

# MURDER IS SO RUDE

By Jerry Rabushka

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ISBN: 1-60003-674-0

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**SYNOPSIS:** Mrs. Corpse has been murdered at an upscale dinner party! Mrs. Hostess is scandalized—it will ruin her seating plan. “I never know what to do with a widow at a couples gathering!” she cries. Fortunately there’s a detective at the party. He tries in vain to get information out of a group of guests who seem to know *far* too much about murder. His assistant? Officer Newbie. It’s her first day on the job, and she’ll do anything to get a confession. Manners, morality, and murder mesh together in a mystery that will have you laughing your way to life in prison!

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

(6 male, 7 female, 4 either; 0-5 extras)  
(Can be performed with 16)

### THE HOMEOWNERS

MRS. HOSTESS (f) ..... Rich, snooty, and obsessed with protocol and etiquette (85 lines)  
MR. HOSTESS (m) ..... Her husband (35 lines)

### PARTY GUESTS

MRS. CORPSE (f) ..... The victim (48 lines)  
MR. CORPSE (m) ..... (19 lines)  
DOCTOR CURALL (m/f) ..... (28 lines)  
MRS. BUTCHER (f) ..... (31 lines)  
MRS. CUTTER (f) ..... (31 lines)  
MRS. HACKER (f) ..... (15 lines)  
MR. DODDER (m) ..... An extremely old man (28 lines)  
MR. OVERBILL (m/f) ..... The lawyer (22 lines)

MR. BLADE (m) ..... (23 lines)

**HOUSE STAFF**

MISS CLEANUP (f) ..... The maid (44 lines)

MR. BOWENSCRAPE (m) ..... The butler (25 lines)

**POLICE FORCE**

INSPECTOR KETCHAM (m) ..... (106 lines)

DR. COLDSLAB (m/f) ..... The coroner (13 lines)

OFFICER NEWBIE (f) ..... Overzealous and under-experienced (58 lines)

MADAME (MONSIEUR) MINDREAD (m/f) ..... A psychic, later revealed as a member of the police force (49 lines)

Extras may be used in act one, scene one and act two, scene one.

COLDSLAB [appears only in act 1] and MINDREAD [appears only in act 2] can be doubled

While the “m/f “characters may be referred to male or female in the script, please change the names and pronouns for the appropriate gender. The author grants permission to change gender of other characters if necessary.

*MURDER IS SO RUDE*

**DURATION:** 90 minutes

**PRODUCTION NOTES**

**SET:** All the action takes place in the Hostess' home, an impeccably decorated wealthy abode. There are two settings: their ante-room [a room outside the dining room] and their library. This play can be produced with a "lavish" set or practically none at all.

**PROPERTIES – PERSONAL**

- Money
- Invoices (For the lawyer.)
- Various food and drink, plates, and serving dishes.

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ACT ONE, SCENE 1

*PARTY GUESTS are standing around in an ante-room outside the dining room. This room can be sparsely furnished, with couch and a couple chairs, or more ornately designed. In the room at the scene opening are MRS. BUTCHER, MRS. CUTTER, MRS. HACKER, MR. DODDER, MR. OVERBILL, DR. CURALL and MR. BLADE. MRS. CUTTER and MRS. BUTCHER and MRS. HACKER are engaged in a lively conversation of bashing their hostess. The OTHERS can be checking watches or phones or exhibiting other signs of impatience. MRS. CORPSE lies on the floor, unnoticed. If possible, keep her hidden from view until the majority of the CAST exits, or play on the fact that no one notices SHE's in the way. A few extras may be used in this scene as well.*

**MRS. CUTTER:** *(Loudly annoyed.)* Is dinner ever going to be served? I'm dying of hunger!

**MRS. BUTCHER:** Me too. It's like that dinner-theater I went to last week. All theater, no dinner.

**MRS. CUTTER:** Why is that rich people have no appetite? If you go to a middle class household, it's "Hi, let's eat." In a more budget-conscious household it's "Go to the fridge and fix yourself something." Go to a rich household and it's "Don't call us, we'll call you." *(Calling off stage.)* Well, frankly, Mrs. Hostess, that call is way overdue!

**MRS. HACKER:** I wager that they want us to starve to death. Perhaps the undertaker is cheaper than the caterer. I can't believe we even came here. It certainly wasn't for the prestige. *(Worried and hushed.)* Bad thing always happen at these parties.

**MRS. CUTTER:** Actually, Mrs. Hacker I *want* to be seen here. I want to remind the Hostess family how much they owe me for putting up with these interminable gatherings.

**MR. OVERBILL:** *(Intruding.)* You *will* be seen, Mrs. Cutter. I've been videotaping the three of you and I'm going to post your comments on YouTube. Then I'll wait for the legal fallout. I'm a lawyer, after all.

**MRS. CUTTER:** That's perfectly fine, Mr. Overbill. They'll see our distress and next time they'll remember to serve us at the appointed hour.

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*Enter MR. BOWENSCRAPE and MISS CLEANUP.*

**MR. BOWENSCRAPE:** May I have your attention? Dinner is being served at once in the dining room!

**MRS. BUTCHER:** *(Changes her attitude entirely.)* So soon? We were having such a good chat I hardly noticed the time! *(Pushes people rudely out of the way.)* Excuse me.

*OTHERS start to exit as well. The author perceives the dining room as being out an exit stage left, however the director may put it elsewhere if needed.*

**MR. DODDER:** You all go on ahead. I'll get there on my own time.  
*(HE walks really slow.)*

**MR. BLADE:** *(To MISS CLEANUP.)* What are they serving?

**MISS CLEANUP:** *(Not impressed.)* Fried wren.

**MRS. HACKER:** *(Stops in her tracks, not impressed.)* Wren? Whatever is wren?

**MR. BOWENSCRAPE:** A very small bird. For when quail is too filling.  
*(Admonishing her.)* This is a delicate feast for the senses, not a stuff your face mac and cheese Midwestern wedding. Now, move it or lose it. They may not be enough wren to go around.

**MISS CLEANUP:** The wren is to be divided up equally among all the guests. It's not very big to begin with.

**MRS. HACKER:** One wren?

**MR. BOWENSCRAPE:** Yes, a single bird to be shared. Call it social engineering, designed to increase camaraderie among those fortunate enough to be on the guest list.

**MR. BLADE:** Oh please sir, no one comes to these evenings for companionship.

**MRS. BUTCHER:** At least it's not dinner-theater. We won't have to sit through a play afterwards with our stomachs growling for that one extra carrot stick. I don't understand the morbid fascination people have with community theatre murder mystery. *(Half to the GUESTS, and half the audience.)* Go kill someone in your *own* family and see what where it leaves your appetite!

**MR. BOWENSCRAPE:** *(To MISS CLEANUP.)* I'll escort them to the dining area, Miss Cleanup, and you can tidy up the drawing room.

**MISS CLEANUP:** I'll be happy to, Mr. Bowenscrape. *(No SHE won't.)*  
Yes, happy to.

**MR. BOWENSCRAPE:** *(To GUESTS.)* Let's go, now. You know Mrs. Hostess demands a timely presence.

*With MR. BOWENSCRAPE's pushing, THEY ALL leave except for MISS CLEANUP, who sees them out. MR. DODDER needs extra pushing. Still no one notices MRS. CORPSE's body on the floor.*

**MISS CLEANUP:** *(Going about her business, trips over MRS. CORPSE.)* Uh... a little to much to drink, Mrs. Corpse? As usual, Mrs. Corpse? *(Tries to wake her up, if MRS. CORPSE is hidden, still try to make sure MISS CLEANUP isn't hidden from the audience's view.)* Uh... Mrs. Corpse? You'll miss the wren! You lucky dog you. Mrs... *(Realizes there's a problem.)* Oh dear! They must have bored you to death, poor thing. Last time we went to a dinner theater the entire first row passed away before intermission, yet refused to give up their seats. *(Shakes the body, then shouts.)* Is there a doctor in the house?

**DOCTOR CURALL:** *(Enters.)* Doctor James Eliot Curall, at your service. And I'm... *(Tries to act "hip hop".)* "in da house!!" Shake it, mama!! *(Starts to dance.)* *(For a female character, change the name to Jamie Eliza.)*

**MISS CLEANUP:** *(Stops him.)* I'm not your mother. And I'm not your mama, either! Now are you in the house or not?

**DOCTOR CURALL:** What do you think?

**MISS CLEANUP:** I think you're in the house, but out to lunch.

**DOCTOR CURALL:** What seems to be the problem?

**MISS CLEANUP:** Mrs. Corpse has taken a fall. Hurry, or she might sue!

**DOCTOR CURALL:** *(Goes to examine, haphazardly.)* I'm sorry. But... I'm afraid there's nothing I can do.

**MISS CLEANUP:** Can't you help her?

**DOCTOR CURALL:** *(Sadly.)* As I said, there's nothing I can do.

**MISS CLEANUP:** Are you sure?

**DOCTOR CURALL:** Yes, very. It's my day off. And... *(Rolls her over.)* she's dead.

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**MISS CLEANUP:** Oh dear. Dead! Can we move her then? Mrs. Hostess will be very upset if this becomes the talk of dinner. She's so busy taking credit for the meal that we prepared. She'll probably pay herself out of my salary.

**DOCTOR CURALL:** Excuse me, but I'm very hungry, and the food is going fast. Someone might steal my decorative kale. (*Exit.*)

**MISS CLEANUP:** (*Shouting again.*) Is there a lawyer in the house?

**MR. OVERBILL:** William Overbill, attorney at law. And I'm "In da house!" Shake it, mama! (*Starts to dance.*) [For a female character, change the name to Wanda.]

**MISS CLEANUP:** Please. Don't shake it.

*HE keeps dancing, SHE gets very annoyed.*

**MISS CLEANUP:** I said stop the shimmy!

**MR. OVERBILL:** (*Slightly embarrassed.*) Oh... uh... what seem to be... oh, wait... (*Checks the time.*) billing starts... now. What seems to be the problem?

**MISS CLEANUP:** It's Mrs. Corpse. She's dead.

**MR. OVERBILL:** Then I guess *you'll* be paying for my services. Does she have a will?

**MISS CLEANUP:** I don't know.

**MR. OVERBILL:** Didn't you ask?

**MISS CLEANUP:** I didn't know I'd need to.

**MR. OVERBILL:** I always ask. Did she leave me anything? How much is her estate worth? I'm thinking percentages here.

**MISS CLEANUP:** I'm sure she's quite wealthy, since she was invited to this party. Either that, or she knows something devastating about Mrs. Hostess.

**MR. OVERBILL:** You seem woefully ill informed on the finances of the deceased. When you have sufficient information, perhaps you'll contact me. Here. (*Hands her a bill.*)

**MISS CLEANUP:** A hundred forty dollars?

**MR. OVERBILL:** It's a house call after all. Now if you'll excuse me, there's an empty chair at the table with my name on it. I'm billing them, too. (*Exits.*)

**MISS CLEANUP:** But... there's also an empty chair at the table with *her* name on it ... (*Shouts.*) Is there a priest, minister, rabbi, shaman, or imam in the house? (*No answer.*) Not a very religious bunch, I see. (*Louder.*) I said, is there a priest, minister, rabbi, shaman, or imam in the house? Witch doctor?

**MRS. HOSTESS:** (*Enters, perturbed.*) What's going on? This is a private home, not an interfaith commune.

**MISS CLEANUP:** I'm sorry, Mrs. Hostess...

**MRS. HOSTESS:** The wren is getting cold. It's already moldy. I fear if it gets chilly that no one will touch it.

**MR. HOSTESS:** (*Sticking up for his wife.*) My wife insists on this evening proceeding without incident. Perfect. Flawless. She does not expect to have to tolerate the staff screaming for clergy at a dinner party.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** At a wake, yes, but never at dinner.

**MISS CLEANUP:** (*Tragic.*) In there it's a dinner, in here's it's a wake.

**MR. HOSTESS:** (*Examining MRS. CORPSE.*) She doesn't look very awake to me.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** Mrs. Corpse! Always one for the practical joke. Come on, Luella, shake it!

**MR. HOSTESS:** Perhaps she wants dessert first. How about a nice turnover. (*Turns her over.*) Now, she's "out."

**MRS. HOSTESS:** (*Shouting off stage, with urgency.*) Is there a doctor in the house?

**MISS CLEANUP:** Been there done that.

**MR. HOSTESS:** Is there a lawyer in the house?

**MISS CLEANUP:** (*Hands MRS. HOSTESS the bill SHE just got.*) We're on the clock.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** Is there a policemen in the house? A detective? A special operative? There's a dead body in the drawing room and I want it removed! (*Gets an idea.*) What about the street department? We can put her outside and call it a day.

**MR. HOSTESS:** Well this certainly explains the empty chair next to Mr. Corpse. We should be very delicate. News of her death might kill him.

**MISS CLEANUP:** On the contrary, it will probably prolong his life considerably.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** (*Pacing quickly and waving her arms trying to figure out what to do.*) This is so uncomfortable. I never know what to do with a widow at a couples gathering. Oh, we do have a representative of law enforcement with us. I invited him to make sure the cooking staff doesn't skimp on the paprika. (*Shouts.*) Inspector Ketcham! May we see you please?

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** (*Enters.*) Inspector Ike Ketcham, at your service, Mrs. Hostess! But please hurry. I was just in the middle of an asparagus spear. There's only two, you know. You're such a tease with a vegetable, Mrs. Hostess.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** I know. (*Laughing at herself.*) I was planning to have the cook fill your plates, but I couldn't help but snack on them all morning long.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** (*Laughing back, but not amused.*) Rude.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** Perhaps, but in *this* house, I'm the authority of what's rude and what isn't. And speaking of rude...

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** What seems to be the problem?

**MR. HOSTESS:** If you didn't hear my wife shouting, there's a dead body here in the drawing room, and we'd like you to do something about it.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** Oh, I see. Such ill timing.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** Mrs. Corpse, of course. I knew I shouldn't have invited her. Stealing the limelight from the wren and the asparagus. No one will be able to enjoy a bite!

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** (*Commenting on the cooking.*) No one is. (*HE pulls out a camera and takes some photos.*)

**MRS. HOSTESS:** I bet she wishes she wore makeup!

**MR. HOSTESS:** And washed her drawers. (*Defends himself.*) Not that I'd know. (*More aside.*) Not that I... wouldn't.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** I don't think it would have helped!

**MRS. HOSTESS:** She's considered very attractive in our circle!

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** I mean it wouldn't have helped keep her alive.

**MISS CLEANUP:** What do we do, inspector?

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** Well, she isn't going anywhere, so I suggest we finish dinner before it gets cold.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** I agree. Please clean up, Miss. Cleanup.

**MISS CLEANUP:** (*Sarcastic.*) I'll just wash her off and inject the stuff of life back into her and she'll be good as new.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** We can't do that. It's evidence.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** Evidence of what?

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** Evidence of... (*Dramatic.*) murder.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** It's probably just evidence of high cholesterol. She didn't know what a vegetable was. Couldn't stand the sight of a salad. And now, she'll miss the asparagus that could have saved the very life she so callously threw away.

**DOCTOR CURALL:** (*Enters, gently.*) If Mrs. Corpse won't be making it to dinner... can I have her asparagus? I kept telling her to eat her veggies or she'd wind up a corpse. She kept telling me she already was. Yet people ask "what's in a name?"

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** My sense of duty must trump my hunger for your delicious dinner, Mrs. Hostess. (*Examines the body.*) Hold it! I sense... foul play.

**MISS CLEANUP:** Ya think?

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** I think someone murdered Mrs. Corpse. In cold blood.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** Inspector Ketcham, I wouldn't be the least bit surprised. She had plenty of enemies. I just invited her because I knew she was allergic to the main course. But we just wanted her to sneeze and break out in hives.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** I think we need people to break out some answers.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

*In the library: present are MR and MRS HOSTESS, INSPECTOR KETCHAM, MISS CLEANUP, and the DR. COLDSLAB (Who is standing aside for the moment.) The library can be designated by, of course, piles of books, bookcases, etc.*

**MRS. HOSTESS:** Must you bring all these people into my library? My books are old and untouched.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** As are we all, Mrs. Hostess.

**MISS CLEANUP:** With my new electronic reader, we can get rid of these old dust traps!

**MRS. HOSTESS:** (*Offended.*) These are priceless family treasures! Now, inspector, please assure me you'll keep these books safe.

**MR. HOSTESS:** My wife is very fastidious about her parties. People who are invited must show up, and people who are not must stay home.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** I'm sorry, Mr. Hostess. But in case you've forgotten, a murder has been committed!

**MR. HOSTESS:** So? Make some quick work and be done with it already.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** We'll make sure whoever did this is never on the guest list again.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** Not for about fifty years, at least. (*Introducing.*) This is Dr. Coldslab, the coroner. I've asked him to come quickly.

**DR. COLDSLAB:** I regret to inform you that my cursory examination reveals that Mrs. Corpse was poisoned.

**MR. HOSTESS:** I hope it wasn't the asparagus.

**DR. COLDSLAB:** I believe it was something much more sinister.

**MISS CLEANUP:** That would be the decorative kale.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** Do you think it happened here? What if she was poisoned before she got here? Maybe she picked something up from the ladies room at the diner. It's so filthy!

**DR. COLDSLAB:** We'll have to take her to the lab to find out more specifically.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** Meanwhile, I'll need to question your guests.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** What a slap in the face! First a killing, then an inquisition! *(With a toss of the head.)* It had best *not* be Spanish!

**MR. HOSTESS:** We'll have the butler show the guests in.

**MISS CLEANUP:** What would you like me to do with dessert, Mrs. Hostess?

**MRS. HOSTESS:** I don't care! I just don't care anymore! *(Starts to cry.)*

**MR. HOSTESS:** *(Comforting her.)* Honey!

**MISS CLEANUP:** Honey's in the far left cabinet if you'd like me to get it!

*No one can believe she just said that!*

**MRS. HOSTESS:** My party is ruined. I wouldn't put it past that Mrs. Corpse to have planned her death right when dinner was being served. She was always thinking of herself, inspector. *(SHE rings a bell and/or calls off stage.)* Mr. Bowenscrape!

**MR. BOWENSCRAPE:** *(Enters quickly.)* That would be me, Mrs. Hostess.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** Please round up the guests for Inspector Ketcham.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** Wait, did you say this was the butler?

**MRS. HOSTESS:** Yes.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** Well then the case is solved. In my experience, the butler does it. The butler always does it.

**MR. BOWENSCRAPE:** *(Offended.)* I bet your pardon. That's prejudicial and stereotypical.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** Perhaps, but our prison is full of butlers. Vengeful murderous scoundrels all! And it's the perfect punishment. *(Amused with himself.)* It's very frustrating to be a butler in a room where you can't open the door.

**MR. BOWENSCRAPE:** Now if you'll excuse me...

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** I'll excuse you when I'm good and ready. Until then, have a seat Mr. Bowenscrape.

**MR. BOWENSCRAPE:** *(Aggressive.)* I said if you'll excuse me... *(Starts to push past EVERYONE to leave.)*

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** *(Getting in his way.)* And I said have a seat. Tell me about Mrs. Corpse. Surely you've seen her before.

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**MR. BOWENSCRAPE:** She had no respect for the staff. (*Imitating MRS. CORPSE.*) "Let me in, let me out. Announce me. You know who I am." Once I suggested she say please and thank you. She said:

**MRS. CORPSE:** (*Enters, as if in the conversation, yet stays to the side of the rest of the cast.*) Over my dead body!

**MR. BOWENSCRAPE:** So I was hopeful, but...

**MRS. CORPSE:** I said over my dead body.

**MR. BOWENSCRAPE:** (*As if speaking to MRS. CORPSE.*) I suppose you'll say please and thank you *now*, Luella! And, to a much higher authority than myself. Sadly, her body was removed before we had the chance to do a hoochie cooch on her entrails.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** Perhaps you should come to the autopsy. We could arrange a sort of Mexican Hat Dance with her liver.

**MR. BOWENSCRAPE:** I might, if I ever get a day off.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** Don't you have guests to show the door to?

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** Actually, he doesn't. I'm not letting anybody leave until everyone is questioned. Starting with you, Mrs. Hostess.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** Me?

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** Yes, you. It's your home.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** Surely you don't think I killed Mrs. Corpse. If I did, it would have been at her place. I hate calling the carpet cleaners for just one room.

**MRS. CORPSE:** I wouldn't put it past her. She's so fastidious. I know she'd like to institute the death penalty for violations of etiquette.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** (*To MRS. CORPSE.*) You did rearrange the seating, didn't you? I had to put it all back at the last minute.

**MRS. CORPSE:** I didn't want to sit next to my husband. I sit with him every day. I wanted to eat next to someone attractive and considerate.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** So indeed, you have the motive.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** I hardly think moving the seating is grounds for murder.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** But it is in this household. This isn't the first dinner party you've invited me to where there has been an untimely death.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** You mean the cat? She was seventeen!

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** I've talked to countless guests who have been evicted from your parties due to perceived transgression of decorum. You hold people to a standard of etiquette you know nothing about.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** Like elbows on the table? Chewing with your mouth open? Stealing food from other people's plates? You seem to think being an officer of the law affords you those privileges. Upper class people believe otherwise. *(Exits in a huff.)*

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** Wait! I'm not finished!

**MR. HOSTESS:** I believe you are. When my wife says we're finished, we're finished. Trust me. You're finished. And if I were you, I'd finish this investigation with the words "accidental death."

Do Not Copy

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

*In the anteroom: OFFICER NEWBIE is interviewing MRS. CUTTER*

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** (A “tough” policewoman, new to the force, and overzealous in her job, but who has no idea what SHE’s doing. SHE says and does a lot of things to impress people, all of which backfire.) So, Mrs. Butcher...

**MRS. CUTTER:** I’m Mrs. Cutter. Mrs. Butcher lives down the block.

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** Whatever, you’re all guilty so it doesn’t matter.

**MRS. CUTTER:** Excuse me?

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** Sorry. It’s my first case! (Shakes MRS. CUTTER’s shoulders happily.) I’m so excited!

**MRS. CUTTER:** Your first?

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** (proud) Officer Cagney Lacey Newbie. First day on the job! Any leftover donuts?

**MRS. CUTTER:** You’re confusing me. I thought you were a policewoman.

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** Probably because I don’t know what I’m doing. So why don’t you just admit you did it and save us both a lot of hassle? I’m angling for a promotion. Care to help a girl out?

**MRS. CUTTER:** But I didn’t.

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** I say you did. Now, who’s got the law on their side?

**MRS. CUTTER:** Neither of us.

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** It would be great to score on my first day!

**MRS. CUTTER:** You’re making me sick.

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** Didn’t you have some words with Mrs. Corpse just before she was found dead? What did she say to you?

**MRS. CUTTER:** I said “watch that cheese, it’ll kill you.” If it had high cholesterol, it was always on her plate. But not for long.

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** (As if this is incriminating.) So you know something about the cheese.

**MRS. CUTTER:** I know everything about the cheese. I’m a cheese whiz, as they say in polite circles.

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** (Spooky.) But usually, the cheese stands alone.

**MRS. CUTTER:** (Tired of this.) I’d like to be that cheese about now.

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** How were you so sure it would kill her?

**MRS. CUTTER:** Cheese kills. It's like cigarettes, only tastier. It's fat. It's addicting. And she was in poor health already. That one extra cube probably put her over the edge. I suggested she stop, but Mrs. Corpse, she was headstrong.

**MRS. CORPSE:** (*Again, enters and keeps to the side.*) I'll eat what I please, including the cheese.

*At this point, as a flashback, MISS CLEANUP comes out with a tray of cheese. MRS. CORPSE takes a lot of it, while MRS. CUTTER tries to get to it but MRS. CORPSE takes it away from her, turns her back to MRS. CUTTER and starts to gobble. MISS CLEANUP is amused by, but disdainful of, what's going on, and exits with an empty tray.*

**MRS. CORPSE:** (*Mouth full.*) Mmmpppp mmmppphhh my cheese!

**MRS. CUTTER:** (*Back to OFFICER.*) And she took the whole tray, gobbled it up, and left me to suffice with the Velveeta. I wanted to kill her, but... well, such a feeling subsides after awhile. Fortunately, someone did my work for me. Next party I'm coming early, with a long pair of tongs.

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** So, she had no enemies here?

**MRS. CUTTER:** I wouldn't say that. None of us really like each other. None of us! After 25 years of dinner parties there's a lot of resentment. But murder... you might want to talk to Mrs. Butcher. She has much more experience in that than I do. (*Laughs.*)

ACT ONE, SCENE 4

In the library, MR. BOWENSCRAPE is showing MR. CORPSE in to meet with the INSPECTOR.

**MR. BOWENSCRAPE:** (To INSPECTOR KETCHAM.) I present to you the husband of the deceased... Mr. Alfred Emmanuel Corpse the Third. No need to be so stiff, sir, it's simply a murder investigation. I assure you, your wife is not the suspect.

**MR. CORPSE:** My dear wife. Her maiden name was "Lively." Before our wedding they all said, "If you marry this man, you'll wind up a Corpse." Now she's done it twice.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** My sympathies on the untimely parting of your wife.

**MR. CORPSE:** I wish someone had told me sooner, before Mrs. Butcher claimed inheritance of her asparagus.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** I know this is a difficult time.

**MR. CORPSE:** It does carry a certain amount of inconvenience, but we all knew it would happen.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** (Suspicious.) We did? How so?

**MR. CORPSE:** I come from a long line of Corpses. So while it's a sorry occasion, we see it as inevitable.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** But not murder!

**MR. CORPSE:** She was a little afraid to come to this party. She never gets along with Mrs. Hostess. But if she ditched the invite, the private enmity between them would become all too out in the open. They preferred to love in public and hate in private.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** Why the hate? They seem like perfectly proper society ladies!

**MR. CORPSE:** Well, Mrs. Hostess and I often spent our evenings together at dinner theatre. It's hard being married to a corpse, you know.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** It is an unusual name.

**MR. CORPSE:** Yes, it is. People made fun of me in grade school until I threatened to turn them *all* into corpses. Make good on that threat just once and the teasing stops. I loved school! (*Thinking back, fondly.*) My third grade teacher, Mrs. Hearse. She carried me on her back from one room to the next! My fifth grade art teacher, Mr. Stone. Those days are engraved in my memory forever! My seventh grade teacher Mrs. Cryptrobber...

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** (*Interrupting.*) On the matter of your wife...

**MR. CORPSE:** Well, everybody liked her, yet nobody liked her. She was... an enigma.

**MRS. CORPSE:** (*Appearing to the side, with cheese.*) This cheese is delicious. I just can't get enough!

**MR. CORPSE:** And you never knew if she meant it or she was being sarcastic. While she said it like this:

**MRS. CORPSE:** (*Excited.*) This cheese is delicious. I just can't get enough!

**MR. CORPSE:** She meant it like this:

**MRS. CORPSE:** (*Sarcastic.*) This cheese is delicious. I just can't get enough!

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** So what are you saying...

**MR. CORPSE:** We weren't sure whether or not to love her or hate her. So we randomly took sides.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** Someone was apparently on the wrong side of sure.

**MR. CORPSE:** Yes, someone was. Mr. Dodder, for instance... knows a lot about murder. (*Knowingly, but not necessarily honestly.*) A lot.

ACT ONE, SCENE 5

Same room. MR. and MRS. HOSTESS are talking with the INSPECTOR. MRS. HOSTESS is very annoyed and wants this investigation over. MISS CLEANUP is dusting, but also paying close attention. MR. BOWENSCRAPE is also present, near the door. OFFICER NEWBIE is also present, observing.

**MR. BOWENSCRAPE:** Whom shall I show in next?

**MRS. HOSTESS:** It's "who," and nobody. Inspector, you must allow Mr. Bowenscrape to escort my guests from the premises. They're starting to talk. And worse, they're eating the cheese and crackers I was saving for tomorrow's tea.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** (*Surprised.*) You have a lot of cheese.

**MISS CLEANUP:** And not enough crackers.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** It's on special. Even the wealthy have to budget... (*With a flourish.*) sometimes!

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** We'll let you have your house back as soon as we figure out who committed this crime.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** Did my husband tell you about his dalliance with the deceased? At the theater every weekend.

**MR. HOSTESS:** That doesn't mean you should have killed her in revenge.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** I didn't kill her in revenge! I spent those evening with *her* husband at the more serious yet less-attended alternative theatre downtown. (*To INSPECTOR KETCHAM.*) The Corpses and the Hostesses are very much intertwined in vengeance and... theatre-going. We'd never kill each other. I want them to live and suffer.

**MISS CLEANUP:** Truth be known, Mrs. Hostess has a beef with everyone at the party. I'm surprised she just didn't let the sour cream sit out all day before they got here.

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** What kind of beef?

**MRS. HOSTESS:** (*Cheerful.*) Wellington, usually. It's our favorite!

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** We mean what kind of trouble?

**MR. BOWENSCRAPE:** The mistress of the house is fastidious about etiquette. She doesn't forgive its breach. Mrs. Cutter, Mrs. Butcher, Mr. Blade, Mr. Dodder, they've all done something wrong.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** Twenty years ago Mrs. Butcher ate her salad with the entrée fork. She hasn't apologized to this day.

**MR. HOSTESS:** Yet you have her back.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** We're great friends. She's just boorish. Mrs. Corpse, on the other hand...

**MRS. CORPSE:** *(Enters, charmingly addressing MRS. HOSTESS.)* Mrs. Hostess, if your husband is available this evening, I'd like to request the pleasure of his company. *(Snarky.)* Without you. *(Exits, with a cute wave at MR. HOSTESS.)*

**MRS. HOSTESS:** See, that kind of thing.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** Yet you invited her...

**MRS. HOSTESS:** At my husband's insistence.

**MR. HOSTESS:** Luella made these parties so much more interesting.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** I think you invited her over here to kill her.

**MISS CLEANUP:** In front of all these people? Mrs. Hostess gives a good dressing down, but never in public. After dinner we're all presented with a list of all our failures and missteps, whether we're on staff or invited guests.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** *(Had enough.)* Yes, Miss Cleanup, and you missed a spot. It's in the cellar in a far corner. It demands your immediate attention. *(Presents a rag, and MISS CLEANUP, aggravated, snatches the rag and goes to clean it up.)*

**MR. HOSTESS:** I get the same, after a romantic evening. Oh, the murderer surely made the wrong choice!

ACT ONE, SCENE 6

*In the library, OFFICER NEWBIE is interviewing MRS. BUTCHER.*

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** So Mrs. Butcher, what do you know about this ugly business?

**MRS. BUTCHER:** *(Loud and offended.)* Officer Newbie, how dare you? Plastic surgery is no grounds for ridicule.

**DOCTOR CURALL:** *(Enters, quickly.)* You should have seen her five years ago. She looked twenty years older!

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** I meant the murder, doctor.

**DOCTOR CURALL:** Oh. *(Exits, embarrassed.)*

**MRS. BUTCHER:** Oh, it's nothing she didn't have coming.

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** And you brought it to her.

**MRS. BUTCHER:** Luella Corpse loved murder. Angela Lansbury, Dick van Dyke... then she went on to harder stuff, like Agatha Christie. And *Saw*. I had to draw the line after the first four.

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** Are you sure you didn't draw a knife across her throat?

**MRS. BUTCHER:** Are you sure you didn't draw some cockamamie conclusion across your brain? There was no knife involved.

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** And you know that how? *(Dismissive.)* Just give me a confession and we'll both be a lot happier.

**MRS. BUTCHER:** Ok. I confess.

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** See? Easy, and you'll be out in what, twenty, thirty...?

**MRS. BUTCHER:** I confess I don't know what you are talking about. I confess I had nothing to do with it. I'm happy. Are you?

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** Mrs. Cutter seems to think you have a vested interest in Mrs. Corpse's death. She seems to think that you know a lot about murder in general.

**MRS. BUTCHER:** That's your problem right there. She *seems* to think, when in fact, she does nothing of the sort.

**MRS. CORPSE:** *(Enters to comment.)* Mrs. Butcher, you're the one who said "I always enjoy a good killing."

**MRS. BUTCHER:** I meant in the movies. I love a night of gruesome, graphic, blood curdling, nausea-inducing murder! Then I imagine it's my husband. We're not called the Butchers for nothing. But real life? Not so much. (*Shouts off stage.*) Almeda! Almeda, get in here right now.

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** What are you doing? And who is Almeda!

**MRS. BUTCHER:** Hmm, I see an officer not doing her job. I'm going to settle this once and for all. Almeda Cutter, of all things, implicating me in Mrs. Corpse's death!

**MRS. CUTTER:** (*Enters.*) Oh, like *you* didn't do it. I saw you shaking white powder on her strawberry appetizer.

**MRS. BUTCHER:** That was Stevia. An all natural no-calorie sweetener. Did you think it was anthrax?

**MRS. CUTTER:** I wouldn't put it past you to off the woman to get at her asparagus. (*To OFFICER NEWBIE.*) Asparagus is such a premium these days. Even the rich have to ration it.

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** Which would make killing for it is entirely justifiable. So if you did that, Mrs. Butcher, we'll understand. Perhaps a plea bargain. Second degree. Ten, fifteen, something like that. You'll still be spry and on the market when you hit the streets again.

**MRS. BUTCHER:** I hate asparagus! I'd much rather have a Brussels sprout. I would have gladly given Mrs. Corpse my share. Though she was acting suspicious at cocktail hour. She was talking... cryptically...

**MRS. CORPSE:** I'm afraid of asparagus these days. I know of a dinner party where fifteen people took gravely ill, and it was blamed on the asparagus. We wanted to blame the Democrats, but none had been invited.

**MRS. CUTTER:** I told her I knew of no such party.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** (*Enters, gruff.*) And I told her if she didn't eat the asparagus I would look like a fool for serving it, so she'd better pony up. As it stands, my other guests finished off her plate, and they're still standing, so I resent the implication that her death is the result of my dinner!

**MRS. CUTTER:** Oooo, what a little eavesdropper!

**MRS. HOSTESS:** Intercom, Mrs. Cutter. Intercom.

*MURDER IS SO RUDE*

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** What *is* her death to be blamed on, come to think? That's very important. Once we blame it on something, we can blame it on someone! Until then, you're all suspected.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** You are insufferable.

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** Maybe, but at least I'm not implicated in a murder. Like you are. (*Laughs inappropriately.*) So if one of us goes to jail, it will much more likely be (*Laughs again, then suddenly gets serious.*) you!

*MRS. HOSTESS exits stiffly.*

Do Not Copy

ACT ONE, SCENE 7

OFFICER NEWBIE, INSPECTOR KETCHAM, MRS. CORPSE, DOCTOR CURALL, and DR. COLDSLAB in discussion. MRS. CORPSE is being shown to the OTHERS as part of the investigation into the cause of her death.

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** So what's the deal with the cadaver?

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** The correct terminology is "what are your findings in regards to the deceased?"

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** Same thing. It's not like you can offend a corpse.

**MRS. CORPSE:** Oh, but you can, officer, you can... now if you please, Dr. Coldslab will share his findings.

**DR. COLDSLAB:** *(Brings MRS. CORPSE to them ALL to show her off and discuss the cause of death.)* I checked her here. *(Points somewhere.)*

**MRS. CORPSE:** Doctor! Show a lady some modesty.

**DR. COLDSLAB:** Then I checked here there. *(Points somewhere inoffensive.)*

**MRS. CORPSE:** I'm not that kind of girl! *(Slaps DR. COLDSLAB.)*

**DR. COLDSLAB:** Then I cut her open to look inside.

**MRS. CORPSE:** To find a body of evidence?

**DR. COLDSLAB:** Old joke.

**MRS. CORPSE:** Sorry.

**DR. COLDSLAB:** You're excused. You're a very old woman.

*MRS. CORPSE is offended.*

**DR. COLDSLAB:** My autopsy found that you'd been lying about your age. Plus that you have a hard time saying no to cheese and crackers.

**DOCTOR CURALL:** Please, Dr. Coldslab. What did you find? Other than cheese.

**DR. COLDSLAB:** Well... as I said... crackers.

**DOCTOR CURALL:** *(Impatient.)* Other than that!

**DR. COLDSLAB:** Nothing you could have cured.

**DOCTOR CURALL:** That gets me off the hook.

**DR. COLDSLAB:** It was your day off after all.

*MURDER IS SO RUDE*

**DOCTOR CURALL:** Yes, people should really avoid maladies on a Saturday night.

**MRS. CORPSE:** So what did I die of?

**DR. COLDSLAB:** Poison, I believe.

**DOCTOR CURALL:** I knew it!

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** How did *you* know it?

**DOCTOR CURALL:** Uh... I just.. uh.. figured. I mean I *am* a doctor. Plus, people in this income bracket tend to poison more often than not. They think it's cleaner than bullets.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** So you know the cause of death without examining the patient.

**DOCTOR CURALL:** I took a quick look.

**DR. COLDSLAB:** Poisoned... by a spoonful of hummus.

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** Hummus. What an unsuspecting murder weapon. So Middle Eastern, yet so American. So healthy, yet now so deadly. We need to find out who wielded this instrument of destruction.

**MRS. CORPSE:** I knew it tasted funny! (*Tries to get OFFICER's attention.*) I know exactly who did it.

*The OTHERS talk among themselves, SHE tries to get their attention.*

**MRS. CORPSE:** I said I know who did it! Hey! Officer! Doctor! Listen to me! (*No one does.*) Oh that's right. They can't hear me. (*To audience.*) Wouldn't *you* like to know?

**END OF ACT ONE**

ACT TWO, SCENE 1

*EVERYONE is present except MADAME MINDREAD, MRS. CORPSE, and DR. COLDSLAB. MRS. HACKER is hidden on the floor. Extras from Act One can be included.*

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** *(Walking among EVERYONE, trying to look threatening but not doing a very good job of it.)* So, which one of you gave her the hummus? *(Silence.)* There's a game on TV tonight I really want to see.

**MR. HOSTESS:** *(With disdain.)* What game... *Wheel of Fortune?*

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** I'm going to become very angry if I miss it. So again, if one of you will confess, and I don't particularly care who it is... our work here will be done. So...*(Claps her hands motivationally.)* who wants to take one for the team?

**MR. OVERBILL:** I would suggest we leave here as well. My obligations as guest have long ago run out, and I've converted my current situation into billable hours.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** Someone here will be needing your services.

**MISS CLEANUP:** *(Narrating.)* I put the hummus in a serving bowl, but I didn't poison it

**MRS. HOSTESS:** The bowl was incorrect. It was too small.

**MISS CLEANUP:** Like my pay, but I make do.

**MR. BLADE:** I remember passing the hummus. It looked funny. Like anthrax.

**MRS. CUTTER:** *I* passed the hummus to Mrs. Corpse, actually.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** So you admit to killing her.

**MRS. CUTTER:** I didn't say that. I just passed her the hummus. Mr. Dodder gave it to me. Well, he dropped it first, you know. He's such a...

**MR. DODDER:** I resent that.

**MRS. CUTTER:** How can you resent what I haven't even said?

**MR. DODDER:** I'm slow. I have to work ahead. And I didn't drop the hummus. I merely put it on the floor while I was looking for a contact lens.

**MR. BLADE:** You don't wear contact lenses.

**MR. DODDER:** *(Comes to a realization.)* That explains why I can't see! But... Mrs. Butcher gave me the hummus.

*MURDER IS SO RUDE*

**MRS. BUTCHER:** You snatched it from me. I didn't even get any. Which is good, I might have been killed myself.

**MISS CLEANUP:** This means... that maybe Mrs. Corpse wasn't the intended victim. Whoever had the hummus first was the object of this crime. Poor Mrs. Corpse died someone else's death.

**MR. BOWENSCRAPE:** So Mr. Hostess' slyly attending dinner theatre with Mrs. Corpse had nothing to do with this. That's too bad, it was a perfect excuse, once it got out.

**MR. HOSTESS:** How dare you! We simply enjoyed a type of entertainment disdained by our respective spouses. And how, pray tell, did you come to find out?

**MR. BOWENSCRAPE:** I know everything, sir. It comes with the territory. When your entire life is opening and closing doors, you pay very close attention to what's going on... on *both* sides!

**MR. CORPSE:** If you know everything, then you have a motive to kill everyone. (*Trying to get EVERYONE to agree.*) I say the butler did it!

**MR. BLADE:** I go with butler!

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** Me too!

**EVERYONE:** (*Chanting and pumping fists.*) But-ler! But-ler! But-ler!

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** Silence! (*To OFFICER.*) Watch your mouth. You can't just proclaim someone did it and be done with it.

*Pause as EVERYONE is embarrassed.*

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** Only I can do that.

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** Maybe quitting time doesn't mean anything to you.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** You can quit permanently!

**DOCTOR CURALL:** I think this will be my last party at this place.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** How insulting! Someone dies one time and you blame the hostess.

**MR. HOSTESS:** That's so rude.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** This hummus has made this killing even more mysterious. We don't know who someone wanted to kill or who tried to do it. We're back to square one.

**MR. DODDER:** Well, I'm leaving. I need an after-dinner snack. (*HE starts to walk and trips over MRS. HACKER.*) My gosh, woman, get up!

- MISS CLEANUP:** (*Looks, as if to notice her for the first time.*) Mrs. Hacker! She's.... she's...
- MRS. HOSTESS:** What, dead? I wouldn't put it past her. Soon it will be all the rage—dying at my parties.
- MISS CLEANUP:** Yes...! Dead!
- MRS. HOSTESS:** Fine, then take her out of here.
- MR. HOSTESS:** And hurry, my wife hates a corpse in the drawing room. (*To MR. CORPSE, apologetic.*) Present company excepted.
- MRS. HOSTESS:** No, I don't like you here very much either.
- MR. CORPSE:** But.. our... alternative theater! Stealing sandwiches at intermission! Was it all for nothing?
- MRS. HOSTESS:** That didn't mean I liked *you*. I just didn't like your wife so I went to the theater with you out of revenge. She knew so many secrets about me I couldn't very well exclude her from the party, now could I?
- MR. CORPSE:** She knew about your jewelry theft, your fraudulent bank deals, and about that stunt you pulled on the cheerleading squad in junior high... she *did* know a lot.
- INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** So you had every reason to want her dead, Mrs. Hostess.
- MRS. HOSTESS:** Yes, every reason. But not Mrs. Hacker! We were very close! The last thing she said was, "If you want to kill Mrs. Corpse, I'll do it for you and take the blame."
- MRS. CUTTER:** She didn't say that at all. She said, "Mrs. Hostess is trying to talk me into offing Mrs. Corpse, yet she's so much more skilled at murder than I."
- MR. HOSTESS:** None of this is true, and no one wanted to kill Mrs. Hacker. She isn't interesting enough.
- MISS CLEANUP:** It sounds like everyone here has a perfect motive to kill everyone else.
- MRS. HOSTESS:** Yes, we do, but then who would we party with and who would we talk about?
- MR. OVERBILL:** Someone in here is killing us, one by one, and you, Inspector Ketcham, refuse to let us leave. That being the case, I'll say you are the killer, either in truth, or inadvertently.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** I admit this method of investigation has its downside. The last time this happened were out in an hour. Dinner, murder, party. It was a political thing. Everybody lied, so I knew exactly who did it. You people are far too forthcoming. All of you, except for one... and I need to find out just who that is!

**MRS. HOSTESS:** In the meantime, there are some crumpets in the TV room. *(To INSPECTOR KETCHAM.)* Can this end soon, I'm running low on crumpets.

**MR. BLADE:** And who doesn't love a good crumpet? Out of my way. *(Exit.)*

**MR. DODDER:** *(No one is in his way, but HE acts like it anyway.)* I haven't had a crumpet in half a century! Out of my way! *(Moves slowly.)* I said out of my way! *(Exits, finally.)*

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** Doctor, could you examine the body and pronounce it dead?

**DOCTOR CURALL:** Sorry, there's nothing I can do.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** Doctor, examine the body if you please.

**DOCTOR CURALL:** I'm not on call. Perhaps you need an... oncologist. *(Laughs at his joke, but no one else does.)* Oncologist? Get it? Oh never mind.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** You can bill the police department.

**DOCTOR CURALL:** In that case... *(Takes a look.)* She's dead.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** You didn't even check for a pulse.

**DOCTOR CURALL:** She doesn't have a pulse. That's what "dead" means.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** *(Checks.)* She's not dead at all.

**DOCTOR CURALL:** Wow, how could I miss that? Must be my day off.

**MRS. HACKER:** *(Gets up.)* Shhhhh!

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** Shhhh?

**MRS. HACKER:** Shhhh. If they think I'm dead, I can get out of here.

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** It doesn't work that way. In fact, now you've implicated yourself further, Mrs. Hacker.

**MRS. HACKER:** I've been lying on the floor the whole time. How does that implicate me?

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** It just does. Don't you know anything about police work?

**DOCTOR CURALL:** I think she's just doing this for attention.

**MR. OVERBILL:** Yes... everyone says “Poor Mrs. Hacker. I loved her so. I wish I was nice to her when she was alive.” She finds out what we really think and takes revenge accordingly.

**MRS. HACKER:** My plan was to get out of here. Either I'd sneak out or I'd get carried out in a body bag. It's really hard to hold your breath like that, so I'd say I did a pretty good job. *(To DOCTOR CURALL.)* I suggest you let me go. How will you explain your misdiagnosis? I'll sue you all for malpractice!

**MR. DODDER:** *(Enters, painfully and having trouble standing up.)* Someone poisoned... a crumpet!

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** No, you're just old. Time for you to go.

**MR. DODDER:** *(Goes to OFFICER quickly and cuffs her.)* You insolent hussy! *(Then gets back to dying.)* Someone poisoned a crumpet! *(HE falls over.)*

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** Did they poison *one*? Or the whole batch?

**MR. DODDER:** How am I supposed to know? You're the detective. So get in there and detect. As for me, I'm about to meet my maker. And my mother, and my father. And my three ex wives. Plus my high school sweetheart. I was quite a Romeo in my day. Wish me luck, I'll need it. Now, if you'll excuse me... I hear crumpets calling... but... *(Pathetic.)* no tea... *(HE dies.)*

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** This is ridiculous. We have hummus that was passed to someone, to someone else, from someone else, by someone else, to Mrs. Corpse. So whoever wanted to kill Mrs. Corpse was irrelevant, and whoever had a beef with Mrs. Corpse was irrelevant. It also means that... one of you is still yet to be a victim. Unless, of course, the intention was Mr. Dodder all along.

**MR. BLADE:** *(Enters.)* Mrs. Hacker, aren't you supposed to be dead?

**MRS. HACKER:** It just wasn't my time, Mr. Blade. I'm sorry. I tried.

**MR. BLADE:** *(Snide.)* Not hard enough, Mrs. Hacker.

**MRS. HACKER:** There's no need to be rude. If you wanted my kale you could have just asked for it.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** If you please!

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** So, in essence, we don't know who wanted to kill who. Just that everyone wants someone dead.

**MR. BLADE:** And for trifling reasons.

**MR. CORPSE:** I'm sure if we wait around long enough, we'll find out.

*MURDER IS SO RUDE*

**MRS. HOSTESS:** In the mean time, I'm having the cook make up a new batch of crumpets. Just in case someone still wants one.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** Well... since we have no idea of what's going on here, I took it upon myself to bring in some outside help....

*Enter MADAME MINDREAD, a psychic. Since MADAME MINDREAD will reveal herself as having another identity later in the script, this costume should be very outrageous as it needs to be hiding her true self.*

**MADAME MINDREAD:** I'm Madame Millicent Mary Mindread, the best known psychic in the West, the East, the North, and... well not so much the South, but I'm working on it. I'm going to sniff out the killer if it takes all day. *(If male, change the name to Monsieur Milligan Martin Mindread.)*

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** Hurry, I'm missing my shows!

**MADAME MINDREAD:** Don't you TiVo?

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** On *my* salary? I'm a policemen, not a lawyer.

**MR. OVERBILL:** Speaking of which, my billable hours are running up! Perhaps you can come watch *my* TV later this week—if you let me out of here now.

**OFFICER NEWBIE:** That's bribing an officer.

**MR. OVERBILL:** I can afford it. And I'll get myself off the hook when I testify that you took it!

**MADAME MINDREAD:** Silence! I need to evolve with the energy. I need to feast on your fears. Tinker with your thoughts. Meld with your minds. Arrange with your auras.

**INSPECTOR KETCHAM:** We get it.

**MADAME MINDREAD:** Shhhh! I must have quiet. Complete, total, quiet. Now... silence! Absolute silence. Silence that weighs on you like a giant velour curtain falling from a catwalk.

**MRS. BUTCHER:** Nobody's talking but you!

**MADAME MINDREAD:** It's my shtick. Run with it. (*SHE goes around to EVERYONE.*) Mr. Blade works as a knife seller in an outlet mall. Two children, one went to college, one to prison. Prior record of smuggling and bootlegging roast beef into a vegan restaurant. Mrs. Butcher, known to interrupt people to thwart their goals. Has a propensity towards... well, never mind. Enjoys crumpets and hummus, but won't share. Mrs. Cutter, a seamstress and clothing designer. No one likes her outfits. Too conservative, except in New Hampshire. She's jealous of others' successes. Motive? Of course! Mrs. Hacker? A writer. Well, not really. Mr. Corpse... hmmm... I dare not say!

**MR. BLADE:** You're incorrect!

**MRS. BUTCHER:** It's not true

**MRS. CUTTER:** It's all lies.

**MADAME MINDREAD:** Silence!

**MRS. HOSTESS:** Excuse me, but no one comes to my house and tells me to shut up.

**MR. HOSTESS:** I do.

**MR. BOWENSCRAPE:** I'd like to.

**MRS. HOSTESS:** And it doesn't work, now does it? So, Madame Millicent Mary, either you pony up the killer or get out.

**MADAME MINDREAD:** It's coming...

*MADAME MINDREAD closes her eyes, points a finger, and turns around in a circle a few times. People move out of her way as SHE gets dizzy and loses her balance, then falls to the ground, pointing up in the air.*

**MADAME MINDREAD:** It's... YOU! (*Her finger is pointing where no one is standing.*)

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