down the street?

NEPTUNE: No way!

ARCHIE: Oh, that's right. You *wash* the windows.

KEELY: Just yours, Man!

RACHEL: Why just ours?

SCORPION: You want to know the truth? We don't like you.

RACHEL: That's not very fair, is it? We've never even met you. I ... I'm Rachel ... and this is my husband, Archie.

KEELY: Well, how dee doo!

NEPTUNE: Hey! Mind your manners, kid. That's Scorpion ... Keely ... and I'm Neptune.

ARCHIE: Did you graduate with those names?

*(NEPTUNE, KEELY, and SCORPION again are convulsed with laughter.)*

NEPTUNE: Graduate?

KEELY: Yeah! We got diplomas, all right!

SCORPION: From the school of hard knocks.

NEPTUNE: *(Ominously)* And you're gonna get one if you don't close up this place and get lost!

RACHEL: We ... we just opened!

ARCHIE: And we mean to stay.

SCORPION: A bookstore? Here?

RACHEL: There isn't another bookstore in a five mile radius.

NEPTUNE: That's because nobody in a five mile radius can read!

ARCHIE: Look, just because you can't—

*(NEPTUNE grabs ARCHIE by the collar.)*

NEPTUNE: Don't, Man!

KEELY: Neptune! Cool it!

*(NEPTUNE shoves ARCHIE away.)*

NEPTUNE: I can read!

SCORPION: Yeah! Big deal!

RACHEL: I think you'd better go and take your soap with you!

NEPTUNE: I'm warning you--pack up and get out!

ARCHIE: Look, we'll get the police on you so fast you won't know what end is up.

NEPTUNE: Yeah? Think again, buddy boy!

KEELY: They know who's in charge in this neighborhood.

RACHEL: Oh, you're the big man around here.

NEPTUNE: And unless you want to lose everything ... close the door and lock it.

RACHEL: Look, we're trying to improve your territory, Neptune. Can't you see that? This was an old tattoo parlor ... falling apart.

SCORPION: Mack was our friend! His shop was a good place!

KEELY: Until you talked him into selling!

ARCHIE: We didn't talk anybody into anything.

NEPTUNE: Mack would never have quit like that.

ARCHIE: Mack has cancer. He needed to be closer to his kids.

KEELY: *(Incredulously)* What? You're just making that up!

RACHEL: Why would we do that?

SCORPION: I don't know ... why would you?



NEPTUNE: It doesn't matter, guys. They're out of here. And the sooner, the better! C'mon!

*(NEPTUNE, KEELY, and SCORPION move right. Just before exiting, NEPTUNE turns back to center.)*

And it better be real soon!

*(SCORPION salutes casually, then follows NEPTUNE and KEELY off right. RACHEL and ARCHIE breath a sigh of relief. ARCHIE falls into chair at right.)*

ARCHIE: I guess that was the neighborhood Welcome Wagon.

RACHEL: The realtor warned us this would be a tough neighborhood at first.

ARCHIE: *(Mimicking)* But it'll be gentrified in a year or so.

RACHEL: It's going to take more than a year to gentrify those three!

ARCHIE: Should I call the police?

RACHEL: I'm not so sure. They forgot the jacket.

ARCHIE: Oh, great! Now they'll be back.

RACHEL: *(After a slight pause)* Archie, do you think we made a mistake?

ARCHIE: Opening this place?

RACHEL: Yeah.

ARCHIE: It's been our dream. *(Stands, and looks around proudly)* Our very own mystery book store. Our very own! I think we wanted this from the moment we met.

RACHEL: Who would have thought you'd meet the man of your dreams at an Edgar Allan Poe seminar?

ARCHIE: Or the girl of your dreams.

RACHEL: You know something, Archie Conrad? I wouldn't mind being walled up if you're entombed with me.

ARCHIE: As long as we've got a glass of *amontillado*.

*(ARCHIE and RACHEL embrace.)*

We'll make a go of this place. You'll see!

RACHEL: Despite our welcoming party?

ARCHIE: I have a feeling they'll be gone before we are.

RACHEL: How about locking up and calling it a night?

ARCHIE: I'm ready.

*(ARCHIE exits right as RACHEL moves behind the counter.)*

RACHEL: *(Freezing)* Archie? Archie?

*(ARCHIE enters right, having locked the door.)*

ARCHIE: What's wrong?

RACHEL: *(Holding up the statue)* Archie, there's blood all over this thing.

ARCHIE: What'd you do, cut yourself?

RACHEL: No.

ARCHIE: Maybe it's just some paint or something.

RACHEL: It's blood, Archie. I know it!

ARCHIE: A calling card from our midnight visitors?

RACHEL: This is too creepy even for a mystery book store!

*(ARCHIE exits left quickly.)*

Archie? Be careful!

*(RACHEL moves left, notices something behind bookcase and moves towards upstage side of left bookcase. SHE now sees ARVID. SHE backs to center in horror.)*

Archie! Archie!

*(ARCHIE enters left.)*

ARCHIE: Somebody broke in!

*(In terror, RACHEL points behind bookcase. ARCHIE takes a look.)*

Oh, no! Oh, no!

*(ARCHIE takes out his cell phone.)*

I ... I need the police! Hurry!

*(The curtain falls.)*

## **SCENE TWO**

**SETTING:** The Bookstore, early the following morning.

**AT RISE: RACHEL and ARCHIE sit in chairs at right. THEY are exhausted. FAWN stands between them, her arms folded. PEG, wearing gloves, searches about the room.**

FAWN: Let's go over it again, folks!

ARCHIE: *(Tiredly)* We told you everything that happened!

RACHEL: Six times already!

ARCHIE: We've got to get ready to open.

FAWN: You what? You see that yellow tape out there! Crime scene tape! Nobody crosses that tape unless I say so and I don't say so, buddy boy!

ARCHIE: *(Under his breath)* I'm not your "Buddy boy."

FAWN: What?

ARCHIE: Nothing! Nothing!

FAWN: So, you came in at eleven last night. Where were you before that?

ARCHIE: A movie.

FAWN: What movie?

RACHEL: Premature Burial.

FAWN: *(Looking disgustedly around the room)* Figures!

*(PEG selects a book, pages through it, then begins to read.)*

ARCHIE: They're having a retrospective of classic horror films at the Delmont.

FAWN: You two like horror movies, ha?

RACHEL: They're fun.

FAWN: Figures! A couple of killers *would* really like all that blood and gore!

ARCHIE: Who are you calling killers?!

RACHEL: Really, this is ridiculous!

FAWN: Look at this place! Manor of Death! What kind of name for a bookstore is that?

ARCHIE: It's a mystery book store. We sell mysteries.

FAWN: It's wrong, buddy boy! It's really wrong, right, Sgt. Palmer?

*(PEG, too interested in her book, doesn't answer.)*

Palmer!

*(PEG, startled, throws the book into the air.)*

PEG: Ha? What? Were you calling me?

FAWN: *(Moving in on PEG)* You're supposed to be searching the place for clues!

PEG: I ... I was!

FAWN: Not in the books!

PEG: Oh, but I open a Mary Higgins Clark (*or other mystery writer*), and I'm hooked! What ... what did you ask me?

FAWN: I wanted your opinion on this whole Manor of Death thing.

PEG: Well, the victim was bludgeoned with a bust of --

FAWN: I mean the store!

PEG: (*To RACHEL and ARCHIE*) I think it's very clever! And I know it's going to be a wonderful addition to this neighborhood. We've been needing a store like this ... and now that you're here, I think we'll see some nicer businesses moving in—

FAWN: Palmer! That wasn't the opinion I wanted. Go back to whatever you were doing!

PEG: Right, chief.

*(PEG resumes her searching, but actually just picks up her book and begins to read again.)*

FAWN: So, you'd whetted your appetite for murder and mayhem at the movie.

RACHEL: I wouldn't put it like that.

FAWN: I would. And my opinion's the one that counts!

ARCHIE: (*Under his breath*) We noticed.

FAWN: (*Ominously*) What was that?

ARCHIE: Nothing! Once our appetites were whetted we walked home.

FAWN: In this neighborhood? You expect me to believe that?

RACHEL: It was a lovely night.

FAWN: There hasn't been a lovely night in this neighborhood since I was sixteen.

RACHEL: You grew up here?

FAWN: This is my territory, lady, and don't forget it.

ARCHIE: I thought it was Neptune's territory.

FAWN: (*With a cynical laugh*) Neptune? That weasel? Little Mr. Tough Guy?

RACHEL: He and his friends were soaping our windows when we got home.

FAWN: Soaping! Ha! (*Laughs heartily*) You hear that, Palmer? They were soaping the windows!

*(PEG, deep in her book, fails to respond.)*

Palmer!

*(PEG throws the book into the air again.)*

PEG: What? I'm sorry!

FAWN: I can't wait 'til your next performance report! I don't think there's a score low enough for you!

RACHEL: Detective, would you like a cup of tea or something? It might calm you down. Your nerves must be a bit frazzled ...

FAWN: (*Frazzled*) My nerves aren't frazzled! So what if I just found out my house payment has gone up! My daughter is seeing a bum I can't stand! My brother just moved in with his three kids! My nerves are just fine! Just fine!

PEG: Take a deep breath.

(*FAWN tries.*)

Deeper!

(*FAWN takes a small breath.*)

Deeper!

(*FAWN takes a full, deep breath.*)

You know what your therapist said. Take time, take breaths, and you'll feel much better.

RACHEL: Therapist?

FAWN: You have a problem with that?

RACHEL: Absolutely not.

FAWN: (*Regaining her "composure"*) All right ... you came in and talked to the window washers.

ARCHIE: They weren't exactly washing the—

FAWN: What happened when they left?

ARCHIE: I locked the front door.

RACHEL: I went around the counter to turn off the computer. That's when I found the statue with blood on it.

FAWN: Your statue?

RACHEL: Yes ... yes, it was a wedding gift.

FAWN: Then what?

ARCHIE: I checked the back door and found out someone had broken in.

RACHEL: And I ... I found ... him.

FAWN: The victim! How well did you know the victim?

RACHEL: I ... we ... didn't.

FAWN: We believe that, don't we, Palmer?

PEG: Don't we?

FAWN: (*Moving to the poster*) Did you overlook this piece of evidence?

PEG: The poster?

RACHEL: We're having a tribute to Preston Killgore in a few days. It was supposed to be a book signing, but Mr. Killgore died suddenly last week.

FAWN: You think I don't read the papers?

PEG: It was some kind of stomach trouble. *(To FAWN)* I read the papers, too!

ARCHIE: I'm missing something here. What does Preston Killgore have to do with the victim?

FAWN: As if you didn't know!

ARCHIE: We ... don't know.

FAWN: You're mighty good at playing innocent, you two.

RACHEL: We *are* innocent!

ARCHIE: Look, we know enough about police procedure to end this interview here and now. You have no right to question us without our attorney present and even then we have the right to remain silent.

FAWN: Well, listen to the Chief Justice of the Supreme Pizza here!

PEG: He's right.

FAWN: I know he's right! And you both know the victim was Preston Killgore's gardener!

RACHEL: What?

FAWN: Palmer!

PEG: *(Flips to page in her notebook and reads)* His name was Arvid Judd. He lived at the Killgore Estate in the gardener's house. He worked for Mr. Killgore for fifteen years. No known relations, allergies, or criminal record.

ARCHIE: Kind of a weird coincidence.

FAWN: We don't believe in coincidences, do we, Palmer?

PEG: Well, I've known a few—

FAWN: Palmer!

PEG: Absolutely not!

FAWN: So, how well did you two know Preston Killgore?

ARCHIE: Didn't know him at all.

RACHEL: And I met him on two occasions. I first met him at a book signing last year and then I went to see him three weeks ago to arrange the book signing here.

FAWN: So you must have bumped into the gardener on that visit.

RACHEL: Sorry to disappoint you, but I only saw his secretary and the housekeeper.

FAWN: Sure, sure, sure.

*(FAWN's cell phone rings.)*

Butterfield here! Right. Right. You don't say! That makes our job a little easier.

*(FAWN snaps her phone shut.)*

Well, well, well!

RACHEL: What's wrong?

FAWN: Seems like yours are the only fingerprints on the weapon.

ARCHIE: That's ... well, that's ridiculous.

FAWN: Don't call forensics ridiculous, buddy boy!

RACHEL: I did pick up the statue.

ARCHIE: And the killer probably wore gloves! Any idiot can see that!

FAWN: You used the "I" word! I don't like the "I" word!

ARCHIE: Well, I didn't mean ... you ... naturally.

FAWN: So, little lady ... you got anything better than that to offer in your defense?

*(ROSALIE, in a flowing cape, dramatic hat, and plenty of jewelry sweeps on right followed by EDMUND.)*

ROSALIE: Rachel, darling! We came as soon as we heard about this awful business on the Today Show! You're coming home right now with your father and me, right, Edmund?

EDMUND: Actually, Rosalie, I don't think there's any reason to run off.

FAWN: *(To RACHEL, pointedly)* Is there?

RACHEL: No! None at all!

ROSALIE: *(Looking FAWN up and down)* And who are you? The cleaning lady?

FAWN: You hear that, Palmer? The cleaning lady!

RACHEL: This is Detective Fawn Butterfield, mother.

FAWN: Homicide division!

ROSALIE: Well! I hope you've got this thing solved by now!

FAWN: Maybe once we get the suspects down to the station we can get a confession out of them.

ROSALIE: What's stopping you?

FAWN: You're in our way!

EDMUND: Oh, Detective, you don't mean my daughter and her husband are suspects, do you?

FAWN: You see anybody else?

ROSALIE: *(Pointing to PEG)* Her!

FAWN: That's Sgt. Peg Palmer, my partner. Now, lady, I want to know just how you got across that police tape out there!

ROSALIE: Oh, Rachel, I think it's a very nice touch, but aren't you afraid a customer might trip over that stuff?

FAWN: You're not supposed to cross it, lady! You're not supposed to be in here!

ROSALIE: Why not?

FAWN: It's a crime scene!

ROSALIE: I know ... and I warned Rachel not to get involved in this crazy bookstore idea. I mean, darling, why couldn't you have married Richard? He's a doctor!

RACHEL: Because I wasn't in love with Richard. (*Takes ARCHIE'S hand*) Archie's the guy for me.

EDMUND: Good for you two. I always thought you were made for each other!

ROSALIE: Edmund, what would you know about it? Look at this! A bookstore! In this neighborhood! A tiny apartment upstairs! I would love to get my hands on the idiot who lent you the down payment!

FAWN: Did I hear the "I" word!

RACHEL: The detective hates the "I" word.

ARCHIE: At least it didn't refer to you this time. I mean ...

FAWN: That's it, buddy boy! You two are coming down to the station!

RACHEL: What for?

FAWN: We'll get your formal statements there! Go start the car, Palmer!

PEG: Right, chief! (*Exits right*)

ROSALIE: Detective, you're not taking my daughter anywhere!

FAWN: Oh, no? Who's going to stop me?

ROSALIE: Edmund! Call our lawyer!

EDMUND: He's in the Caymans fishing.

FAWN: Let's go you two!

RACHEL: Mom, just stay here and stay out of trouble.

ARCHIE: We'll be right back.

ROSALIE: I'll do no such thing! I'm coming with you!

FAWN: Then I'll arrest you for obstructing justice—and frankly, lady, I'll bet you're good at that!

ROSALIE: I know the mayor! I know our congressman! I know the governor!

RACHEL: Mom! Stay here and handle the store!

FAWN: Don't let anybody cross that police tape!

(*FAWN leads RACHEL and ARCHIE off right.*)

EDMUND: (*Calling after them*) We'll be right here, kids, when you get back. Have a good time!

ROSALIE: Edmund! They're not going on a date!

EDMUND: (*Sighing happily*) Anything those two do together is a date. Isn't this place terrific?

ROSALIE: It's ... it's a ... store.

EDMUND: But it's a wonderful store!

ROSALIE: (*Crumpling into chair*) I just ... just wanted something ... something different for Rachel.

EDMUND: But apparently this is what Rachel wanted.



ROSALIE: Oh, what would you know about it?

*(A very OLD LADY enters right using a walker. SHE wears a hat, thick glasses, is hunched over bundled under her shawl and long, print dress.)*

OLD LADY: Guess you're open!

EDMUND: Well, now, Ma'am, all that police tape means—

OLD LADY: Nice touch! Nice touch! Caught my eye. Now where are your Raymond Chandlers?

*(EDMUND begins checking the bookshelves.)*

ROSALIE: Edmund, what are you doing?

EDMUND: Well, we're new here, Ma'am, so let me just look around a bit. Ah! Here you go! Raymond Chandler!

OLD LADY: Thanks, sonny!

*(OLD LADY moves to upstage bookshelf and begins to look at titles. She pulls out a pen and small tablet and begins checking off titles on her list. EDMUND moves behind the counter and turns on computer as NEPTUNE, KEELY, and SCORPION enter right.)*

NEPTUNE: Well, well, well!

KEELY: Look like you got yourselves into some trouble!

EDMUND: May I help you?

SCORPION: Where's the young ones, Pop?

ROSALIE: *(Offended)* Who are you? What do you want?

NEPTUNE: Customers, lady. Anything wrong with that?

ROSALIE: Any title in particular you're looking for?

KEELY: Yeah! *Mind Your Own Business* by Fist in Your Face!

SCORPION: Good one, Keely!

NEPTUNE: So where'd the guy get bumped off?

ROSALIE: It ... it was all ... just an accident.

KEELY: Lady, the cops were here all night. It wasn't any accident.

SCORPION: *(Moving behind bookshelf left)* Hey, guys! Look at this!

*(NEPTUNE and KEELY move to him.)*

X marks the spot.

NEPTUNE: So what'd they do it for?

ROSALIE: They didn't do it!

KEELY: Yeah, and I'm Joan Rivers.

ROSALIE: I don't care if you're Joan of Arc, my daughter would never have done such a thing!

EDMUND: Neither would our son-in-law.

ROSALIE: We'll let the jury decide that, Edmund.

NEPTUNE: Oh, so you're Mom and Pop!

KEELY: They giving day passes at the nursing home?

EDMUND: Our daughter's seems to be having a bit of trouble, so we're here to help out.

NEPTUNE: Yeah? You do that a lot?

KEELY: Must be nice!

OLD LADY: Oh, dear, can someone help me? I can't reach a book.

ROSALIE: *(To SCORPION)* You! The tall one, help that lady.

SCORPION: Me? What do you think I am, a Boy Scout? Get it for her yourself!

ROSALIE: Don't you talk that way to me, young man!

KEELY: Go on, Scorpion. It won't kill you!

SCORPION: What if the shelf falls on top of me?

NEPTUNE: You'd be the only friend I ever had who got killed by a book.

SCORPION: You're as funny as a loaded thirty-eight.

EDMUND: What was that, young man?

SCORPION: Nothing! *(To OLD LADY)* Which one you want?

OLD LADY: The last one on that side.

*(SCORPION reaches up for a book and pulls it down. HE hands it to her.)*

SCORPION: Here.

OLD LADY: *(Looking at the title)* No, it's not that one.

*(SCORPION replaces the book.)*

The next one over.

*(SCORPION pulls down book and hands it to her.)*

No, this isn't it, either.

SCORPION: Make up your mind, lady!

ROSALIE: Young man, the customer is always right!

*(SCORPION pulls down a third book and hands it to OLD LADY. SEBASTIAN enters right and begins to look around.)*

OLD LADY: Yes! This is it! *The Body in the Book Store.*

KEELY: Gosh, Scorpion, you looked like a real Boy Scout for a minute.

NEPTUNE: I was thinking more like a Girl Scout.

*(SCORPION punches NEPTUNE in the arm.)*

EDMUND: Thanks for your help, kids, but if there's nothing else you need—

NEPTUNE: We're gonna browse.

KEELY: We're real good at browsing!

*(NEPTUNE, KEELY, and SCORPION begin to look at books, but suspiciously.)*

ROSALIE: Edmund, we should lock the door!

EDMUND: Rosalie, business is business and the kids could use some.

SEBASTIAN: Excuse me, but are you two the owners?

ROSALIE: Of this? You've got to be kidding!

SEBASTIAN: Where can I find the owners, then?

EDMUND: They just ... stepped out for a while, but we'd be glad to help you.

SEBASTIAN: Actually, I think I might be able to help you.

*(ROSALIE finds a duster and begins to dust everything.)*

ROSALIE: Then grab the Windex and do the windows! They look like they're full of soap!

*(NEPTUNE, KEELY, and SCORPION glance at one another and grin.)*

EDMUND: I don't think this gentleman meant help in that context, Rosalie.

SEBASTIAN: No, I didn't.

EDMUND: Are you looking for a book?

SEBASTIAN: Actually I'm looking for a book store.

EDMUND: Any particular kind?

SEBASTIAN: Well, these days with the mega-bookstores, an independent owner has to find a niche. Mystery book stores do well. My experience has been that mystery lovers will kill for a good book.

*(OLD LADY drops a book or two.)*

Poor choice of words, sorry. Anyway, I really would be interested in buying this store.

EDMUND: Well, Mr. ... Mr. ...

SEBASTIAN: Mr. Smith. Jim Smith.

EDMUND: Well, Mr. Smith, I don't really think my daughter and her husband would be interested in selling—

*(ROSALIE sidles up to SEBASTIAN as NEPTUNE, KEELY, and SCORPION slip off left.)*

ROSALIE: Oh, now, Edmund! I don't really think we can speak for them. They may be very interested in selling especially if I have anything to say about it!

SEBASTIAN: And I bet you'd have a lot to say about it.

ROSALIE: Well, they're young and very inexperienced ... and after what happened last night ...

SEBASTIAN: Something happened?

ROSALIE: Didn't you see all that police tape out there?

SEBASTIAN: I thought that was just ... decoration.

ROSALIE: There was a murder here!

SEBASTIAN: You don't say! Anyone you knew?

EDMUND: Rosalie, that's enough gossip.

ROSALIE: If Mr. Smith is interested in buying the place, Edmund, he ought to have the full story.

SEBASTIAN: So what is the full story?

ROSALIE: A pair of thieves broke in hoping to rob the place but then fought and one killed the other. Terrible! There's no honor among thieves!

EDMUND: Rosalie! Do you want to scare Mr. Smith away?

SEBASTIAN: Oh, no ... a murder right here ... why ... that makes a mystery book store a whole lot more appealing!

*(RENEE and CLINT enter right. THEY spot SEBASTIAN. There's instant recognition, but no one will admit it.)*

ROSALIE: Apparently!

EDMUND: Can we help you?

RENEE: My, what a cute little book store this is, don't you think ... Jasper?

CLINT: Jasper?

RENEE: That is your name, isn't it?

CLINT: That's me! Forget and forgot!

EDMUND: Are you mystery fans?

RENEE: Sure! I like a good mystery! Something along the lines of *Who's Got the Will*.

*(OLD LADY, SEBASTIAN, and CLINT all look at her, shocked.)*

EDMUND: I saw a title over here that might interest you ...

*(EDMUND moves to left bookcase. RENEE and CLINT follow.)*

RENEE: Well, we aren't exactly interested in reading.

CLINT: We're interested in buying.

EDMUND: Buying books for decorative purposes? I've heard people do that ... and, frankly, we don't care why you buy the books, just so you do!

RENEE: We're talking about buying the store.

EDMUND: Really! Now isn't that a coincidence.

SEBASTIAN: Well, I'll be going now, but I'll return.

ROSALIE: With your checkbook.

SEBASTIAN: With my checkbook! Four o'clock. *(Exits right)*

RENEE: Don't you hate it when people forget their money!

ROSALIE: He didn't forget his. He's buying the store.

EDMUND: Now, Rosalie, nothing's set in stone.

RENEE: It better not be! I want this place!

CLINT: It's a present for me.

RENEE: Jasper's always wanted to play storekeeper.

EDMUND: Play?

CLINT: Mom here still thinks I'm a kid.

RENEE: Mom! *(To CLINT)* Who are you calling Mom? *(To EDMUND)*  
How much do you want for the place?

EDMUND: We don't have any idea!

RENEE: Sounds like that guy had an idea!

ROSALIE: Well, he did make a nice offer.

CLINT: She'll give you ten percent more!

ROSALIE: Really?

RENEE: Yeah! Sure! Anything for Jasper!

EDMUND: Why this sudden interest in this bookstore?

RENEE: Well, to be perfectly honest, I'm not so interested in the books as I am the store. I think Jasper would like to open a bicycle shop in here.

CLINT: A bicycle shop?

RENEE: You know how much you love bicycles.

CLINT: Oh, yeah. Love 'em!

EDMUND: Well, Ms. ...

RENEE: Ms. ... Smith. Jane Smith.

ROSALIE: Isn't that a coincidence? Another Smith.

EDMUND: Well, Ms. Smith, we'll have to check with our daughter and her husband. After all they own this place.

ROSALIE: Remember, Edmund, they don't own it alone. Somebody put a lot down on it and I'm sure whoever that is will be more than happy to get the money back. Let's see now ... Mr. Smith is coming at four to buy the place ... but I can tell him then about your offer and if you come at four-thirty, I can let you know what he's decided!

RENEE: I want this place, lady.

CLINT: Yeah! I won't be happy 'til I get it!

RENEE: And there's nothing worse than Jasper when he isn't happy!

*(RENEE and CLINT exit right.)*

EDMUND: Something odd's going on. Why's everybody so interested in Manor of Death?

ROSALIE: Such an awful name! A bicycle shop would be just perfect here.

EDMUND: I didn't see any bikes in the neighborhood, Rosalie.

*(OLD WOMAN has moved to counter and clears her throat.)*

Oh, yes, have you found what you want?

OLD WOMAN: Sure have. Right here.

*(OLD WOMAN plunks a pile of books on counter along with her tablet and pen. EDMUND proceeds to ring up the sale on the computer.)*

ROSALIE: Looks like you've got a lot of time to read.

OLD WOMAN: At my age, dearie, all I've got is time. And nothing fills it better than a nice, juicy murder!

*(EDMUND bags the books.)*

You got a nice little store here. No wonder everybody wants to buy it!

EDMUND: Enjoy your books.

*(HE hands OLD WOMAN the books. SHE leaves her pen and tablet on counter.)*

OLD WOMAN: Goodbye.

*(OLD WOMAN moves right as IRENE enters.)*

IRENE: Oh, dear! They said this was the place!

OLD WOMAN: Sure is! Best mysteries in town. *(Exits right)*

IRENE: Excuse me! Ma'am? My, but she seemed familiar.

EDMUND: Welcome to Manor of Death. Can I help you find anything?

IRENE: Oh, I... I heard that something terrible happened here last night! *(Bursts into tears)*

ROSALIE: Oh, dear! Would you like to sit down? Maybe a cup of tea or something?

IRENE: No! No, just tell me who did it!

EDMUND: Oh, we have lots of whodunits!

*(IRENE cries loudly and looks for something—on the floor.)*

EDMUND: Did you lose something madam?

IRENE: Yes! Yes, I lost something very dear to me!

*(IRENE cries again as phone rings. ROSALIE answers.)*

ROSALIE: Hello? Yes ... yes ... I ... I can hardly hear you ... yes?

What? But ... but how could that have happened? Oh, dear! All right ... all right. *(Hangs up)* Edmund!

EDMUND: Tell me what it is and I'll help you find it.

IRENE: It ... it won't do any good!

ROSALIE: Edmund!

EDMUND: Try me!

*(With a final burst of tears, IRENE exits right.)*

ROSALIE: Edmund!

EDMUND: I'm beginning to feel like Alice in Wonderland!

ROSALIE: Alice! Listen to me! That was the police who called. They want us to come down and pick up Rachel and Archie.

EDMUND: They just left!

ROSALIE: Edmund, let's go!

EDMUND: All right ...

*(EDMUND pulls key from behind the counter.)*

ROSALIE: How do you know where they keep the keys?

EDMUND: Well, where else would you keep them?

ROSALIE: For being a retired mailman, you sure know your way around a bookstore!

EDMUND: Well ... we've all got our hidden talents, don't we? C'mon!

*(EDMUND pulls ROSALIE off right. NEPTUNE, KEELY, and SCORPION enter left.)*

KEELY: You were right! They forgot all about us!

SCORPION: And who would have thought they'd believe you were a cop?

NEPTUNE: *(Into his cell phone)* This is Sgt. Timmy Tinker at Precinct 21.

KEELY: Timmy Tinker!

NEPTUNE: They bit. And now we've got time to make a few changes around here. *(Overturms a chair)*

SCORPION: I need a little light reading.

*(SCORPION snatches books from the top of left shelf.)*

KEELY: And I think I'll clean out a few drawers.

*(Behind the counter, KEELY pulls out a drawer and we hear contents behind dumped on the floor. NEPTUNE finds SCORPION reading a book.)*

NEPTUNE: Hey! What're you doin'?

SCORPION: Listen to this ... *(Reads)* The phantom moved closer and closer in utter silence. Jack, intent on his stakeout, never heard a leaf rustle or a twig snap. And he never knew what hit him!

*(NEPTUNE hits SCORPION on the back of the head.)*

Hey!

*(Knocking off right.)*

KEELY: Somebody's here!

VOICE: *(Off right)* Hello? Anybody there? I'm from the Gazette and we want to do a story on the hottest mystery in town!

NEPTUNE: Let's get out of here!

*(NEPTUNE, KEELY, and SCORPION race off left, SCORPION taking a stack of books with him as the curtain falls.)*

### **SCENE THREE**

**SETTING:** The Bookstore, that afternoon just before four.

**AT RISE:** *RACHEL is on the phone and ARCHIE is straightening up the furniture.*

RACHEL: Mom, anybody could have gotten in here and robbed us. The back door was unlocked. I know you're sorry. I know ... and don't worry. Not much was taken. It was more just a job of sabotage. Do we know who did it?

*(ARCHIE glances meaningfully at RACHEL. HE shakes his head.)*

We're ... we're not sure. Call that detective? Mom, the less I see of her, the better! Right. Okay, we won't. Bye.

ARCHIE: We won't what?



RACHEL: Make any rash decisions until they get here.

ARCHIE: You mean about selling?

RACHEL: We've got two offers. And according to Mom, they're for a lot more than this place is worth.

ARCHIE: According to your mother. So?

RACHEL: Should we consider them?

ARCHIE: You know ... I guess if our dream is to make a lot of money in real estate, we ought to snap up one of the offers. We can take what we make and buy the bigger building across the street and invest in a mini-mall and as soon as an offer comes for that, we sell, and pretty soon we'll own the neighborhood.

RACHEL: I think that Neptune fellow already owns it.

ARCHIE: Don't change the subject.

RACHEL: I know. I know. This is our dream.

ARCHIE: A bit messy at the moment, but it's what we want isn't it?

RACHEL: But it's so easy for a dream to turn into a nightmare.

ARCHIE: To be crass and commercial, what's happened has put Manor of Death on the map.

RACHEL: In more ways than one!

ARCHIE: Look ... if you really want to sell ... well, I only want you to be happy.

RACHEL: You're sweet. And I am happy. I do love our store. I want to keep it and I know this will all get sorted out ... somehow.

ARCHIE: Exactly how, we don't know. That detective has the brains of a dodo bird.

RACHEL: They're extinct.

ARCHIE: My point exactly. If we only knew a bit more about Preston Killgore. I have a feeling this all has something to do with him.

RACHEL: I'm glad you said that. What time is it?

ARCHIE: Three-thirty. Why?

RACHEL: I called Preston Killgore's secretary after we got back from the police station.

ARCHIE: Is the charcoal hot yet?

RACHEL: What are you talking about?

ARCHIE: You intend to grill her, right?

*(EVELYN, in her forties, nicely dressed, enters right.)*

EVELYN: Excuse me, are you Mrs. Conrad?

RACHEL: Yes ... and you must be Evelyn Duprey. Thanks for coming over so soon.

EVELYN: I've got a few errands to run, so I thought I might drop in now, if that's all right ... I'm pleased to meet you.

ARCHIE: I'm Archie Conrad ... Rachel's lesser half.

EVELYN: I'm sure not. (*Noticing poster*) Oh, the tribute to Mr. Killgore ... how lovely of you to do that. You know? I don't think he was appreciated around here as much as around the rest of the country ... the world, in fact.

ARCHIE: A prophet in his own land.

EVELYN: Yes ... talented people are taken for granted by those who are around them all the time.

RACHEL: Why don't you sit down ...

EVELYN: (*Sitting in chair right*) You've got a charming book store here! Just delightful!

RACHEL: If we can just keep it on track.

EVELYN: Oh, such a horrible thing for you ... finding poor Arvid like you did.

ARCHIE: Did you know him well?

EVELYN: I should say so! He started to work for Mr. Killgore just after I did ... and that was twenty years ago.

RACHEL: You were Preston Killgore's secretary for twenty years? That's two thirds of his career.

EVELYN: It was an honor. And you know the best part? I always found out who did it before anyone else did because I transcribed all his manuscripts.

ARCHIE: I hadn't thought of that. Did you ever have to straighten out his plots?

EVELYN: Oh, no! I wouldn't have dared! Mr. Killgore was a genius at plotting. (*Through her tears*) It's so ... sad ... to think there won't be any more Inspector Grimm mysteries. But you didn't ask me here to see a lot of tears and nonsense.

RACHEL: I ... I just had a few questions. Somehow we need to find out what happened to Mr. Judd.

EVELYN: Aren't the police doing anything?

ARCHIE: They're trying to pin it all on us.

EVELYN: Oh, dear ... so like the police to pick the easiest targets. Mr. Killgore always had Inspector Grimm fighting against his inclination to do that.

RACHEL: Were you with Mr. Killgore when he died?

EVELYN: No ... no, I was working in the study.

RACHEL: He'd been sick for quite a while, hadn't he?

EVELYN: Yes ... gastric attacks ... irritable bowel syndrome ... heartburn and chronic pain. The last attack was just too much for him.

RACHEL: Was there an autopsy?

EVELYN: No. The doctor said there wasn't any need and Mr. Killgore was cremated.

RACHEL: That's too bad.

ARCHIE: Oh, Rachel, what are you thinking?

RACHEL: I don't know ... but it seems ... I mean his symptoms ...

EVELYN: You think he was poisoned?

RACHEL: It's possible, isn't it?

EVELYN: (*Horrified*) Why? How?

RACHEL: You've lived at the Killgore home for some time, haven't you?

EVELYN: Yes, I ... I moved in about five years after I started working for Mr. Killgore. He felt it would be more convenient for me ... but you don't think ... oh, my dears, I would never, ever! Why should I? I'm out of a job now ...

RACHEL: I didn't mean that. I'd just like to know who also lives at the house.

EVELYN: Oh, I'm sorry ... it's just after what happened to Arvid ... well ... with the police and all.

ARCHIE: Have the police been out to the house?

EVELYN: Oh, yes ... they questioned everyone. Not well, but they did ask where everyone was and so on.

RACHEL: And everyone would be ... whom?

EVELYN: Myself. I have a room in the guest house. And then Sebastian, Mr. Killgore's nephew. He lives in the main house. Irene, the cook and housekeeper has an apartment over the garage. And then there's Renee, Mr. Killgore's ex-wife and her new boyfriend, Clint.

RACHEL: (*Incredulously*) She and her boyfriend were living in the Killgore house?

EVELYN: Odd, isn't it? But she always could wrap Mr. Killgore around her little finger. She and Clint have a room upstairs down the hall from Mr. Killgore's room. (*As an afterthought*) What was Mr. Killgore's room.

RACHEL: I take it you don't like Renee Killgore?

EVELYN: A gold digger, if you ask me. But what goes around comes around.

ARCHIE: What do you mean?

EVELYN: Her boyfriend is nothing more than a gold digger himself.

RACHEL: How long were she and Mr. Killgore married?

EVELYN: Three years. The worst three years in that house, I might add. The fighting started the minute the wedding cake was cut.

RACHEL: Why'd she come back to him?

EVELYN: She claimed she didn't have anywhere else to go.

ARCHIE: Wasn't there a generous divorce settlement?

EVELYN: Apparently not generous enough ... and then there was the pre-nup she signed.

RACHEL: I imagine Mr. Killgore made quite a bit of money.

EVELYN: His books sold very, very well ... and he'd published 92 by the time he died.

RACHEL: Why was his nephew living with him?

EVELYN: Sebastian became Mr. Killgore's agent and business manager. Mr. Killgore had a soft spot for the boy. You see, after Sebastian's parents were killed...and that would have been Mr. Killgore's brother and his wife ... Sebastian went off the deep end. He got himself into trouble with the law. He was just lost ... but somehow Mr. Killgore managed to reach the boy and get him back on track, first with a college education, then as a teacher ... and finally as an agent and business manager.

RACHEL: And the cook?

EVELYN: Irene? Oh, she's as harmless as a ladybug. She's been at the house for ten years or so. But ...

RACHEL: But what?

EVELYN: Well, I think the poor thing was sweet on Arvid. She and he would spend a lot of time in the kitchen doing dishes after dinner. And they'd take long walks in the garden ... and on their days off, well ... we don't know where they went, but it was usually together.

RACHEL: A little romance, hmm?

ARCHIE: How's she been since Arvid's death?

EVELYN: She just keeps to herself. Doesn't say much. And she'll be leaving soon. She gave Sebastian her letter of resignation.

ARCHIE: What will happen to everyone else at the house? Obviously things will have to change.

EVELYN: I know. I ... I'm going to be with my sister for a while until I decide what I want to do now. Sebastian told Renee and Clint they need to be out by the end of the month. I assume Sebastian will stay on.

RACHEL: He inherits the estate?

EVELYN: We ... we don't know. Mr. Killgore's will hasn't been read yet.

ARCHIE: When will that happen?

EVELYN: Mr. Brandon, the lawyer, is coming to the Killgore home today at five to read the will.

RACHEL: Well, that might shed some light on what's happened.

EVELYN: I don't see how. I can't imagine what the will would have to do with Arvid's death.

ARCHIE: Maybe nothing.

RACHEL: Maybe everything.

EVELYN: Well, I really do have to get back to the house. Irene just had sandwiches and potato salad for lunch and I'm sure everyone will be hungry by the time Mr. Brandon arrives, so I've got to pick up a tray of hors d'oeuvres at the market before going home.

RACHEL: Well, we certainly appreciate your stopping by ... and hope you'll be here for the tribute?

EVELYN: Oh, I wouldn't miss it for the world. So kind of you. So kind.

*(As EVELYN exits right, ROSALIE and EDMUND enter right.)*

ROSALIE: Oh, Rachel, darling! You look so haggard!

RACHEL: Goodbye, Ms. Duprey!

EDMUND: Another buyer?

RACHEL: No ... Preston Killgore's secretary.

EDMUND: This guy?

ARCHIE: She was just filling us in on the very strange group at the Killgore house.

ROSALIE: Who cares about that? You've got two buyers coming in a few minutes and you've got to go for the best possible price!

*(ROSALIE instinctively starts cleaning up the store.)*

RACHEL: We're not selling, Mother.

*(ROSALIE ignores RACHEL and begins moving the chairs slightly.)*

ROSALIE: You know? If you move the chairs a bit closer, this place will look a whole lot more spacious.

RACHEL: Mother, we're not selling!

ROSALIE: What do you mean we're not selling?

ARCHIE: This book store is our dream, Mom.

ROSALIE: Don't call me that. And I can't imagine how anyone could consider a Manor of Death your dream!

EDMUND: Now, Rosalie ... this isn't our decision.

ROSALIE: Oh, Edmund, you've always been too permissive! You let her get a two-wheeler when she was five! You let her go on a date when she was fourteen!

ARCHIE: With who?

RACHEL: Melvin Turcotte. He was half a foot shorter than me and had the grabbiest hands I've ever seen!

ROSALIE: You see! And then you let her go to that party school instead of—

RACHEL: I didn't want to go to Chatoochie Community College.

ROSALIE: Maybe if you had you'd have developed some common sense ... like seeing a good deal when it stares you in the face!

ARCHIE: You know, maybe it would be a good idea if you took a walk or something while we talked with whatshisname.

EDMUND: Mr. Smith. Jim Smith. And I think that's a very good idea, Archie.

ROSALIE: I'm sure Rachel feels differently about it. After all, a girl needs her mother to guide her.

RACHEL: Mom, I'm not a girl any more ... and I don't think we need any guidance in this.

ROSALIE: Oh! So, you want to get me out of the way! I guess when your parents get to be a certain age ... well, it's time to cast them off like stale bread!

RACHEL: Mom!

ROSALIE: Oh, no! It's quite all right. I don't mind being shoved into a closet. I'll even lock the door behind me so you don't have to bother!

EDMUND: Rosalie, they already gave out the Oscars for this year.

ROSALIE: And you! You go along with anything these two want! It's a wonder Rachel turned out as good as she did.

RACHEL: Mom, you're acting like a child.

ROSALIE: Am I, now? Well, somebody around here has to be the child!

*(SEBASTIAN enters right. HE is in obvious pain, grasping his stomach.)*

*(Sweetly)* Oh, why, Mr. Smith!

RACHEL: *(Concerned)* Are you all right?

SEBASTIAN: No ... no! *(Slumps into chair right)*

EDMUND: Call 911, Archie.

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