

MURDER WITH TOMATO SAUCE

By David J. LeMaster

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CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

Hostess (F)

Mr. Higgenbotham (M)

Mrs. Higgenbotham (F)

Manager (E) – a notebook

Rupert (E) Although they
say she's a woman late
in the show, she may
be played by either sex

Jones (M) – a blowgun

Jupiter Kingsley (E)

Boston Yard (E)

Mr. Sam Salt (M)

Sylvia Salt (F)

Cynthia Salt (F)

Waiter (M)

Waitress (F)

Rathbone (E)

Cook (E)

Person Who Doesn't Belong
(Red Herring) (E)

Martinson (E)

Policeman (E)

PRODUCTION NOTES

Note: Should the director choose, the waiter and waitress may be combined as one role, and the cook and the person who doesn't belong may also be combined. If needed, the manager and the hostess may be combined as well. The policeman may be doubled with another character.

Note: The first murder (when a person in the audience is killed) may be prearranged by the director. It is suggested that people receive raffle tickets, notes, etc., or the word "murdered" is taped to the bottom (or back) of someone's chair. The manager and wait staff may improvise as they look through the theatre to find the murder victim.

Note: At the end of the first act, if there is no curtain, the director may either black out for all of the "victims" to leave the stage, or the director can have the remaining characters (or set dressers) carry the bodies off one by one as part of the production.

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Act One

(A restaurant. The theatre may be transformed to seat diners, etc., so that the show is accompanied by an actual dinner if needed, but dinner theater is not a requirement to produce this show. It is up to the production company to provide the specifics.)

(Onstage is a series of tables and chairs representing a restaurant. It may be as elaborate or as simple as the company requires.)

(A hostess stands stage right. Enter the HIGGENBOTHAMS, a rich and snooty couple. SHE carries a large purse/bag and wears furs. HE is dressed in a suit or a tuxedo.)

HOSTESS: Good evening, Horace and Hilda Higgenbotham. How nice to see you.

HIGGENBOTHAM: Likewise, I'm sure. Miss—

HOSTESS: Smith. I'm your hostess.

HIGGENBOTHAM: Ah, yes. Miss. Smith.

MRS. HIGGENBOTHAM: Horace, don't be fresh.

HIGGENBOTHAM: Sorry, my dear.

HOSTESS: May I see your invitation?

HIGGENBOTHAM: Of course. **(presents invitation)**

HOSTESS: Very good. A table for two tonight?

MRS. HIGGENBOTHAM: Two and a dog.

HOSTESS: I'm afraid you can't have a dog here.

MRS. HIGGENBOTHAM: But I take Missy everywhere. **(indicates purse, where she has a dog. The dog may be a puppet)** Isn't that right, my dear, dear little girl. **(kisses dog. Makes silly sounds, etc)**

HOSTESS: I'm afraid the board of health won't allow—

HIGGENBOTHAM: Nonsense. I'll buy it.

HOSTESS: The board of health?

HIGGENBOTHAM: Yes. Point out the owner and I'll write him a check.

HOSTESS: I don't think it's for sale.

HIGGENBOTHAM: Nonsense, young lady. Everything is for sale. Now, how much do you want?

MR. SALT: **(entering)** Yo, excuse me. Can we get some service here?

MRS. HIGGENBOTHAM: Oh, dear.

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HIGGENBOTHAM: A commoner.

MR. SALT: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Whatever. **(to HOSTESS)** Table for three.

HIGGENBOTHAM: **(to SALT)** Do you mind? We were here first.

MRS. HIGGENBOTHAM: The nerve of some people.

MR. SALT: Well, hurry up, will ya?

HIGGENBOTHAM: What an embarrassment.

HOSTESS: **(to HIGGENBOTHAMS)** I'll seat you.

(They follow her stage left.)

MRS. HIGGENBOTHAM: **(indicates SALT)** Please be sure we're as far away from that man as possible.

HOSTESS: Yes, Ma'am.

(Enter SYLVIA SALT.)

SYLVIA: Are we late?

MR. SALT: I don't think so. There don't seem to be too many people here.

SYLVIA: Doesn't.

MR. SALT: Doesn't what?

SYLVIA: Doesn't seem to be anyone here.

MR. SALT: Yeah, I don't think so, either. Maybe we're early.

SYLVIA: But what about Cynthia?

MR. SALT: I thought she was with you.

SYLVIA: No, I left you together.

MR. SALT: You said, "Go get the seats, and we'll meet you in the restaurant."

SYLVIA: I said, "I'll meet you in the restaurant." Cynthia was supposed to accompany you.

MR. SALT: Look, you dumb broad, I left the girl with you.

(MRS. SALT starts to slap MR. SALT. HOSTESS returns just in time. SHE fakes being happy.)

HOSTESS: **(returns)** Now. Mr. and Mrs. SALT is it?

MR. SALT: Sam Salt, that's right. You want my invitation?

HOSTESS: Yes, please.

MR. SALT: Give it to her, Sylvia.

SYLVIA: **(exasperated)** Give what to whom?

MR. SALT: Do I stutter? Give her the invitation.

SYLVIA: I don't have it.

MR. SALT: I gave it to you, babe.

SYLVIA: You most certainly did not.

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MR. SALT: Yeah, I did. You got it, babe.

SYLVIA: You have it, dear.

MR. SALT: No, you got it, babe.

SYLVIA: But my dear—

HOSTESS: I'm afraid you can't come in without an invitation.

MR. SALT: **(to HOSTESS)** Excuse us. **(to SYLVIA)** Look in your purse.

SYLVIA: It isn't in my purse.

MR. SALT: Yeah, it is.

SYLVIA: **(looks in purse)** It most certainly isn't. See?

(SHE goes through her purse. There are all kinds of items and gives them to MR. SALT to hold: Lipstick, makeup, lip balm, a mirror, and a mysterious looking item that appears to be a gun. Have fun with this; the more items SHE takes out, the funnier it will be.)

MR. SALT: Come on, we ain't got all day.

SYLVIA: But my dear—

MR. SALT: What else you got in there? Jimmy Hoffa? ***(SHE pulls a salt and pepper shaker from purse. MRS. SALT is embarrassed that HOSTESS sees)*** Oops. How did that get in there?

SYLVIA: I know it's here somewhere.

(SHE withdraws a knife, a piece of rope, a candlestick, and a pair of brass knuckles. MR.SALT shrugs.)

MR. SALT: **(to HOSTESS)** Women? She's a walking dollar store, what can I say?

(Enter CYNTHIA, a teenager. SHE has a horrible attitude. SHE stands, furious, watching her mother go through the purse.)

CYNTHIA: Oh, for goodness sake. I've got the stupid invitation, Mother.

MR. SALT: You?

CYNTHIA: ***(gives invitation)*** Yeah, you gave me it to me in the stupid car.

SYLVIA: Where have you been?

CYNTHIA: I had to go to the crapper.

SYLVIA: Cynthia! That is inappropriate language.

CYNTHIA: Whatever.

SYLVIA: We call it the toilet.

MR. SALT: Yeah, yeah. Now, can we sit down and get some grub?

HOSTESS: Right this way.

(Leads them to a table on opposite end of stage from Higgenbothams. MRS. HIGGENBOTHAM's dog barks as they cross the stage.)

HIGGENBOTHAM: I say, look at that bunch of hooligans.

MRS. HIGGENBOTHAM: They're certainly out of place here.

HIGGENBOTHAM: Surely they couldn't have been given an invitation? I thought this was a prestigious affair.

MRS. HIGGENBOTHAM: Perhaps they are the ones to be victimized tonight?

HIGGENBOTHAM: Ah, a delightful idea.

(Both laugh. The dog barks. MRS. HIGGENBOTHAM reaches into her own bag to feed the dog treats. Enter RUPERT and JONES, who look like a Vaudeville team. RUPERT is tall, thin, and quiet. JONES is short and round. The HOSTESS approaches them.)

HOSTESS: Good evening. Do you have your invitations?

JONES: ***(proud)*** Of course. We're Rupert and Jones, the world's famous detect— ***(RUPERT elbows JONES)*** What? But she asked us— ***(RUPERT elbows JONES)*** Oh, the low profile. Right.

(changes tone) Please, Miss. Just show us to our seats.

HOSTESS: Do you have your invitations?

JONES: Yes, right here. ***(gives them)***

HOSTESS: Ah, yes, Rupert and Jones, the world's famous detectives.

JONES: I told you she'd know it was us— ***(RUPERT elbows JONES)*** Right.

HOSTESS: This way. ***(SHE leads them to seats stage right)***

CYNTHIA: Mom, this is stupid. I want to go home.

SYLVIA: Sam. Would you please address your daughter?

MR. SALT: Who?

MRS. SALT: Cynthia.

MR. SALT: Oh, yeah, yeah. ***(pause)*** What about?

SYLVIA: About her behavior in public.

CYNTHIA: This whole dinner is just stupid. I don't want to sit in this stupid restaurant with these stupid people eating this stupid food.

MR. SALT: Me neither. I saw a Burger Berg across the street. Let' go.

SYLVIA: Would the two of you please sit down and stop embarrassing me?

(Enter JUPITER KINGSLEY. HOSTESS approaches.)

HOSTESS: Ah, you must be Jupiter Kingsley.

JUPITER: That's right.

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HOSTESS: And are you here alone?

JUPITER: No, my friend. . . (**Enter BOSTON YARD, JUPITER's date**)

Ah, this way, Boston.

BOSTON: I thought I saw something in the lobby—

JUPITER: Something?

BOSTON: (**to HOSTESS**) Does this establishment have secret service men?

HOSTESS: No, I'm afraid we don't.

BOSTON: KGB Agents? FBI? CIA? Undercover operatives?

HOSTESS: Afraid not.

BOSTON: Oh. Well, I suppose I didn't see anything at all. Dinner, then?

HOSTESS: Right this way.

(SHE seats them in the final table, center stage. Enter a waiter and a WAITRESS. The WAITER crosses center.)

WAITER: Are we all here?

HOSTESS: All present and accounted for.

WAITER: Ladies and gentlemen. On the menu today are two choices.

Spaghetti with meatballs, or vegetarian spaghetti with tomato sauce.

JONES: Vegetarian? (**RUPERT elbows JONES**)

WAITER: Your choices of drink are water and expensive sparkling water.

HIGGENBOTHAM: Preposterous.

MRS. HIGGENBOTHAM: What kind of a restaurant is this?

WAITER: And your choices of dessert are Hostess Ding Dongs, Twinkies, and Tootsie Rolls.

MR. SALT: How much'd we pay for this?

SYLVIA: One hundred and fifty dollars a person.

MR. SALT: That's it. We're getting our dough back and going for burgers.

WAITER: Anyone for vegetarian spaghetti?

MR. SALT: Yo, buddy. We want a refund.

JONES: Me, too. (**RUPERT elbows him**)

BOSTON: That does seem a rather ridiculous price for the evening's dinner.

JUPITER: Is there a manager?

WAITRESS: He'll (**she'll**) be along shortly.

MR. SALT: Well, I want my money back.

BOSTON: Yes. This dinner is certainly not worth the price.

WAITER: You haven't even had your dinner yet.

JUPITER: But what you're charging--

JONES: And what you're claiming you'll serve—(**Enter MANAGER dramatically**)

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MANAGER: Silence!

MR. SALT: **(pause)** Who the heck are you?

MANAGER: I am the manager of this establishment and your host for the evening. **(to WAITER and WAITRESS)** Why are they without food?

WAITRESS: They haven't ordered yet.

MANAGER: Serve them anyway.

WAITRESS: You got it.

(Throughout the following the WAITER and WAITRESS serve food to the characters onstage. WAITER dumps a small plate of spaghetti in front of MR. and MRS. HIGGENBOTHAM.)

HIGGENBOTHAM: I say, didn't we order dinner for two?

WAITER: That is dinner for two.

HIGGENBOTHAM: For a hundred and fifty dollars?

WAITER: What do you care, you old money bag? You can afford it.

HIGGENBOTHAM: See here!

MRS. HIGGENBOTHAM: Do you have anything for the dog?

WAITER: Afraid not, ma'am.

(Pause. SHE lets the dog eat her side of the spaghetti. HIGGENBOTHAM is furious.)

HIGGENBOTHAM: Do you mind if I eat my own dinner first?

MRS. HIGGENBOTHAM: Missy has to have her food. **(to dog)** Don't you Missy? Yes, you do. Yes, you do.

(WAITRESS brings a plate of spaghetti with one giant meatball to the SALTS.)

MR. SALT: Oh, no you don't. We're not eating a thing.

CYNTHIA: Don't be stupid, Dad. The meatball looks delicious.

MR. SALT: I ain't paying a hundred and a half for no meatball.

SYLVIA: Stop being cranky and eat your dinner, dear.

MR. SALT: You call this dinner? **(to WAITRESS)** Yo, Miss?

WAITRESS: Yes?

MR. SALT: You got any crackers?

WAITRESS: Yes. But they're twenty dollars extra.

MR. SALT: What kind of rip-off is this?

(WAITER has dumped another plate of spaghetti in front of RUPERT and JONES.)

JONES: Thank you.

WAITER: Want some Parmesan cheese?

JONES: No. **(RUPERT elbows him)** Yes? **(WAITER puts cheese on spaghetti)** Rupert, I don't like Parmesan cheese. **(WAITER finishes. RUPERT snatches the spaghetti and begins to eat)** Wait. Where's mine? **(RUPERT holds out a fork as a weapon to stave off JONES. Later, as RUPERT eats the spaghetti, HE uses the napkin liberally to wipe his mouth.)** Oh. Guess I'll just wait, then.

(WAITRESS approaches JUPITER and BOSTON with a plate of spaghetti.)

BOSTON: Afraid we'll need two plates here. I'm a vegetarian.

WAITRESS: Oh, yes. You've got the vegetarian plate. One for you **(puts plate of spaghetti in front of JUPITER)** and one for you **(puts empty plate in front of BOSTON)**

BOSTON: What's this?

WAITRESS: Your spaghetti.

BOSTON: But there's nothing here.

WAITRESS: It's vegetarian.

(WAITER and WAITRESS walk stage right and stand.)

JUPITER: I always wondered how you vegetarians made it without meat.

BOSTON: But it's an empty plate.

JUPITER: Have you tried it?

BOSTON: Of course not.

JUPITER: Then what are you complaining about?

(BOSTON struggles with how to try the dinner. HE mimes putting a fork to the plate and taking a bite.)

JUPITER: How is it?

BOSTON: **(defeated)** I've had worse.

MANAGER: **(to HOSTESS)** Very good. Has everyone been served?

HOSTESS: Yes.

MANAGER: Then we're ready to begin. The list. **(HOSTESS gives it)** I'd like to welcome you all here this evening. **(clears throat and looks at list)** Let's see. First, we have Hilda and Horatio Higgenbotham, retired, formerly of Scotland Yard.

HIGGENBOTHAM: Yes, that's right.

MANAGER: Welcome, sir.

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HIGGENBOTHAM: Thank you.

MANAGER: A very impressive career, I must say. Thirty years on the force.

HIGGENBOTHAM: Yes.

MANAGER: Considered one of Britain's top sleuths.

HIGGENBOTHAM: Oh, well. Thank you.

MRS. HIGGENBOTHAM: Oh, Horatio. I'm so proud of you.

MANAGER: And heir to millions.

HIGGENBOTHAM: Actually that's billions. With a "B."

MANAGER: So many billions, in fact, that your critics claim you've purchased your reputation as an investigator, and in actuality you're not particularly bright.

HIGGENBOTHAM: I say, my good man. How dare you.

MANAGER: Well, it's true. And then, there's Hilda. Higgenbotham, the world's most avid reader of cheap mystery novels.

HIGGENBOTHAM: You are?

MANAGER: And a whiz at "Where's Waldo."

HIGGENBOTHAM: Sheer nonsense.

MRS. HIGGENBOTHAM: Well—

HIGGENBOTHAM: You actually play such juvenile games?

MRS. HIGGENBOTHAM: I was state champion last year.

MANAGER: And what's that in your purse, madam?

MRS. HIGGENBOTHAM: *(tries to hide it)* What purse?

MANAGER: Please, Madam. You're not fooling anyone.

MRS. HIGGENBOTHAM: Oh. Well, it's—

MANAGER: Missy the Wonderdog. And in an eating establishment. Tsk, tsk, tsk.

MRS. HIGGENBOTHAM: But she's ever so well behaved.

MANAGER: Missy, whose keen sense of smell has uncovered countless clues for Scotland Yard.

HIGGENBOTHAM: It has?

MANAGER: While you, Mr. Higgenbotham, always take credit for finding them.

HIGGENBOTHAM: That's not true. I can explain—

MANAGER: Madam, I do hope you've brought a pooper scooper in case there's an emergency.

(SHE smiles and pulls one out of her purse.)

JONES: What else have you got in that bag, madam, a few hundred pounds to pay off the board of health? ***(RUPERT elbows JONES)***

MANAGER: Ah, yes. Our second pair of sleuths, the world famous detectives, Rupert and Jones.

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JONES: That's Jones and Rupert—(**RUPERT elbows JONES**) Well, it should be.

MANAGER: The two of you have personally put more than a hundred criminals behind bars.

JONES: You know our work?

MANAGER: You're a prolific crime-solving team known the world round.

JONES: Yes, well, I—(**RUPERT elbows JONES**) What???

MANAGER: Ah, yes, and your partner, the great Rupert. Silently watching events unfold around him (**her**), as Jones blathers on and on about insipid nonsense.

JONES: I beg your pardon!? (**RUPERT elbows JONES**) Will you cut that out? (**RUPERT elbows JONES. JONES moves his chair away**)

MANAGER: Your reputation proceeds you, Rupert. Anything to say? (**RUPERT glares**) Want to disclose how you recently broke open the case of the Transylvanian Schnope Diamond?

JONES: Oh, yes, our most famous case. We were faced with insufferable odds, unbelievable terrors, horrible murderous suspects, and—(**RUPERT scoots chair close to JONES and then elbows JONES**) Forget it.

MANAGER: And then, our third team, Jupiter Kingsley and his (**her**) sidekick, Boston Yard.

BOSTON: Sidekick? See here, I'm the brains of this team—

JUPITER: Quiet, Boston.

BOSTON: But I—

JUPITER: Quiet, Boston.

BOSTON: You can't—

JUPITER: Quiet, Boston.

BOSTON: But—

JUPITER: Quiet, Boston.

BOSTON: Right.

MANAGER: A pair of internationally famous sleuths who solve crimes the old fashioned way. With police sketches and fingerprints.

BOSTON: Actually, we've graduated to computer analysis and DNA testing. I went back to school and we purchased a lab—

JUPITER: Quiet, Boston.

BOSTON: But he—

JUPITER: Quiet, Boston.

BOSTON: But you—

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