

REMAIN SEATED

A Mystery Thriller!

A play by Cenarth Fox

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Production Notes

Remain Seated and all **FOX** plays come with free notes with detailed ideas and suggestions for each play. Topics include *set-design, lighting, props, costumes*, etc.



Remain Seated

By Cenarth Fox
Published by FOX PLAYS

Some reviews of this popular mystery performed in Australia, the USA and Britain

Remain Seated provides the audience with at least one body, several suspects and plenty of motives. It's a thriller in the grand tradition. The clues are there for the observant but the final revelations are sure to surprise. The tight, pacy script leads the audience through many twists and turns and the result is a murder-mystery whodunit with the inevitable, completely unpredictable ending.

Piggery Lane Players

Remain Seated is a fast-moving mystery thriller with plenty of suspense

Tongala Little Theatre Inc

Our production of *Remain Seated* went very well

Quirindi Dramatic Society

Remain Seated is a combination of various aspects of theatre – drama, comedy and farce. The plot has more twists than a country lane.

Sunshine Community Theatre Inc

Remain Seated is a challenging play for both actors and audiences. The final scene is a real cliffhanger.

Kingsport Players

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Synopsis

Remain Seated is a murder mystery. Well, there is at least one death and we're not certain how the person died. To say any more would probably tell you whodunit. The setting is a performance of a play by your local theatre society. Strange things happen on stage. Keep your eye on the actor downstage left.

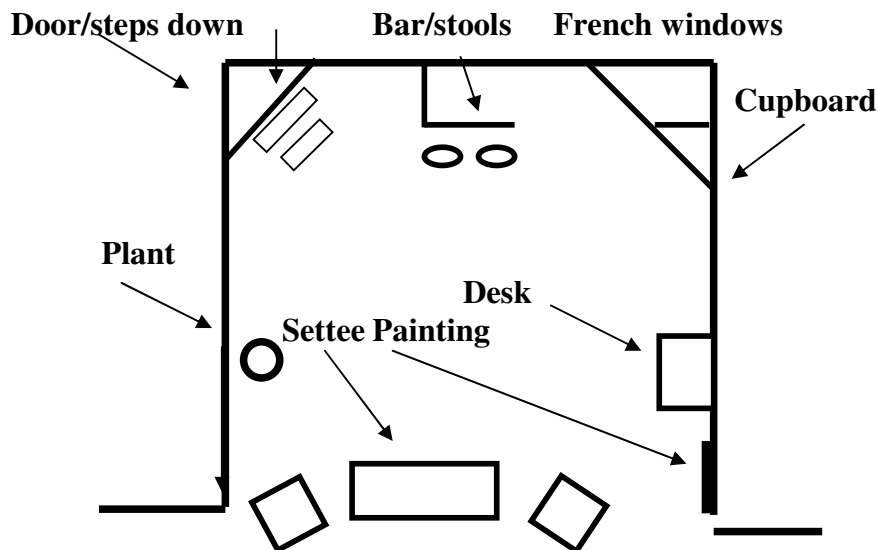
Setting and Time

There is no definite location. It could be Melbourne, Manchester or Malibu. Accents will change according to your location. The time is the present.

Note: *Remain Seated* can be a piece of dinner-theatre. Suggested running-order:

Entree
Main Course
Act One
Dessert
Act Two
Coffee & Mints

Stage Setting



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Characters

COLIN DOUGLAS - middle-aged, self-made, self-educated, successful businessman, owns his own business, not a slob but lacks sophistication, no flair, not a film-star

ROGER GRIFFITH - the actor playing Colin, flashy, sophisticated, self-indulgent, a touch over-the-top, if there is such a thing as a stereotype thespian - he's it

SHIRLEY DOUGLAS - Colin's wife, middle-aged, lacks style or class, not common but certainly down-to-earth, loud, gives as good as she gets, enjoys a drink and a laugh

LOIS FENWICK - the actor playing Shirley, mature, generally quiet and polite

GARY DOUGLAS - Colin and Shirley's son, young adult, immature, too big for his boots, self-indulgent, pushy, chauvinist, impolite, wiseguy

PETER REYNOLDS - the actor playing Gary, caring, sensitive, quietly-spoken

DENISE DOUGLAS - Gary's wife, young adult, quiet, timid, insipid, suffers in silence

CARRIE ALMOND - the actor playing Denise, independent, strong, articulate

TERRI FENTON - stage manager, could be young [20] or older [up to 50], loves live theatre, gets on well with actors, good at her job, good at her work, a professional

SUE TROMPP - young or middle-aged woman who works in the local theatre company

LENA FRANCIS - Colin's accountant, 30ish, sophisticated, intelligent, attractive, well-dressed, successful businesswoman, independent, decision-maker, slight foreign accent

ROBERT BURTON - middle-aged policeman, detective-sergeant attached to homicide-squad, dedicated, industrious, an average, ordinary, battling copper

LOUISE DRAUF - policewoman, constable, youngish, inexperienced, quietly spoken, good officer, dedicated, career policewoman likely to succeed

Note: The first ten characters require only five players.

ACT ONE

*(Curtain rises on lounge-room in wealthy, contemporary house. [See Stage Setting]. UC is a flashy bar complete with glasses, stools and mirror. A plush settee is DR with fashionable side-tables either side. The room is empty. It's early evening on a pleasant night. **Only indirect lighting is used at first** i.e. wall lights, desk-lamps, etc. Suddenly SHIRLEY enters UR. She wears quality casual gear but lacks class. She married young and wealth has come only in the last few years as the business prospered. SHIRLEY pauses, leans against closed door. She is worried, nervous and angry. She puts her hands to her face and it's then we see the hand-gun. She's not used to guns and holds it awkwardly. Gathering herself, she bounces down the stairs, crosses to bar, places gun on the bar and pours herself a drink. She gulps it down. Grabbing the gun she crosses to the writing-desk LC and rummages through one or two drawers. Finding some ammunition she proceeds to load the gun. She has problems and says "Damn" before finally loading the gun. COLIN's voice is heard offstage)*

Colin *(From off-stage UR) Later I said. Come on, let's have a drink.*

(SHIRLEY panics, looks around, terrified. She closes the drawer, darts to settee and slips gun under closest corner. She turns and races upstage. French windows are locked. "Damn" she mutters again and dives for the adjacent cupboard/closet. Both doors i.e. UR and cupboard [UL] open simultaneously. SHIRLEY enters cupboard and closes door. COLIN enters followed by LENA. He looks across at cupboard)

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- Colin** *(Not sure if anyone's there) Shirley?*
(LENA passes him and moves to settee DR. She sits on DL end, removes her shoes, places them on floor near the hidden gun, draws her stockinged-feet onto settee. COLIN is satisfied they're alone, crosses to bar and prepares cocktails. He's a rough diamond. Working-class background, uneducated but worldly-wise. LENA is largely responsible for the recent boom in COLIN's business. She's an accountant with overseas contacts. COLIN and LENA began a second "partnership" about a year ago. It suits him just fine but she is growing tired of the mistress role)
- Colin** *(Prepares drinks)* Make yourself comfortable, baby. I've got a new cocktail.
- Lena** *(Examining her nails)* Have you spoken to Shirley?
- Colin** *(Still mixing drinks)* You won't get this at any of your yuppi restaurants. I call it *Delicious Dynamite*. *(He pours drinks, brings glasses to settee]* You'll love it. *(He hands one to LENA, sits and proposes a toast)* To the best looking accountant in the world. *(She gives a forced smile, they clink glasses and drink. He wants to know her reaction)* Well?
- Lena** *(Persists with her question)* Have you told Shirley?
- Colin** *(Peeved)* Forget Shirley. *(Keen to get her reaction about the drink)* Isn't this marvellous?
- Lena** *(Wants to settle their disagreement)* Colin, we had this out last week. I'm not into sharing. You leave Shirley or I'm out. Finito. Understand?
- Colin** *(Annoyed but agrees)* Yeah, all right, okay. I'll tell her.
- Lena** Yes but when?
- Colin** *(Angry)* Tonight! All right? *(LENA impassive)* As soon as she shows. *(Pause. Cupboard door opens and SHIRLEY's head peers out. LENA accepts his promise and raises her glass. They toast each other again and drink.)*
- Lena** Where is she?
- Colin** *(Again annoyed)* How would I know? *(Sarcastic)* Probably spying on us from the cupboard.
(Startled, SHIRLEY suddenly withdraws and closes the door. LENA rises and crosses to examine painting DL [print of well-known masterpiece - COLIN has no class]. He sits on settee and gulps his cocktail. LENA sips her drink, speaking whilst studying art)
- Lena** Strange how a tough, successful businessman can't tell his wife he's got a mistress. *(Pause)* Amazing the power of a simple hausfrau.
- Colin** Shut it will you? I said I'd tell her. *(SHIRLEY stifles sneeze. It is just heard not obvious. LENA has no reaction. COLIN sits up, worried)* What was that?
- Lena** *(Thinly-veiled sarcasm)* Marv'llous painting. Must be only ten million of these around today.
- Colin** *(Uncertain)* Someone sneezed.
- Lena** It wasn't the *Mona Lisa*. *(Sarcasm continues as she returns to settee)* I know. It's your wife. She's hiding in the cupboard ... *(Mock shock)* with a gun!
(COLIN realises she's sending him up and his anxiety changes to annoyance)
- Colin** Oh very funny. Look, Shirley is strange. I have to tread very carefully.

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Lena You're paranoid. You've let it get to you. You think she roams the house with a loaded gun.

Colin She could be. She's strange. She could do anything.

Lena Unlike her husband who can't make a simple decision.

Colin Baby, please, you know I'm crazy about you. You know I want you.
(Phone on bar rings. It has a soft tone. No-one moves. LENA stares at COLIN)

Lena Your phone's ringing.

Colin *(Ignores it. He's serious)* Lena, darling, I want us to be together - forever!
(Moving to her) I love you.
(She hasn't moved. He starts to close in for a kiss but stops, raises her glass and sips. Simultaneously cupboard door opens. SHIRLEY's head appears. All three freeze. Pause. Suddenly phone stops ringing. Freeze continues. Suddenly UR door opens and GARY enters. COLIN falls back from attempted kiss-position, SHIRLEY withdraws, quickly closes her hideaway door. LENA amused)

Gary *(Annoyed)* Dad. Phone.
(GARY withdraws and closes door. Pause. COLIN again slides towards LENA and SHIRLEY again pokes her head around the carefully-opened cupboard door. Just as COLIN's about to attempt another kiss, GARY again enters causing the kiss-attempt to be cancelled and the cupboard door to quickly close. GARY is fuming. He comes onto the landing)

Gary Did you hear me?

Colin *(Rising, annoyed)* Yes, all right, I'm coming.

Gary It's ISD. California. *(or London)*
(GARY moves to bar. LENA places her glass on side-table and hastily puts on her shoes. She starts to follow COLIN wearing only one shoe. COLIN goes to bar, deposits his glass thereon and heads to door UR. LENA calls in haste)

Lena That'll be Herschew's. I reckon you've got the contract!

Colin I'll take it in the study. *(He's about to exit but stops as LENA calls)*

Lena Insist on the terms as stated. We can't afford any discount.
(LENA is about centre trying to replace her other shoe. She stops when COLIN, at the door UR, turns and speaks with a touch of nastiness)

Colin I'm a big boy, Lena. You stay here and keep an eye on junior.
(COLIN exits. LENA is off-balance holding one of her shoes. Pause. LENA's awkward balance adds to the embarrassment caused by COLIN's rebuke. GARY moves to LENA and holds her allowing the shoe to be replaced. GARY grins smugly and refuses to release the now well-balanced LENA)

Gary Nice shoes. They match the legs. How 'bout a drink?

Lena *(Recovering)* Thanks, I've got one.

Gary *(Leans closer)* I mean a real drink.

Lena *(Pause. Shrugs)* How can I refuse? *(LENA drifts back to settee).* Been reading Ian Fleming again have we?

Gary Make yourself comfortable. *(GARY takes empty glass, takes it back to bar. LENA sits above hidden gun. GARY mixes drinks)* So what was that all about?

Lena *(Out front)* Where's your lovely wife, Gary?

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- Gary** *(Ignores her)* So its a lovers' tiff, hey? Interruptus something. *(LENA ignores him, removes her shoes and again tosses them on the floor near the hidden gun)*
Not to worry. One of my cocktails and you're a new woman.
(LENA rolls her eyes, draws her stockinged-feet up onto the settee. GARY comes down carrying two glasses. He's oozing cheap charm which hardly impresses the sophisticated LENA. GARY hands her a glass, sits where his father sat and proposes a toast)
- Gary** To the best-looking accountant in the world. *(They clink glasses and drink. GARY is anxious to get her reaction)* Well?
- Lena** Don't look now but your insincerity's showing.
- Gary** *(Smug)* So you and the old man are splitting?
- Lena** Curiosity killed the brat.
- Gary** *(Smiles at her barb but counters)* Purely selfish mind. I'm hoping when you drop off Dad, you might land on me - *literally* speaking.
- Lena** Well let's face it, figuratively has too many syllables.
- Gary** Nice one. Touch of class.
(Cupboard door opens slowly and SHIRLEY looks out. Pause. The conversation continues. SHIRLEY crouches and gingerly moves forward towards the settee)
- Lena** *(Between sips)* So how long before you take over Daddy's business?
- Gary** Don't ask me, darling, I'm not the sleeping partner.
(GARY slides towards LENA. This causes SHIRLEY to drop on all fours. She freezes. After a pause she continues her journey downstage crawling carefully)
- Lena** You know there's something fascinating about a love-hate relationship.
- Gary** Magic. Dangerous. You never know what'll happen next.
(GARY is trying to seduce his father's mistress. LENA's simply playing along. SHIRLEY reaches the L side of the settee and feels for the gun. She must negotiate LENA's shoes. After some fumbling, SHIRLEY locates and delicately retrieves the gun. Above her, the combatants continue their word games)
- Lena** Isn't it past your bedtime?
- Gary** Probably. How about you tuck me in?
- Lena** What? No story?
- Gary** Of course. Let's have *Snow White and the Handsome Prince*?
- Lena** You'd make a lovely dwarf.
- Gary** *(In rhythm of song)* And little men get bigger every day.
(GARY leans across to kiss LENA. SHIRLEY has the gun and kneels up pointing it straight at LENA's back. GARY can't see his mother because of LENA. SHIRLEY is about to speak when the door UR opens and DENISE enters. She's a shy woman treated poorly by her chauvinistic husband. One day she'll stand up to GARY but not today)
- Denise** *(Looking for her husband)* Gary?
- (SHIRLEY nearly dies and ducks down beside the settee. GARY freezes, quietly fumes then slides back away from LENA)*
- Gary** Enter the wicked witch. *(False emotion)* Ah Denise. Darling. *(Holds glass aloft)* Same again.

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Denise *(DENISE comes down, takes GARY's glass, stops, looks at LENA)*
Where are your shoes?

Lena *(Suddenly drains her glass and holds it towards DENISE)* You're too kind.
(DENISE smiles weakly, takes the other glass and heads upstage to the bar where she pours two drinks from the cocktail container prepared by GARY who slides a hand towards LENA ready to demonstrate his awesome romantic talent. DENISE faces upstage. SHIRLEY, head down, crawls to cupboard. Suddenly DENISE looks UL and sees SHIRLEY disappearing into cupboard. DENISE screams. She could drop a container or two. SHIRLEY closes cupboard door. GARY drops back immediately. LENA is amused. GARY recovers, is furious)

Gary Denise! What the hell are you doing?

Denise *(Stunned)* Your mother. *(Points to cupboard)*

Gary *(Rising)* What about my mother?
(LENA replaces her shoes. DENISE comes down. GARY confronts her C)

Denise She's there. In the cupboard.
(GARY looks towards silent, shut cupboard, quickly dismisses DENISE's claim)

Gary Why do you say these things? Why are you so bloody stupid?

Denise *(Close to tears)* Don't speak to me like that. You've got no right.

Gary Lena and I were discussing important business. We don't want any interruptions. Understand?
(GARY points a finger at DENISE threatening her. Suddenly UR door opens and COLIN enters. He surveys the scene. GARY is caught threatening his wife)

Colin What's going on?

Gary *(Snaps back)* Nothing. Forget it.

Lena *(To COLIN)* Did they buy it?

Denise Shirley's in the cupboard.

Colin *(Coming down and ignoring DENISE)* Take Denise home. Now.
(COLIN brushes past GARY and confronts LENA from behind)

Gary *(Angry)* No! Why should I? Mum invited us for tea.

Denise She's in the cupboard. *(Still ignored by all)*

Colin *(Angry at GARY)* Well I'm uninviting you. Now go home, now!

Lena *(Rising)* I think I'll leave too.
(LENA starts to move but stops when COLIN speaks)

Colin *(Threatens LENA)* You stay!
(Pause. Tense moment. LENA pauses then starts towards the UR door)

Lena No thanks. Give Shirley my apologies.
(COLIN moves upstage, may have to push GARY aside and blocks LENA's path)

Gary *(Alarmed)* Dad! Don't be stupid!

Colin *(Has forced LENA to stop)* Not you. We've got some unfinished business.

Lena I charge double for house calls.
(COLIN stares at LENA who holds her ground. Pause. Suddenly he slaps LENA's face. All hell breaks loose. LENA clutches her face and staggers DL. GARY leaps on his father and they struggle RC/DR. DENISE distressed and flits between helping LENA and separating the men. Ad lib simultaneous dialogue)

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- Colin** Get off! Get off me! *(etc)*
- Gary** *(Grabbing COLIN's flailing arms)* Take it easy! Stop it! Are you mad? *(etc)*
- Denise** Stop! Somebody help! Gary! *(etc)*
- Lena** *(Holding her face)* My face! Get a doctor! I'll kill you, Colin! *[etc]*
(The activity and ad lib dialogue continues for about fifteen seconds. It builds to a fever pitch when suddenly a gun is discharged. Everyone freezes. Slowly they disentangle themselves and all turn to face the cupboard. Pause. Slowly the cupboard door opens and SHIRLEY emerges. She holds the gun and looks as horrified as the others)
- Colin** *(Stunned)* Shirley?
- Gary** *(Likewise stunned)* Mum?
- Denise** I told you she was there.
- Lena** *(Recovers. Sarcastic)* Well, well. Shotgun Shirley. Bit early for ducks isn't it?
(Slowly SHIRLEY recovers. She points the gun at LENA and has evil in her eyes. Pause. She is about to shoot)
- Colin** *(Moving towards C)* I'll take that. These things can be ... *(COLIN stops suddenly when SHIRLEY points gun at him)* ... dangerous.
- Gary** Mum! Don't! Please!
(SHIRLEY relaxes her aim a little. The immediate threat seems over. Pause)
- Colin** *(Nervous)* Are you all right?
- Shirley** *(Smiles)* Fine. *(Others visibly relieved that SHIRLEY seems normal)* Oh but your golf-bag scored a hole-in-one. *(Feeble laugh from others)*
- Lena** *(Calm and a bit disgusted)* How long were you in there?
- Shirley** Long enough. *(Waves gun to settee)* Why don't we all sit down?
- Lena** I was just leaving.
- Shirley** *(Suddenly nasty)* Sit down. *(SHIRLEY menaces LENA with gun. LENA pauses then sits in usual spot on settee. SHIRLEY snaps at the others)* All of you.
(The others are timid, afraid. GARY and DENISE go to settee and sit next to LENA. GARY is between the two women. COLIN tries to reason)
- Colin** Shirl, darling, let's talk.
- Shirley** Oh we'll talk, *darling*. *(Indicates settee with gun. Angry)* Sit!
(COLIN nervously crosses to settee. It's a three-seater and, to add humiliation to fear, COLIN is forced to sit on the floor beside LENA. SHIRLEY crosses DR)
- Shirley** Competition-time, folks. One lucky winner wins the silver-slug.
- Gary** *(Nervous, afraid)* Mum! This is crazy!
- Shirley** *(Suddenly nasty)* No talking! *(Wandering behind settee. Others even more scared not knowing what is happening behind them)* Right then, let's introduce ourselves. Number one. Colin.
(COLIN is confused, scared, humiliated. He tentatively half looks around)
- Lena** *(Whispers)* Wave.
- Shirley** *(Furious, in and snaps at LENA)* No talking! *(Pause. Even LENA is worried. SHIRLEY steps back)* Competitor Number One. *(COLIN briefly raises his hand giving pathetic acknowledgment. SHIRLEY gives evil smile)* Good, good.
(SHIRLEY moves behind LENA) Competitor Number Two.

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- (LENA briefly raises her hand in a calm and dignified manner)*
- Shirley** Ah, Ms Cool. *(In close to LENA and nasty)* Not for long, *(a la Bogart)* schweeheart! *(SHIRLEY steps back and moves along the line a little)* Number Three. *(Pause before GARY briefly raises his hand. He's really scared)* And Number Four. *(DENISE looks straight out front, petrified. SHIRLEY is impatient and speaks louder)* Number Four! *(GARY elbows his wife who looks at him stunned. GARY demonstrates raising hand in front of chest and DENISE suddenly gets the idea and briefly [and pathetically] raises her hand. SHIRLEY is smugly delighted. She moves DR and addresses the competitors. SHIRLEY's in charge of the quiz)* Right. Now we know the contestants. Good luck, gang and away we go. *(SHIRLEY moves as she speaks finishing the question LC of COLIN)* Calling myself a devoted husband and father, I'm really a conniving, two-timing womaniser. *(Snaps at COLIN from slightly upstage)* Who am I? *(Pause. COLIN petrified. This is it. Confess and die)* Well? *(Slowly COLIN raises his hand. SHIRLEY delighted)* Ah, Number One!
- Colin** *(Can hardly speak)* Colin? *(SHIRLEY is thrilled, macabre delight)*
- Shirley** That's it! Well done. *(Suddenly disgusted and turns on the frozen others)* Oh come on, a little encouragement, please. *(Pathetic applause from others. SHIRLEY instantly back to evil inquisitor/quizmaster)* With lousy taste and plastic everything, I specialise in books, blokes and beds. *(Super nasty behind LENA)* Who am I? *(LENA doesn't hesitate and raises her hand. LENA is calm)* Yes, here. Competitor Number Two.
- Lena** Moi. *(OTHERS look confused. Even SHIRLEY thrown but quickly recovers)*
- Shirley** *(In close to LENA. Sarcastic)* Nice one, Moi. *(SHIRLEY steps back and continues her game)* A pathetic copy of my chauvinistic father, I treat my wife like dirt. Who am I? *(Pressure too great for GARY who blurts out answer without raising his hand)*
- Gary** Me! It's me! Oh Mum, I'm sorry ... *(Buries head in hands and sobs)*
- Shirley** *(Annoyed)* Wait for it. No-one's pushed their buzzer. *(Pause. GARY's sobbing peters out. He sits up then briefly raises his hand whilst wiping his face with the other)*
- Gary** Bzzzz, bzzzz. *(SHIRLEY back into her mock excitement)*
- Shirley** Yes, over here. You were first, Number Three!
- Gary** *(Almost chokes his confession)* Is it Gary?
- Shirley** Yes! Correct! Well done! Come on, let's hear it for Number Three. *(OTHERS give polite applause. GARY returns to silent sobbing)* Now checking the scores we have *(Big mock-excited voice)* a three-way tie! *(SHIRLEY sudden mood change again as she swings back into the game)* Right, final question. I'm the weak and miserable wife of a moron of a husband who treats me like dirt *(Emphasises)* and gets away with it! *(Louder near DENISE)* Who am I?

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(DENISE is far too scared and confused to know what to do. Pause. SHIRLEY jabs DENISE who screams/whimpers. GARY decides to help her out)

Gary

(Whispers) It's you. (SHIRLEY is enraged and roars at GARY)

Shirley

(Furious) No cheating! (Pause. Fear dominates. DENISE looks in fear at GARY who gives a tiny nod. DENISE briefly raises her hand. SHIRLEY delighted. Mock surprise at having found a winner) Yes, over here. Number Four.

Denise

(Pathetic whimper) It's me.

Shirley

(Again enraged) Me?! That's not correct! Who's me?!

Denise

(Almost choking with fear) Denise. (Instantly SHIRLEY back to mock-delight)

Shirley

Yes, yes, correct. (OTHERS slow to applaud) Come on, come on. (OTHERS give polite applause. DENISE applauds herself. SHIRLEY suddenly mock-surprised) Oh no! It's a four-way tie. One more question. Sudden-death. (Suddenly sotto-voce, evil) Sudden-death. Get it? (OTHERS do get it but dare not respond. SHIRLEY steps back) Right. Buzzers ready. Who am I? Born a long time ago, I consider myself attractive to the opposite sex. I'm wrong. My greatest talent lies in using people. I earn far more than I deserve. I have no friends and delight in destroying others. I'm selfish, conniving and decidedly evil! (Pause) Who am I? (SHIRLEY wanders back and forth behind settee. Others unsure) Well? (GARY raises his hand. It has to be him) Number three.

Gary

It's me. Gary.

Shirley

(Scoffs) Wrong! (Relieved, GARY withdraws his hand. Pause. Tension mounts. COLIN knows it's him and starts slowly to raise his hand. Suddenly DENISE quickly raises her hand and COLIN quickly withdraws. SHIRLEY ridicules DENISE) You wouldn't know. Don't make me laugh. You're not even close. (GARY pulls down DENISE's hand. Pause. COLIN is feeling the heat. With fear and trembling he slowly raises his hand. SHIRLEY is pleased) Aha! We're getting warmer. (In close to COLIN) Nice try but wrong! (COLIN quickly withdraws his hand and breathes deeply. Pause. SHIRLEY steps back and looks at LENA. The others turn and look at LENA. They can't turn too much. Just when we expect LENA to raise her hand, she calmly rises, moves DL and adjusts her hair in a mirror [or maybe reflection of glass over the crummy print. SHIRLEY is white with rage. OTHERS freeze) Hey! Get back! Now!

Lena

(Adjusting her hair. Cool) Time the game was over, Shirley.

Shirley

(Recovering and now nasty) Oh it's a game is it? Monopoly versus marriage. Pass go, collect two million quid and (spiteful) ... my husband! (LENA continues adjusting her hair and could even touch up her lipstick)

Lena

(Not turning) It's not the done thing, you know, being a bad loser.

Shirley

(Points gun at LENA's back) Guess who's the loser? Turn around.

Colin

(Desperate) Shirley! For God's sake!

Lena

(Turning, calm) But then you went to a government school.

Shirley

(Takes aim at LENA) I'm going to enjoy this!

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Colin *(Rising, facing SHIRLEY)* Shirley!
(Pause. Just as SHIRLEY is about to shoot LENA she suddenly swings the gun at COLIN. He nearly dies of fright. GARY and DENISE crouch in fear)

Shirley *(Nasty at COLIN)* Come on hero. Save your damsel in distress. *(Pause)* Try it. I dare you! *(COLIN is no hero and cowers in fear. Finally GARY breaks the ice)*

Gary Mum! We can talk this out!

Shirley *(Moves into GARY and mimics him)* I'm hoping when you drop off the old man, you might land on me - *literally* speaking. *(GARY is petrified)*

Gary It was a joke. *(Desperate to the calm LENA)* Lena. Tell her it was a joke.

Lena You're the joke.

Gary *(Can't believe it)* What?!

Lena Like father, like son. You're both all hands and cliches.

Shirley *(SHIRLEY is amused)* Nice one. I like it.

Lena We've actually got something in common, Shirl. Both entwined round the same losers.

Colin *(Mixture of fear and anger)* Lena! This is not funny!

Shirley Nice try, Honey, but it won't work.

Lena Of course it will. You liquidate the losers and take the lot.

Gary *(Desperate)* Liquidate!

Colin Right that's enough. You're both acting like idiots.

Shirley *(Threatens COLIN)* Don't you dare call me an idiot, you idiot!

Lena Paris, New York, furs, fellas. Look with hubby and offspring deceased, the company's yours.

Shirley *(Turning on COLIN)* You said the business was bust.

Colin It is! We're virtually broke!

Lena *(Laughing)* Bust! He just clinched a deal worth two million.

Shirley *(Staggered)* Two million!

Colin *(Rising)* This is ridiculous.

Shirley *(Angry at COLIN)* Sit down!

Colin *(Angry. Decides to make a stand)* No! Give me the gun.
(SHIRLEY takes aim at COLIN. LENA slowly and carefully moves upstage)

Shirley Certainly. Here's a down-payment.

Colin *(Freezes but still defiant)* You'll get twenty years.

Shirley And you'll get life!
(LENA is now behind SHIRLEY and grabs a small statue from the writing-desk. LENA raises statue and moves to attack SHIRLEY. DENISE sees this and screams! SHIRLEY turns just in time to avoid being bonked. Instead, LENA's statue hits the gun which is sent flying UC. SHIRLEY and COLIN dive for the gun. LENA falls over LC. SHIRLEY gets gun, points it at COLIN who quickly backs DR. GARY and DENISE crouch on the settee until GARY suddenly grabs DENISE and scurries DL. GARY holds DENISE in front of him using her as a shield. Typical! LENA grabs SHIRLEY from behind. They grab one another's hands in struggle for gun. Lots of grunting/puffing.)

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Gun is swung towards COLIN who suddenly ducks and holds his head expecting the worst. The well-choreographed fight moves behind settee. The women fall to the floor out of sight. The following lines spoken ad lib and often over the top of one another. Who speaks what is not important. "Get off!" "Let go!" "Ow!" "Ahh!" "I'll kill you!" "No!!" "Stop it!" etc. A mixture of screams and yells are mixed with dialogue. OTHERS peer nervously at unseen fighters. Suddenly two shots are heard in rapid succession. OTHERS are mortified. Pause. Silence. What has happened? Slowly SHIRLEY's head and shoulders appear. SHIRLEY looks dazed as if she's been shot)

Colin *(In a trance)* Shirley?

Gary *(In a trance)* Mum?

(Slowly LENA's head and shoulders appear above back of settee)

Denise Lena?

(LENA too looks dazed as if shot. The women turn and look at one another. Their faces are expressionless. Pause. Slowly they both slide from view. Pause. The others start to move to settee when SHIRLEY hops to her feet, clutching the gun and dusts herself down. The others freeze)

Shirley *(Enjoying herself, good spirits, moving C)* Well, so much for the arm-wrestling. Now where were we?

Colin *(Still distressed)* Shirley! What happened?

Gary *(Equally distressed)* Mum! Where's Lena?

Denise *(The only one genuinely concerned)* Are you okay? Are you hurt?

Shirley *(Cool as if nothing's happened)* Fine. *(Brief look at the unseen LENA)* But the bookkeeper's ah ... in the red! *(SHIRLEY enjoys her pun and gives a crazy laugh and smile. COLIN starts towards her. SHIRLEY instantly changes to nasty maniac. Pointing gun)* Freeze! *(COLIN stops dead)*

Colin *(Pleading)* Shirley, please. She might be dead.

Shirley *(Blowing casually into gun-barrel)* No might about it. She's balanced her last set of books.

(COLIN falls back in shock. DENISE gasps and sobs. GARY comforts her in the first bit of tenderness he's shown his wife in five years)

Shirley *(Cool in the crisis)* Now we all saw what happened. She attacked me, I defended myself, the gun went off accidentally and this terrible but accidental tragedy took place. Right? *(Silence. SHIRLEY insistent)* Right? *(The OTHERS nod and mutter "yes". They're all still in shock)*

Colin We'd better call the police.

Shirley *(Angry and threatening again)* No police! Not yet. Listen, if she died accidentally, and she did, we forget the fight and call it suicide.

Others *(In shock)* Suicide!

Shirley *(Calm, matter-of-fact)* Suicide. It happens every day.

Colin You're mad. It'll never work.

Gary I don't want anything to do with this. Keep me out of it.

Denise I'm going to be sick.

(DENISE moves to and collapses on settee. The OTHERS take little interest)

REMAIN SEATED 13

- Shirley** A fight means a possible trial. If I'm charged, this whole bloody mess gets on the telly. We'll be in everyone's lounge-room. Is that what you want?
(Pause) Well?
- Colin** *(In frustration)* You stupid woman. You stupid, stupid ...
(He breaks down and sobs. SHIRLEY is ice-cool)
- Shirley** Right, suicide it is. Denise, check the body.
- Denise** *(Sits up horrified)* No! No!
- Gary** I'll do it.
(GARY moves behind settee, disappears. DENISE follows. We can't see them. COLIN stops sobbing. SHIRLEY wipes the gun with a handkerchief. COLIN turns, emotional)
- Colin** I loved that woman. She meant the world to me.
- Shirley** *(Casual, wiping gun)* Is this how you remove fingerprints?
- Colin** You could have taken the money.
- Shirley** Oh I will. The lot.
(Suddenly DENISE screams and rises horrified. She clutches her face and staggers UC. SHIRLEY moves LC. GARY rises shocked. COLIN and SHIRLEY are stunned)
- Denise** *(Pointing at back of bar)* She's dead. *(The others freeze)*
- Gary** Ah, Denise ... it's okay. Everything's fine.
- Denise** *(Hysterical but able to be understood)* She's dead! Oh God, Katie's dead!
(DENISE dissolves into hysterical sobs. COLIN moves to her. SHIRLEY is thrown by this and suddenly threatens COLIN with the gun)
- Shirley** *(Threatens)* Nobody moves! *(COLIN comforts DENISE)* Did you hear me?
- Gary** *(Nervous)* Ah, Mum. *(Delivers the line as if it has never been in the script before)*
Don't you think we should call an ambulance?
- Shirley** *(Genuinely confused)* What?
- Colin** *(Comforting distraught DENISE)* Yes. I think we should call an ambulance.
- Shirley** *(Getting angry)* Look I'm in charge here. I'm giving the orders.
(DENISE breaks free from COLIN and staggers towards SHIRLEY)
- Denise** Lois, Katie's turned blue. I think she's really dead!
- Shirley** *(Thrown again)* Who's Katie?
- Denise** *(Turns DL, shouts off-stage)* For God's sake, Terri. *(Dramatic)* She's dead!
(DENISE collapses. Pause. GARY then COLIN then SHIRLEY all rush to help her. Pause. Suddenly, quickly the lights dim. BLACKOUT. Audience can hear muffled talking. TERRI enters. We can see everyone gathering upstage. Actors and stage-manager are discussing situation. It's very dim but during next 30 seconds we see frantic activity. We can just make out LENA being carried offstage with most of the company lending a hand. Finally TERRI is ordered to do something and the nervous stage manager moves DC)
- Terri** Ian, could we have the house please?
(A spot shines on TERRI who shields her eyes. Another spot shines on a side wall of the theatre. This second spot represents the house lights coming on.)

REMAIN SEATED 14

*The real house lights do **not** come up and the audience remain in darkness. TERRI is not used to public-speaking let alone emergencies)*

Terri Ladies and gentlemen, if I could have your attention. (*Waits for hubbub to subside*) I don't know how to say this. We've had to call an ambulance because one of our actors is (*TERRI chokes*) The last part of that scene wasn't actually in the script. Could you please remain seated for a short time whilst I just check the situation. (*COLIN screams/cries in anguish from upstage/offstage. TERRI thrown*) I'll be right back.

(TERRI disappears upstage out of the spot. Again we hear muffled conversation/frantic whispers as the cast discuss the situation. This needs to be heard but not heard. Too dramatic a scene could provoke laughter. It's serious not farcical. After twenty [or so] seconds, TERRI emerges once again. The lights glare and she again shields her eyes to address the pretend audience)

Terri Ah, ladies and gentlemen. (*Audience quietens*) Thank you. (*TERRI shocked and struggling to speak*) I'm not sure what to say. As I said, we've called an ambulance as one of our actors is ... (*She chokes then recovers*) I'm sorry. I don't think we can continue. There's been an accident. Nothing to do with the play. And I think it's serious. It's (*Fighting back tears*) ... very serious. I'm not sure what to suggest. Perhaps we could take an early interval ... if you wouldn't mind.

(SOUND EFFECTS. Sound of an ambulance siren is heard in the background)

Terri That'll be the ambulance. Look, I'm really sorry. As I said, perhaps you could move to the foyer and ... (*Distressed, TERRI hands to head*) Oh God!

Burton (*From rear of theatre*) Is there a problem? Can I help?

Terri (*Head up, shading eyes, looks in direction of BURTON'S voice*) I'm sorry.

Burton (*Starts moving down aisle*) Is this part of the play or a real emergency?

Terri No it's real. There's been a terrible accident.

Burton (*Still coming forward*) So I'm not interrupting anything?

Terri No, it's not part of the play. Are you a doctor?

Burton Police. How can I help?

(BURTON holds his ID card aloft and TERRI waves in acknowledgment)

Terri Thanks. (*Is now embarrassed so tries to speak confidentially but without success*) Look, it's pretty bad and they're taking her straight to hospital.

Burton Is the actor dead?

Terri (*Embarrassed, distraught*) We're not sure. She looked terrible and ... Look, can you come backstage? (*TERRI breaks down, recovers. BURTON takes control*)

Burton Calm down. Call the local police. Tell them I'm here. Tell them an ambulance is on its way and if I need their help, I'll call them on my radio. (*DRAUF enters from side entrance or at side of stage. BURTON sees her*) Hold it. They're here already. (*To DRAUF*) Are you local?

Drauf Who are you?

Burton (*Again shows ID*) Burton. Homicide. Do I know you?

REMAIN SEATED 15

- Drauf** Constable Drauf, sir. Just transferred from Hondon. We followed the ambulance.
- Burton** Right. Have your partner stay with the ambulance. Get statements from the paramedics and the hospital. Call the station. Explain the set-up. Tell them we'll call for back-up if necessary.
- Drauf** Yes sir. *(DRAUF exits back through the theatre)*
- Burton** *(Calling)* Then report back to me.
- Drauf** *(Calling before she disappears)* Right sir.
(She exits. BURTON moves backstage. TERRI alone on stage, more confused)
- Terri** *(To audience)* I'll just check on things, ladies and gentlemen. *(Scratching her head as she departs)* I'm sorry about this.
(She exits to darkness. Another 20-second pause. Muffled voices. Whispers in the darkness. BURTON enters from the wings and moves DC. This is the first time he's had to look directly into the lights. He shields his face)
- Burton** Ladies and gentlemen. *(Pause if necessary for hubbub to cease)* As you've heard from the stage manager, one of the cast collapsed. I'm afraid it's very serious. If there are any friends or relatives of the actor concerned here tonight, will you please go to the foyer now. *(Pause. You could have one/two plants who get up and go. Please make sure that anyone who does know the actor, is not put through unnecessary distress. This part of the play may need to be explained to some people)* Right, well the constable spoke briefly with the ambulance crew and I regret to advise ... *(Pause, softer)* the actor would appear to have died. *(Pause)* My name is Burton. I'm a detective-sergeant with the Homicide Squad. I was off-duty in the audience. Obviously the play can't continue and I guess the company will make some announcement in due course. Meanwhile, I'm obliged to conduct a brief inquiry, certainly until the local officers get here. Some of you may need to make a statement. Don't worry. It's just routine and won't take long. So, *(Turns to the wings DL)* if we could have some more lights, please.
(Pause. Slowly general stage lighting comes up. Crossfade lit wall. It becomes black. On stage, lighting is full or almost so. Company are sorry lot. CARRIE on sofa being comforted by PETER. TERRI and DRAUF are UL inspecting bar/cupboard. TERRI explaining how it is used. DRAUF has note-pad/pencil. LOIS slumped in chair DR and ROGER sits on steps UR. He has a drink and takes a swig from time to time. When lights come up, actors are unimpressed. They try to cover their emotions but are not happy. BURTON turns to face them)
- Burton** Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.
- Roger** *(Moving RC)* Is this really necessary?
- Burton** Yes sir, I'm afraid it is.
- Roger** *(Not happy)* Not the questions. *(Indicates audience)* Them. Close the curtain or send them home.
- Lois** *(Also embarrassed at exposure to audience)* I agree. The play's over. Make some announcement, anything, only dismiss the house.

REMAIN SEATED 16

Burton All right, take it easy. *(Pause)* I need to a statement from everyone in the company and discuss it with the audience.

Roger What? *All of them?*

Burton There's a chance of a coronial inquest and, depending on the autopsy ...

Company *(Shocked. As one. Not DRAUF)* Autopsy?!

Burton It's standard procedure. A death in unusual or suspicious circumstances has to be investigated.

Gary *(He's annoyed now)* It's unusual all right. Distressed actors grilled by police in front of dozens of witnesses. *(COMPANY agree)*

Drauf You're not helping, sir. We're obliged to ask these questions. We can lower the curtain, take a statement from each of you and keep the audience in the dark, literally for an hour or more. *(COMPANY upset)*

Terri An hour! Look they paid to see a play not to talk among themselves.

Burton Or we can question the audience keeping you lot waiting till we've finished.

Lois How long will that take?

Burton *(Shrugs)* Anyone who wishes to make a statement has to be interviewed.

Roger *(Furious)* Oh terrific. We lose a colleague in tragic circumstances. We're literally in shock and you say, "Sit tight for two hours"! *(Cast upset)*

Carrie *(Snaps out of her distress but speaks softly but emotionally)* Can we please get this over as quickly as possible? *(Cast agree)*

Burton Well the quickest way is for you lot to give your statements after which we can interview them. *(Meaning the audience)*

Roger *(Still not happy)* Yes but why in front of the audience?

Drauf *(Moving to LC)* They can corroborate your statements, sir.

Roger Corroborate!? Corroborate what? Perry Mason meets Agatha Christie. The play's over. This is real life for God's sake!

Lois Roger, they have to, it's their job.

Drauf It is normal procedure, sir. At the scene of an accident we could interview dozens of witnesses.

Roger Wonderful. *(Pause)* Well can we get on?

Burton Yes and I'd like the lights on the audience please. *(Looks around)* Can we do that?

Terri *(Calls)* Cue the house please Ian.
(Slowly a spot comes up on the auditorium wall and the pretend audience is lit)

Burton Right, I'm investigating the death of ...

Drauf Katie Williams, sir.

Burton Katie Williams. Thank you constable. Ladies and gentlemen this is a preliminary investigation. I need to obtain details concerning the incident in case such information is required at a later date. *(BURTON addresses pretend audience - the follow spot on the wall)* And I'd like you ladies and gentlemen to bear with us.

REMAIN SEATED 17

The company members will be answering a few questions after which some of you may do likewise. Nothing to worry about. It's standard procedure. Your co-operation will be appreciated. Please keep the noise down and if you wouldn't mind, remain seated.

(BURTON addresses the COMPANY. Obviously he allows his voice to be heard in the auditorium even if sometimes he is speaking to those on stage)

Burton *(Takes out note-pad and pencil)* Can we start from when you first found the deceased. *(CARRIE sobs again and is comforted by PETER)*

Peter *(Comforting CARRIE, speaking to BURTON)* Is it possible to use a little tact. She was a member of our company. We did know her.

Burton Certainly. I'm sorry. I know it's hard and I'll be as quick as I can. So, who first discovered Katie?

Terri You can't be serious. You were in the audience. You saw exactly what happened.

Lois Terri, forget it. You can't win.

Carrie *(Raises a hand but is still distressed)* I discovered Katie. With Peter.

Burton Thank you. And where was that?

Peter *(Still comforting CARRIE nods with his head)* Upstage. Behind the bar.

Burton And when did you first notice something was wrong?

Roger Oh come on. We knew she was dead because instead of sneaking out unseen to return to the dressing-room, she stayed on the floor slowly turning blue!

Burton You're not helping, sir.

Peter Yeah, give it a rest, Roger.

Roger Get stuffed!

Burton Could I have your name, sir?

Roger It's in the program. You can read I presume?

Terri *(Angry)* Roger! Knock it off!

Burton I haven't seen this play before. I think I know where the acting stopped and the real drama began but if you'll stop acting like an idiot, we can all finish and go home. It's up to you.

Roger Oh well spoken, sir. I bow to the director's request.

Terri That's a first. *(ROGER quietly fumes, says nothing. LOIS breaks the silence)*

Lois Everything was as you saw it until Carrie and Peter went to check the body. That *was* in the script. From then, well, we started to ad lib.

Burton Thank you. *(Pause. Back to ROGER)* I've seen you somewhere before.

Roger Oh, is that a compliment? Should I call my solicitor? Do I get a prize?

Peter This is ridiculous. Can we investigate the accident?

(COMPANY agree. BURTON looks hard at furious ROGER then continues)

Burton Right. Peter and Carrie. Show me where you found the body.

Terri The tact continues.

Burton Look, I know it's not easy but it's got to be done.

REMAIN SEATED 18

Roger (*Angry, comes down C*) Why? Who said? You barge in here, (*Indicates audience*) flaunt yourself in front of them and what for? Anyone'd think Katie was murdered!

(*Other cast members flinch at "murdered". CARRIE visibly upset. BURTON has allowed ROGER his go then counter-attacks, not viciously but with force*)

Burton Look sir, a person died here tonight in unusual circumstances. That warrants a police investigation.

Drauf It's standard procedure.

Lois But what if it was just a heart attack?

Burton (*Seizes on LOIS's comment*) I see. So Katie had a heart condition?

Lois I don't know. I'm just suggesting the possible cause.

Burton Don't guess. It doesn't help. Now, does anyone know if Katie had any problems with her health?
(*OTHERS shake their heads*)

Terri She wasn't sick. Just the opposite. Never missed a rehearsal. Never had a cold. Nothing.

Peter (*Sotto voce*) Anything.

Burton What about enemies, bad friendships? Was she upset about anything?

Roger (*Angry again*) Hold it. What is this? Maybe you've got some right to investigate an accident. But what's with the personal questions and in public if you don't mind!

Peter I agree. It's outrageous.

Roger (*Continues attack*) You're enjoying this. You're performing in front of this lot (*Indicating audience*) and turning them into a bunch of voyeurs!

Drauf I think you've said enough, sir.

Roger (*Heaps scorn on DRAUF*) That's right, stick together. You know this is wrong.

Drauf I don't know that.

Roger You're playing along because mister high-ranking detective here is pulling rank.

Lois That's enough, Roger.

Roger (*To OTHERS*) Can't you see it's a game? (*Indicates BURTON*) He gets his kicks prying into privacy. He *dreams* about moments like these. This is a buzz for the fuzz!

Burton (*Keeps calm despite ROGER's attack*) I gather you'd prefer to make your statement at the station, sir.

Roger (*Sarcastic, mock surprise*) Oh no! Not the wet blanket in the cell routine!

Burton (*Has had enough.*) Right, that *is* enough! Shut it. Now!

Lois Roger. Grow up!

Roger So we've had some experience of cells have we?

Roger Don't come the royal we with me, Plod. *We* mind our own business.

Burton This is my business.

- Carrie** *(Distressed)* Stop it! Stop it now! *(OTHERS freeze. She attacks)* This is crazy. Katie is dead and you want to fight. Who cares about police procedure, the audience, anything! *(Emphatic)* Katie was my friend and now she's dead!
- Roger** *(Pause. Ashamed)* Sorry, Caz. Really. You know ... ah ...
- Carrie** I don't care about them. *(Brief indication of audience)* I don't care about any of you. I care about Katie. *(Silence. The OTHERS are ashamed and moved at CARRIE's speech)* I don't know how she died. Or why. But she did. And the very least we can do is show her respect. *(Pause)* You want to look it up, Roger. Starts with R.
(OTHERS stunned. BURTON recovers and addresses group in softer voice)
- Burton** Look, why don't we all sit down. Please.
(Gestures and after a pause those standing sit as follows. PETER is still on the settee, LOIS in chair DR. Reluctantly, ROGER sits on the DR end of settee with CARRIE joining him sitting between the two men. BURTON moves the arm-chair DL closer to the settee and offers it to TERRI. She accepts. DRAUF moves behind settee between LOIS and ROGER. BURTON moves C. Pause. Everyone settles. ROGER mimes his apology to CARRIE. She nods her acceptance)
- Burton** Would anyone like a drink? *(OTHERS shake their heads. CARRIE nods)*
- Carrie** *(Softly)* Yes please. Water.
- Terri** *(Rising)* I'll get it. *(Exits LC or DL)*
- Burton** Okay. We've established no-one knew of Katie being ill or in trouble. What about family and friends?
- Lois** She had none, apart from us that is. She moved from interstate three years ago.
- Peter** Most of her time was spend here, in the theatre. She never mentioned her family. At least not to me.
- Others** That's right Never spoke of them ... etc.
- Peter** She did tell me her parents were dead and she was an only child.
- Burton** And what about her movements tonight? Before the play?
- Lois** She had a meal at my place. Nothing special.
- Burton** And you both ate the same meal?
- Lois** Yes exactly.
(TERRI enters with glass for CARRIE who nods, sips slowly. TERRI sits)
- Burton** What about here in the theatre? Did she have anything to eat or drink?
- Peter** She drinks on stage. We all do. Roger and I both give her ... *(Suddenly stunned)* Oh no! You mean she was poisoned!
(Time this well. PETER'S final word is explosive and CARRIE responds by blowing what's in her mouth straight out front. It should be a spray not a torrent. This naturally causes distress. CARRIE is mortified at the suggestion and upset at the mess. ROGER takes her glass, gives it to DRAUF who places it upstage on the bar. PETER is full of apologies and comforts CARRIE who brushes herself of excess moisture)
- Carrie** *(Expelling moisture)* Peter!

Peter Oh no, I'm sorry. Caz, I'm sorry.

Lois (*Sarcastic*) Good one, Peter. Very subtle.

Peter (*Upset at his faux pas*) I'm sorry. I didn't mean that.
(*Above four lines could overlap a little, even continue ad lib a bit. Don't make a scene of it and have things settle promptly. BURTON keen to pursue matters*)

Burton So Katie had two drinks on stage before the fight?

Roger (*Annoyed but restrained*) Including one of my colossal cocktails. Neat.

Lois (*Annoyed at ROGER*) Will you please give it a rest?

Peter But I mixed her a drink too. And we both drank it. (*To ROGER*) And Roger drank it too.
(*ROGER suddenly grabs his throat in mock horror at having poisoned himself. He is ignored and things move on quickly*)

Terri You've opened a large can of worms, sergeant. The entire cast handled the drinks and I prepared the mix in the first place.
(*Pause. OTHERS momentarily think ROGER may have fixed KATIE'S drink*)

Lois But it still gets back to the fight. I'm the one wrestled and struck her.

Roger Oh for god's sake, Lois, you didn't touch her.

Lois That's what you want me to say, isn't it?

Burton I want you to help the investigation.

Lois I fought with Katie. I struck her.

Roger Pretended to.

Lois Behind the bar, out of sight, where even the other actors can't see what's happening, I shoot Katie. Question. What did I really do?

Roger The only person you're shooting is yourself. In the foot!

Burton Did something accidental happen during the fight?

Lois No.

Burton Did Katie hit her head on the floor?

Lois It was a normal performance.

Burton Could Katie have slipped and not said anything because it wasn't in the script?

Lois (*Pause*) I'm not sure.

Terri I'm sure. From the wings I can see Katie behind the bar.

Burton But not Lois?

Terri No, not Lois but Katie performed as if nothing had happened.

Burton Nothing that you could see?

Terri They played it according to the script. They fight, move behind the bar then fall out of sight. The gun is heard with the actors simply crouched behind the bar. Once out of sight, they don't continue the fight. It's called make believe.

Burton Of course. Ah, could everyone please move to their positions for the fight?
(*COMPANY all protest*)

Company What!?

Roger (*Over the protests*) You've gotta be joking.

REMAIN SEATED 21

Terri I told you what happened.

Lois So did I.

Burton I need to see how the pretend fight took place. (*COMPANY upset*)

Roger What for?

Lois (*Gives in*) Oh let's do it. Then we all go home.

Peter It's a bloody disgrace.
(*Grumbling, CAST move. ROGER DR, PETER and CARRIE DL, LOIS behind bar. TERRI wanders LC*)

Burton Thank you for your help.

Lois We fight here and then drop behind the bar.

Burton (*Moving to LOIS and thinking*) Right. Ah, Constable. (*BURTON beckons and DRAUF moves to the bar. To LOIS*) Show me what happens using the constable as Katie. (*COMPANY continue their anger*)

Lois Nothing happens.

Burton Nothing?

Terri I told you. Once they're out of sight they just wait for their next cue.

Roger (*Same old sarcasm*) It's called "suspense".

Peter It's called unnecessary interference.

Terri (*Grabs gun and heads C*) All right, I'll show you. Come on Lois. It'll only take a minute.
(*LOIS joins TERRI by settee between C/DC. Police DL. OTHERS move aside*)

Lois I don't like this, Terri.

Terri (*To BURTON*) We're now behind the bar. I'm Katie. And this is what happens every night and did tonight.

Burton You realise this is serious?

Roger Serious! You've turned it into a circus. Look at the audience. They came for a comedy and scored a farce.

Burton I need to know what happens in the fight behind the bar.

Roger You realise this is giving away trade secrets.

Carrie Roger!

Roger I mean an actor lives on illusion. This is our livelihood. Well, when not working 9 to 4.36.

Burton (*To the women*) Please get on with it.

Terri You have to imagine that the bar is in front of us.

Burton I understand.

Lois And we're crouched out of sight.

Burton Of course. Please continue.
(*LOIS and TERRI look at one another then proceed. TERRI hands LOIS the gun. Pause. Suddenly they launch into character. TERRI is LENA. They face front, kneel then shout their lines and make their sound effects. They pay no attention to one another. This is what happens behind the bar. It may appear comical but no-one on stage laughs. COMPANY know this is what happens.*)

Police spellbound. Ad lib dialogue flies thick and fast. "Get off!" ... "Let go!" ... "You bitch!" ... "Ahhh!" ... "I'll kill you!" ... "No!" etc. TERRI claps her hands making a slapping sound and then holds her face and screams/groans. LOIS then points the gun to the roof while TERRI plugs her own ears and grimaces. LOIS puts a finger in one of her ears, fires the gun twice, puts it on the floor and wrings her hand. TERRI is rubbing her ears. Suddenly both women stop "acting", rise, dust themselves and move aside. TERRI picks up gun)

- Terri** Sorry to disappoint you, sergeant, but we did warn you.
- Burton** And that's exactly what happened tonight?
- Lois** Give or take the odd scream.
- Roger** Maybe she died of overacting.
- Burton** May I see the gun? *(He takes and examines it)*
- Terri** It's a starting-pistol. A prop. It fires blanks.
- Lois** Very loud blanks.
(BURTON hands gun to DRAUF who examines/places it on the writing-desk)
- Burton** So after the shots, what next? *(More frustration from cast)*
- Roger** Aw look why don't you go back to your seat and we'll run the whole show from the top. Constable Plod here can play Katie. Or maybe you'd like the part. What dress size are you? Twelve? Twenty-two?
- Peter** *(Worried that ROGER has finally gone too far)* Roger. Will you shut up!
(BURTON wanders UC, stops, turns and beckons to ROGER who indicates himself and mimes speaking "Me?". BURTON is cool, nods. ROGER, with a face about to cry moves to BURTON. ROGER arrives UC and faces front alongside BURTON. We see ROGER's face. He's playing the naughty school-boy about to be reprimanded by the headmaster)
- Roger** I'm sorry, headmaster. *(Holds out his hand to be caned)* I'll try not to cry.
(ROGER a touch over the top. BURTON ignores histrionics and leans forward whispering in ROGER's ear. We see ROGER's face change. At first he's confident in role of the school-boy mocking the police. But BURTON whispers something which scares ROGER. His expression returns to normal then looks sullen and serious. ROGER turns his head and looks at the expressionless, motionless BURTON. Suddenly ROGER turns and walks back to his place DR. He stops and turns to the cast who gaze at him in wonder. What was said?)
- Roger** *(Casually, sarcastic)* It's all right. He's bought my silence.
(The OTHERS look at ROGER, at BURTON and one another)
- Peter** *(Concerned)* Roger? Did he threaten you?
- Roger** Me? No he just told me I was overacting. Again.
(Pause. OTHERS not sure. BURTON is suddenly back into his investigation as if nothing has happened. Moving UL, he speaks)
- Burton** Now what happens here in the cupboard *[closet]*?
(BURTON stops at cupboard UL, turns. Pause. TERRI moves to BURTON)
- Terri** Lois waits inside ... like this. *(TERRI opens the cupboard door and steps inside)*
She first fires the gun in here. Another blank ... of course.
(BURTON looks at TERRI then suddenly moves to the back of the settee)
- Burton** Thank you. I've seen enough.

Company (*Surprised*) What!? ... Seen enough? ... You mean that's it? *etc.*

Peter (*Surprised, relieved*) You mean, you've finished? We can go?
(*TERRI comes out of cupboard and joins the group*)

Burton Just about. I only need to know if anything about tonight's performance was different.

Peter Yes. I was late with an entrance.

Lois And I took too long loading the gun.

Terri Perhaps Katie died from the frustration of working with well-meaning but incompetent amateurs.

Burton The longer you mess me about, the longer we stay. Now was the fight scene as recently demonstrated an exact version of tonight's performance?

Lois Yes! Exactly!

Terri We showed you what happened. (*Indicates audience*) We showed everyone!

Burton So no-one slipped? No-one had an accident?

Lois Oh this is bizarre. Don't cast Lois in your next play, she murders her fellow actors.

Burton I'm not accusing you of anything. But that's the sort of thing you'll be asked at an inquest.

Peter Terrific.

Burton I'm trying to help. It's just possible that it was a tragic accident and I'm actually on your side. (*Pause. COMPANY quiet*) Now, after the fight. What happened *after* she was shot?

Roger You mean who murdered her after she was killed?

Carrie Roger!

Burton You've been warned. (*Pause. BURTON is serious. ROGER backs off*)

Terri It gets a little complicated. And I don't think any explanation will help.

Burton Try me.

Terri In the play there's a time lapse. The body stays behind the bar for three hours. In reality, Katie immediately exits unseen and heads for the dressing-room to change costume.

Burton Why does she change when she's already dead?

Peter She comes back into the play.

Burton So in the play she isn't really killed? (*Frustration from COMPANY*)

Terri I said this wouldn't help.

Burton Just continue.

Terri In the play Lena is killed but she returns later as a spirit.

Drauf A ghost?

Lois Not every play is naturalistic. And not everything is as it seems.

Burton So Katie exits from behind the bar immediately after the fight?

Terri In the play, yes. In real life, no.

REMAIN SEATED 24

Burton I know what happens in real life. She dies, the play stops and an ambulance arrives.

Peter No that's the *real* real life.

Burton (*Starting to lose it*) This is not funny.

Roger I'm not so sure. Your average critic would have said that pages ago.

Terri Sergeant, in the script the body remains on the stage but its spirit departs. In order to play the spirit, Katie has to exit and change costume. But in order to fool the audience, a pretend-Katie remains on stage.

Roger A dummy, dummy.

Burton Remains where? (*CAST exasperated*)

Peter Does it matter? Does anything matter except Katie's death?

Burton Well if it matters why are you still acting? (*CAST furious*)

Lois We're not acting. This is real!

Burton Wouldn't be some sort of theatrical superstition?

Carrie No it's called shock, distress, bereavement. We just had an awful experience and we're still upset. And you are making it worse!
(*Longish pause. CAST stare at BURTON who remains calm*)

Roger I think we should continue the play.

Company (*Huge shock*) What!?! ... Roger! ... Are you mad? ... etc.

Roger No, no, wait. Hear me out. Listen.

Carrie I can't believe you could do this to Katie.

Roger (*Sincere*) Carrie, please. Let me explain. (*Pause*) We're not going to beat the cops. You can't fight city hall. If we show the gendarmes what happens after the fight, I bet they'll see there's nothing amiss and they'll let us go.

Peter No! It's absurd. Worse, it's evil.

Roger It means we can all go home. Soon. (*Pause. OTHERS are thinking*)

Terri (*To BURTON*) If we do this, can we then go home?

Burton I think so. (*CAST frustrated*) I mean it should answer any further questions and that'll be the end.

Roger Right, you heard the man. (*He claps his hands and moves DR*) Places for after the fight. (*Pause*) Well, come on.

(*CAST look at one another, mutter disapproval then move to enact the next scene. ROGER DR, CARRIE and PETER sit on settee. LOIS moves to the writing desk. TERRI takes the police offstage DL speaking as she goes*)

Terri This way ladies and gentlemen.
(*TERRI indicates with her hand and the police exit. Suddenly the lighting changes. The spot on the auditorium wall is killed. On stage it's now very late at night. Dim lighting. Those on the settee slump back in exhaustion. The men undo a shirt button or two and ruffle their hair. The actors are now back into the characters we met at the beginning of the play. DENISE is a mess. She has been crying for hours. SHIRLEY is cool and determined but even her patience is wearing thin. She speaks from the desk*)

Shirley We have to do something. (*Pointing behind bar. Annoyed*) The body's getting cold! (*DENISE leans forward, sobs again. The men are exasperated and exhausted*)

Gary (*Annoyed at his snivelling wife*) Oh shut up, Denise.

Shirley (*Moving behind settee RC*) We've been arguing for two hours!

Colin (*Still staring at ceiling*) Three.

Shirley I'm not taking the blame. Unless you back my suicide theory, I'll throw so much mud you lot'll wish you were never born.

Colin (*Suddenly up and angry. He storms UC*) All right. You want a story. I confess. (*OTHERS sit up/turn stunned*) I killed her.

Others (*Shocked*) What?

Colin I've been stealing from the company for years. Lena found out. I told her to forget it. She wouldn't. I pinched the pills she took for her back and filled them with weed killer. (*Huge gasp from OTHERS*)

Shirley Pull the other one, Colin. You haven't got the guts.

Colin Look you want an excuse for your own stupidity, here it is.

Shirley God you're thick. She's wearing a couple of bullet holes. How does that tie in with poisoned pills?

Colin You asked for motive, I've got one.

Denise So have I.
(*OTHERS dumbfounded. All turn and stare at DENISE*)

Shirley I think I shot the wrong person.

Gary Leave it out, Denise. Comedy's not your scene.

Denise I hated her. She laughed at me, taunted me. She knew I wasn't in her class. Well tonight I got my own back. When I made her a drink tonight, I put arsenic in her glass.
(*Huge shock from others. GARY clutches his throat*)

Gary You bitch! You've killed me.

Colin Where did you get arsenic?

Denise I only had enough for one. It was like arsenic. Kills after two hours.

Shirley (*Wanders towards body*) Seems to be working too.

Colin Oh this is lovely. Two of us poison her and another shoots her.

Shirley Accidentally! You two were deliberate. You really wanted her dead.

Colin So did you!

Shirley Yeah but I didn't get the chance. Now listen, there is no way I'm wearing this on my own.

Gary (*Quietly*) Me too.

Shirley Two of you attempted cold-blooded murder and I'm the bunny taking the blame.

Gary I said, "Me too!".
(*Longish pause. OTHERS stop and turn to GARY*)

Shirley You're kidding.

Gary She rejected me. She made me look a fool.

REMAIN SEATED 26

Colin You *are* a fool.

Gary She ridiculed me in front of my friends. I couldn't take it. I hated her. I fixed her car.

Shirley You what?

Gary I fixed her brakes. Tonight she would have lost control on the way home and, I hope, been killed.
(Pause. These revelations take a bit of time to absorb)

Shirley I have to admit you lot have surprised me. I had you picked for the local chickens and here you are lining up as the local Mafia. I'm surprised there wasn't a genuine hitman.

Colin Well actually I did do that.

Others *(In shock)* What?!

Colin Nothing fancy. I just asked a mate to rough her up a bit.

Shirley Rough her up! You've already poisoned her!

Gary That is disgusting.

Colin Disgusting! You wrecked her car!

Gary Yeah but organising thugs.

Denise Shut up! Both of you. I've got a husband and father-in-law you are really killers.

Colin Oh charming. Guess who whips up the odd lethal cocktail.

Denise She deserved it.

Gary You could have killed me.

Denise Pity I didn't.

Gary *(Moves to DENISE and grabs her. She fights back)* You rotten little bitch!

Denise *(Fighting GARY)* Get off! Let go! *(Continues)*

Colin *(Over the other voices)* That's right, beat a woman. Let her go! *(Continues)*

(GARY, DENISE and COLIN all shout at one another and fight for a few seconds. Suddenly SHIRLEY points the gun to the ceiling and fires it. The noise frightens the others and the duck in fear. They cover their heads thinking they're about to be shot)

Colin *(Cowering)* No, Shirley. No!
(Pause. SHIRLEY hasn't moved. She lowers the gun. Slowly the OTHERS sit up and look around. SHIRLEY looks at ceiling. OTHERS follow her example)

Shirley *(Calm)* Ceiling needs painting.

Colin *(Sheepish)* Ah, I'll do that, Shirl. First thing tomorrow.

Shirley *(Suddenly back to business of LENA/KATIE)* There won't be a tomorrow unless we sort out this mess! *(Moving around behind them, threatening in low voice)* Everyone of you tried to kill Lena. In fact I'm the only one who didn't!

Colin *(Indignant, accuses SHIRLEY)* You shot her!

Shirley *(Furious, screams at COLIN)* Accidentally you moron! *(OTHERS cringe)*

Colin *(Backing down)* Yes, all right. Accidentally.

REMAIN SEATED 27

Shirley Now either you come up with some brilliant scheme to get me off the hook or I'll call the cops and tell them everything you've just told me. And with your pathetic planning, it'll be a cinch to prove you're the real killers.
(OTHERS spin round in despair. They are scared/worried. They beg for mercy)

Gary No Mum, please.

Colin Shirley.

Denise I didn't mean to.

Shirley I'll give you two minutes. Something plausible or I start singing.
(SHIRLEY moves to bar. OTHERS look at one another. COLIN whispers. OTHERS shake heads. Pause. DENISE whispers. Men scoff and shake heads)

Shirley *(Calling from upstage)* Time marches on!

Colin *(Calling to his wife)* Be reasonable!

Shirley *(Calm and determined)* One minute!.
(OTHERS start to panic. They confer but get nowhere. Tension mounts. We can't hear what they're saying but there's plenty of head-shaking, brushing fingers through hair, etc. They're starting to crack. COLIN wanders DL thinking. GARY threatens DENISE. It's his only way of expressing himself. She threatens him)

Shirley *(Going for phone)* Time's up!

Gary No! *(Rushes up to SHIRLEY)* Please, Mum. I'm begging you.

Shirley *(Nasty)* Get away ... murderer! *(GARY devastated. Suddenly COLIN calls)*

Colin Wait! I've got it.

Shirley This better be good.

Colin *(Excited)* It's brilliant. You know that woman Lena used to live with. Works in the theatre.

Denise Sue Trompp. She lives round the corner.

Colin That's her. She *hates* Lena. And I mean *hates*.

Shirley So?

Colin I ring her. I tell her Lena's ripped me off. Left me penniless. I ask Sue to help me get even.

Gary *(Sceptical)* She won't buy that.

Colin She arrives, we plant the gun on her and call the cops. When they arrive, we tell them Sue came here unannounced, confronted her arch-enemy Lena, they fought and Lena was killed. It's perfect.

Shirley *(Coming down, almost enthusiastic)* Nice one, Colin. It just might work.

Gary Wait a minute. The body's cold. She was killed hours ago.

Denise We can say Sue held us at gunpoint for hours and we've just overpowered her.

Colin Yes, brilliant.

Gary Denise, darling.

Denise Darling? What happened to "stupid little bitch"?

Colin Come on. This gets us off the hook. *All of us.*
(Pause. OTHERS now convinced. They'll grasp at straw)

Gary Let's do it.

Shirley Right. Colin, ring Sue. (*COLIN heads to phone*) Gary, you and Denise hide the body. (*Pause as they hesitate at their task*) Do it!

(*Everyone moves. COLIN to bar and makes phone call. We see him speaking but can't hear him. GARY and DENISE go behind bar. They mime brief dispute. DENISE goes to cupboard UL and returns quickly with a blanket. SHIRLEY goes to desk LC, wipes gun carefully and replaces it in drawer. DENISE and GARY lift LENA [now covered in blanket] and drag her UL. They place her in cupboard [standing upright] and close doors. They lean on doors to make sure the body doesn't fall out. Excited, COLIN suddenly replaces phone*)

Colin (*Excited*) Done! She's coming.

Shirley (*Has wiped and replaced gun. Hopeful*) She bought it?

Colin (*Heading C rubbing hands*) She hates Lena. Will do *anything* to get even. She's coming straight over.

Shirley (*Also getting enthusiastic*) Right, Colin you do the talking. Gary and Denise hide behind the bar. (*They move UL. SHIRLEY thinks aloud - checking*) Now the body's hidden. (*Looking around*) Where is it?

Gary It's safe.

Colin What'll I say?

Shirley It's your idea, lover-boy. Just make it work. First, call the cops.

Colin (*Suddenly chicken*) Me!?! No!

Shirley (*Adamant*) Yes, you!

Colin (*Gone to water*) I can't. I'll blow it. Please, Shirl, you do it. (*FX: Doorbell rings. All panic except SHIRLEY*)

Denise That's her.

Gary What'll we do?
(*GARY, DENISE and COLIN all panic*)

Shirley (*Calm. To COLIN*) Get the door. (*COLIN starts to exit UR*) Wait! I need to call the cops first. (*SHIRLEY goes to phone on bar*) What's the number?

Colin (*Nervous*) It's on the side of the phone.

Shirley (*Calm*) Good thinking. (*She lifts receiver and punches digits talking at the same time*) Hide, Gary.
(*GARY and DENISE look to hide. DENISE to cupboard, about to open door*)

Gary Not there! Here.
(*GARY grabs DENISE and pulls her behind bar. FX: Doorbell rings again*)

Colin (*Nervous tension taking over*) Oh God!

Shirley (*Into phone. Pretending to be upset*) Police? ... I want to report a murder. (*Puts hand over receiver and speaks angrily to COLIN*) Get the door! (*COLIN leaps into action and exits UR. SHIRLEY resumes phone conversation using distressed voice*) Yes, come quickly. What? ... Oh the address is twenty-seven ... (*SHIRLEY turns upstage. Moments later she replaces receiver*) They're on their way.

Colin (*From offstage*) Thanks for coming. We really appreciate it. In here.

(SHIRLEY signals to GARY and DENISE who hide behind bar. SHIRLEY darts DR and collapses in chair. UR door opens and SUE enters with COLIN)

Colin Come in. *(Indicates settee)* Have a seat.

Sue *(Sits on settee)* Thanks. Nice place you've got. The garden's great.
(SHIRLEY sobs quietly and doesn't look up)

Colin *(To SHIRLEY)* Darling. *(No response)* Sweetheart this is Sue Trompp.
(SHIRLEY moans) I'm sorry, Sue. As you can see, we're in a bit of a mess.

Sue Please, don't apologise. That woman is evil.

Shirley *(a la trance)* She took everything. Everything.
(The last word dissolves into more sobbing)

Colin *(Goes to comfort his dear spouse)* Come on, Shirl. Be brave. That's my girl.

Sue She did it to me, too, you know. I hate the cow.

Colin I'm afraid our business is ruined. Thirty years of work down the tube all because of one crafty accountant.

Shirley *(Suddenly angry)* If I get my hands on her I'll wring her bloody neck!

Colin Hey, you mustn't talk like that. Killing someone's not nice.

Sue Yes it is. Killing's too good for 'er. She stuffed up my life. And I don't care who hears me. I'd have no worries about killing Lena.
(Pause. COLIN and SHIRLEY look at one another then at SUE)

Shirley You can't mean that.

Sue My oath I do. Give me the chance and I'll put her lights out - forever!

Shirley Well strange as it may seem, she's prepared to kill us.

Colin *(Genuinely shocked)* What!?

Shirley *(Rising, crossing to desk)* She left her handbag here last night. Guess what we found inside?

Sue Nothing would surprise me with that tart.

Shirley This will. Look.

(SHIRLEY opens drawer and steps upstage a little. SUE crosses to desk. GARY and DENISE poke heads out from behind bar. COLIN gingerly moves centre)

Sue *(Pause then shocked)* A gun! That looks real!

Shirley Lena had this gun in her bag.

Colin I rang and said we found her gun. She said if I told anyone I'd be dead.

Shirley She threatened all of us.

Sue *(Admiring gun. A touch weird)* You've gotta admit, they are well made. Even beautiful

Shirley We know nothing about guns. Do you think it might be real?

Colin We don't even know if it's loaded.

Sue Well we use imitation guns in the theatre but this looks pretty real to me.

Colin Do you think you could disarm it for us?

Shirley Oh yes, Please make it safe. I hate the thought of a real loaded gun being left in our house.

(Pause. SUE looks at gun and then at COLIN and SHIRLEY)

Colin Please Sue. We trust you.

REMAIN SEATED 30

- (SUE thinks about it then decides there can't be any harm)*
- Sue** Well, if you insist. *(She takes gun out and examines it)* It's real all right. *(SHIRLEY steps back)* And it smells like it's been fired recently.
- Shirley** *(Instant switch of character)* Of course it has, several times, by you.
- Sue** *(Pause)* Sorry. I think I missed that.
- Shirley** Gary. Denise. *(GARY and DENISE appear)*
- Sue** Hey, what's going on?
- Shirley** Now be very careful with that gun. It's the one you used to kill Lena.
- Sue** Lena! What are talking about?
- Colin** Now as you can see there are four witnesses here. We are saw the murder.
- Sue** What have you done? Who's been murdered? *(GARY opens cupboard door)*
- Gary** Da-dah!
- (Everyone looks at the draped body of LENA. It pauses then suddenly pitches forward crashing onto the carpet. SUE is stunned. The OTHERS are grinning)*
- Shirley** Typical. Never could hold her liquor.
- Gary** I believe you two know each other.
- Sue** *(Suddenly happy)* Oh this fantastic. You've really killed her. Congratulations.
- Colin** Ah, I think there's a typing error in there. She's dead, yes but the killer is you!
- Sue** *(Suddenly back to being worried)* Now let's not be stupid about this. You all know I've just arrived.
- Gary** Wrong. You broke in three hours ago and have kept us prisoner all that time.
- Sue** Look if this is a joke, it's not real funny. Okay? The main thing is she's dead and that's all that matters.
- Shirley** To us, sure. But unfortunately not to the police.
- Sue** You've called the cops!
- Colin** They're on their way. And when they arrive, we're all agreed that you killed her.
- Denise** With that gun.
- Sue** You won't get away with this. Cops aren't stupid. They can pinpoint the time of death to minutes.
- Gary** So? What's a minute between friends?
- Sue** I told you this is not funny.
- Denise** So who's laughing?
- Sue** *(Pause. Tension builds)* Okay, she's dead. She had an accident. But I didn't kill her.
- Colin** But you wanted too.
- Denise** *(Mimics SUE)* And I don't care who hears me. I'd have no worries about killing Lena.
- Colin** We've probably got that bit on tape. Just for the record.

REMAIN SEATED 31

Sue You can't do this. *(Louder)* You can't do this.

Shirley *(Taking control)* Sorry sweetheart, Can and will. When the cops come, you confess.

Sue No!

Shirley Do the right thing and we'll back you. Lena attacked you, self-defence, accidental shooting, blah, blah, blah.

Sue I won't do it. You can't make me.

Colin You've made yourself guilty by coming here and handling that gun. Everyone knows you've mad threats against her.

(Pause. OTHERS stare at SUE. Evil grins at the now-desperate visitor. SUE suddenly snaps into action. She's not going to go down without a fight)

Sue *(Suddenly raising gun and backing DL)* No! You won't get away with it!

Colin *(Suddenly afraid)* Hey, take it easy!

Shirley *(Ever calm)* Let her go. If she runs, it'll prove her guilt. *(Gives headlines)* *Murder Suspect Shot By Police!*

(Tense moment. OTHERS stare at SUE who is under strong pressure. SHIRLEY is calm, the OTHERS not sure. SUE edges her way LC to the desk keeping her back to the wall and pointing the gun at the others. GARY moves C and this time uses SHIRLEY as a shield)

Sue *(Threatens as she moves)* Stay back!

Shirley *(Gloating, inciting. Indicates LENA)* Mind the body! *(SUE looks down to avoid standing on LENA then suddenly looks up to make sure no-one has rushed her. SHIRLEY mocks/taunts SUE)*

Shirley Hey! Why don't you take a hostage!

Colin *(Dismayed, angry)* Shirley! She's got a loaded gun!

Shirley *(Jabbing GARY)* Gary'll go!

Gary *(Petrified, angry)* Mum! Cut it out!

(SUE continues to edge DL. OTHERS forced to face her)

Sue *(Points gun)* There's no way you'll get away with this!

Shirley *(Taunts SUE)* What are you gonna do? Shoot another person!?

(Pause. Tension. SHIRLEY ice cool, the OTHERS petrified)

Sue *(Nervous but determined)* Yes. *(Pause. OTHERS freeze [even SHIRLEY])* Me!

(SUE suddenly holds gun to her temple and is about to shoot herself)

Denise *(Terrified, wants SUE to stop)* No!

(In a split-second, DENISE starts towards SUE whose finger tightens on the trigger. Suddenly BURTON steps out from the wings and takes the gun from SUE)

Burton Thank you. I'll take that.

(What an anti-climax. The OTHERS step out of character. They are deflated and annoyed. ROGER can't believe the action of BURTON. DRAUF emerges but is not sure what to do. PETER and CARRIE return to settee. SHIRLEY sits DR with ROGER behind her)

Roger What are you doing? This is the most tense moment in the whole damn play.

- Burton** Yes, well I'm here to investigate a death in unusual circumstances, not to watch a play.
- Denise** Thanks for nothing, sergeant. You've missed my dramatic demise.
- Roger** They send you on a lot of busts do they? Your timing's terrific.
- Burton** I don't see the point in performing the play when the scene involving Lena has been and gone. There's nothing to be gained by continuing with the play.
- Carrie** Then why make us do it?
- Burton** Just tell me about the body in the cupboard.
- Peter** It's a dummy. As if that wasn't patently obvious.
- Burton** I know that. I'm interested in the *real* body. Where would Lena normally be at this time? (*Cast frustrated*)
- Roger** We've been over all this before.
- Terri** By this time in the play, sergeant, Katie has her feet up in the dressing-room. (*Sudden pause as she realises what she's said. OTHERS look at her*)
- Burton** Alas, not so tonight.
- Roger** Oh very subtle, sergeant. A sensitive Sherlock Holmes.
- Burton** I want to go back to the fight. (*OTHERS despair. To LOIS*) When the gun was fired behind the bar, how close were you to the deceased?
- Lois** (*Annoyed*) I told you. I showed you. I don't point it at her. We both *hate* guns. Why are you asking me this?
- Roger** Because he's trying to save face. He's bounced up here, taken centre-stage and discovered nothing! Oh dear. Smokescreen required. How to exit without making an even bigger fool of myself. (*ROGER makes "tch tch" sound with his tongue and shakes his head*)
- Burton** I realise this is difficult, extremely difficult but at the risk of repeating myself, the police are required by law to investigate any suspicious death.
- Lois** Suspicious!?! Can't you tell the difference between a play and real life? She wasn't shot. I didn't kill her!
- Burton** This isn't a car accident. This was a young woman with no apparent illness or disease who suddenly drops dead. That is suspicious.
- Peter** Is that we you call a softly, softly approach? Is this how all police conduct their enquires?
- Burton** Perhaps it would be better for all if you gave a little co-operation. I am simply trying to do my job.
- Roger** The key word being *simply*.
- Burton** And you are starting to definitely annoy me.
- Roger** Careful, officer. (*Indicates pretend audience*) We have witnesses.
- Drauf** (*To ROGER*) Perhaps you'd prefer to handle this at the station, sir?
- Terri** Roger! Back off! (*Pause. Tense moment*)

REMAIN SEATED 33

Burton Right. I'd like everyone to leave their name and address with the constable.

Lois You mean you've finished? We can go?

Burton The investigation may continue once we hear from forensic. But yes, for now, that's it. And thank you for your cooperation.

Terri What about the audience? Do I send them home? I mean we can't continue the play.

Burton Not yet. I need a brief word. So unless anyone has any more to say, give the constable your details before you leave.

Roger So whatever happened to "The show must go on"?

Burton *(To DRAUF)* Take their details, constable. I need a few moments with the audience.

Drauf Yes sir.
(BURTON moves downstage to address the pretend audience. DRAUF mimes taking the name and address of the actors who then exit. PETER and CARRIE move DR miming a dispute. TERRI moves to BURTON)

Terri You want the house I presume?

Burton Sorry?

Terri The house lights. The audience.

Burton Yes. Please. *(TERRI exits to wings)* I need to see the people.
(Slight pause. Suddenly light/s come up on auditorium wall - the pretend house lights - and BURTON turns to address the pretend audience. TERRI re-enters upstage and joins LOIS and ROGER with DRAUF)

Burton Ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for your patience and I apologise for the delay. I know all this must seem strange, perhaps a bit unreal, but we've had a tragic death and it's been my job to conduct a preliminary investigation. I need to know if anyone in the audience saw anything unusual. Perhaps some scenery seemed in a dangerous position. Perhaps you saw an actor slip. Anything no matter how trivial could be important. Don't be shy. Don't be embarrassed. I need your assistance. Believe me, without the public's help, the police are often unable to solve or unravel many events. *(Pause)* Anyone? Please, don't be afraid. *(Imaginary person in pretend audience raises their hand)* Yes sir. Go ahead. *(Pause as imaginary person speaks)* I agree, it is difficult. But we need to distinguish between the play where she was murdered and real life where she may well have died from natural causes. But thanks for your comments. Anyone else? *(He responds to another imaginary member of the pretend audience)* Yes madam? *(Pause as response is heard. BURTON removes note-pad and takes notes)* I see. And you're sure of that? *(Pause)* I take it you've seen the play before? *(Slight pause)* And you're certain it was the settee? *(Slight pause)* No, it is important. Thank you. *(Looks along wall)* Anyone else? Sir? *(Pause)* Well the autopsy should tell us that. But thanks anyway. Anyone else? Don't be afraid. *(Slight pause)* Right then.

That's it as far as I'm concerned. Thank you for your co-operation. No doubt they'll be something in the press. I guess the company will make some announcement so for the time being, please remain seated.

(BURTON moves upstage, confers with DRAUF. The dispute between CARRIE and PETER is hot up. ROGER and LOIS move when BURTON approaches. TERRI moves downstage to address pretend audience)

Terri *(Addressing lit section of wall)* Ladies and gentlemen, as you've seen, the terrible accident has stopped our performance. Unfortunately there's nothing we can do to continue. And I'm sure you can understand. We're all feeling, well shocked to say the least and we're in no mood to finish even if we could. I think the best thing is for you to contact the box-office tomorrow or some time this week. I can't say what'll be done but I'm sure they'll be a refund or new tickets or something. Maybe the season'll be cancelled. I'm sorry. Nothing like this has ever happened to us before. Please give the company twenty-four hours to sort things out. I suggest you adjourn to the foyer now for a drink. *(Weak joke)* We certainly need one if you don't. *(Short embarrassed pause)* Yes, well, that's all folks. And thanks for coming.

Carrie *(Loud)* Peter, I have to! *(She runs to UR door)*

Peter *(To OTHERS)* It's okay. She's just upset.

Carrie *(At UR door)* I'm going to tell them. Just leave me alone. *(She exits)*

Peter *(Chasing her)* No, Carrie! Wait! Carrie! *(OTHERS are stunned)*

Burton What's going on?

Roger *(Calling)* Leave her, Peter.

(ROGER runs after PETER but is too late. PETER exits calling to CARRIE)

Burton Hey! Stop!

Roger *(Turns back to BURTON)* Back off, copper. This is private.

Burton *(Moving to ROGER)* I want to see that young woman is okay.

Roger *(Blocks/grabs BURTON)* She's okay. Now back off!

Lois Roger!

Burton Don't be stupid. *(The men struggle. DRAUF heads for the steps)*

Roger Mind your own business!

(ROGER pushes BURTON who stumbles down the steps and crashes into DRAUF. The two police sprawl on the floor. Neither is hurt. ROGER exits quickly, calling)

Roger Peter! Carrie! *(He exits)* Wait!

Burton Get after them.

Drauf *(Exits UR)* Yes sir.

Lois *(Follows DRAUF, calling)* Roger! Leave them alone! Roger!

(LOIS exits after DRAUF)

Terri *(To BURTON)* Are you okay?

Burton *(Repairing himself)* No. I've got a broken ego and acute embarrassment. What was that all about?

Terri Nothing.

Burton Not another part of the play I hope?

Terri No. More like real life. Look, do we have to discuss this in front of them?
(She indicates pretend audience with nod of her head)

Burton *(Ignores her)* Two of your colleagues start a domestic, they ignore my call to stop and two police officers are assaulted. I've heard about method acting but this is ridiculous.

Terri They're under stress. Wouldn't you be in their position?

Burton What position? What have they done? What's going on?

Terri Nothing. Just a minor domestic.

Burton Well I've got a few more questions. Send the audience home. *(Heads UR)* Then I want a proper talk with your thespian mates. *(Stops at door)* Including you.
(BURTON exits UR. TERRI is alone on stage. She faces the real audience who are in darkness. She gives a feeble grin. Slight pause)

Terri I really think this is a good time for a drink. *(Pause)* Goodnight.
(Instant total blackout. TERRI exits. Slowly bring up the real houselights. The lights on the wall - the pretend audience - are used no more)

ACT TWO

(The audience return, the houselights dim and the curtain rises. To the actors and police, the audience has departed, the auditorium is now empty. The actors lounge around. CARRIE is UL looking out to the garden. PETER sulks on chair DR. LOIS sits on settee staring into space. COLIN and TERRI are upstage at the bar talking. The police are absent. The actors have changed into different clothes, their own casual gear they wore to the theatre that night)

Peter *(To no-one in particular)* It's ridiculous. We've told him everything. We should just get up and go home.

Lois We'd be home if you two hadn't tried for an Academy Award.

Carrie It's too late now.

Peter It's not too late. If we say nothing, no-one need ever know.

Carrie Peter, I'm going to tell him.

Peter Why? Give me one reason why you're doing this?

Carrie Because it's the truth.

Peter Yes but it's irrelevant. However Katie died, we had absolutely nothing to do with it.

Lois Could you two argue somewhere else?

Carrie Could you please mind your own business?

Peter Caz you're not helping anyone. The police don't need to know.

Roger Ah if I may offer a suggestion. Just two words. Cool it.

Peter Cool it! It's your smart-arse comments that turned the cop against in the first place. We told you to stop but not Roger Big Mouth.

Roger Shut it.

Peter What is it with you? Why have you got to bait everyone with your childish sarcasm? I mean, who are trying to impress?

Roger How about I impress you. Here and now.

Lois Oh bloody hell. Will you two just grow up?

Peter Typical. Can't express himself with words so has to resort to violence.

Roger *(Moves to PETER)* There'll be very little violence, mate. All over in a flash.

Peter *(Grappling)* Get off!

Terri *(Trying to intervene)* Stop it! Roger!
(DRAUF enters and immediately dives into the fray)

Drauf Cut it out! Back off!
(The men are separated but the ill-feeling continues. BURTON enters UR drying his hands on a handkerchief. He stops when he surveys the scene)

Burton Hello. What's all this?
(The others break up and BURTON comes down)

Drauf Nothing, sir. Just a few hot tempers.

Burton Smells like *fightus interruptus* to me.

Terri We were rehearsing a scene from the play. The constable asked to see how we staged a fight scene. Isn't that right, constable?

Drauf *(Pause)* Yes. They were rehearsing.

Burton Well who can lie better than an actor? Now if you'll just wait a few minutes, I'd like a word with my colleague. *(BURTON moves DL and DRAUF follows. The others can't hear this conversation)* So? What news?

Drauf Bit of luck, sir. My friend's on duty in casualty. He spoke with the doctor in charge. She was pronounced dead on arrival.

Burton We know she's dead? What was the cause?

Drauf Can't say for certain but they suspect she was poisoned.

Burton Nice one. Gives me something to try on this lot.

Drauf They think it's a pretty rare poison. Nothing straightforward.

Burton Curiouser and curiouser. *(Turns back to COMPANY)* Okay, if I can your attention. *(They settle)* The constable has contacted the hospital and the unofficial report is that your colleague was poisoned.

Others *(Shocked)* Poisoned!?

Lois *(Shocked)* There's got to be a mistake. The wrong blood sample. Anything?

Peter Isn't it too early to know the exact cause of death?

Burton It is early and I did say "unofficial". But science never lies. Sooner or later we'll know the exact cause and then perhaps someone here might have some explaining to do. *(Angry response from COMPANY)* Well let's clear the air. Let's have a little heart to heart now that we're all alone. *(Looks around at the despairing actors. BURTON means business)* Right. Who's first?

Peter We've told you everything. We've even demonstrated exactly what happened.

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- Burton** Oh before we start, I think I owe you all an apology. (*OTHERS stunned*) I'm sorry if any of you were embarrassed in front of the audience.
- Roger** We weren't embarrassed, we were humiliated.
- Burton** And for that I apologise. But now the audience has gone home, let's start again. Only this time I won't tolerate any clever remarks, misleading comments, anything which prevents us getting to the truth. Do I make myself clear?
- Terri** Can I have a solicitor?
- Burton** You can have who you like. In fact we can all go down to the station where proceedings could take half the night.
- Roger** Get on with it.
- Burton** Well I'm ready. Any objections?
- Lois** Forget it, Terri. It won't take long. (*Pause*)
- Terri** Okay.
- Burton** Thank you. Now as you probably know, one of you has asked to make a statement. This person wants to add to their previous comments. So if anyone else cares to do likewise, now's the time.
- Peter** I've got nothing to say.
- Burton** Anyone may speak and, if you wish, may do so in private.
- Roger** It's a bit late for privacy. You've spent half the night flogging our dirty linen in public.
- Carrie** I don't require privacy.
- Peter** (*Distressed*) Carrie! You don't have to do this! (*Begs*) Please.
- Burton** Right madam. In your own time.
- Peter** Can't we talk first? At least not in front of the others.
- Lois** Come off it, Peter. We all know about you and Carrie.
- Peter** (*Aghast*) What?
- Roger** Listen mate, there's no such thing as anonymous adultery.
- Peter** (*Distressed*) Oh dear god!
(*CARRIE moves to settee and holds Peter's hand. She speaks calmly but with force. The OTHERS are interested. PETER drops his head in dismay*)
- Carrie** Peter and I are lovers. We're married but not to each other. We kept our relationship secret till last month. Katie saw us one weekend and told my husband. When I found out, I confronted Katie and we argued. I ... I threatened to kill her.
- Peter** She didn't mean it. It was just something you say in a fit of anger.
- Burton** What exactly did you say?
- Carrie** I said if she told my husband about me and Peter, I'd kill her.
- Peter** It was nothing, an empty threat. (*PETER is led away by TERRI*)
- Burton** You said those exact words, "I'll kill you"?

REMAIN SEATED 38

Carrie Yes but I guess I was frightened. I didn't want to harm my marriage and Katie was ... unpredictable.

Burton Did you fight?

Carrie No.

Burton Did you argue again?

Carrie No. In fact just the opposite. We ignored one another. We didn't speak unless we had to.

Terri Keeps us on our toes. Spot of tension backstage.

Burton So on stage you and Peter are a married couple who despise one another and off-stage you're involved in a relationship?

Roger (*Sarcastic*) Sergeant! A delicate turn of phrase. A euphemism as well.

Peter The threat was nothing. I know Carrie. She's a caring, loving person. (*Emphatic*) She didn't kill Katie.

Burton A little tip, sir. You're almost protesting too much.

Lois He's right Peter. The best defence is silence. Say nowt!

Burton I'm only interested in facts.

Terri So you want us to leave out the gossip and dirty linen? Come on, you coppers love the hearsay and rumour.

Burton I repeat. All I want are the facts.

Peter Well I'm disgusted with the way you forced Carrie to talk about something which is beautiful and private.

Lois Peter, we all knew.

Peter Yes because Katie told you.

Roger Listen sunshine, your ardour was on show during rehearsals for the last play.

Terri Peter, Katie knew about you and Carrie months ago, before she sprung your dirty weekend.

Carrie And I wonder how she knew. I wonder who told her.

Roger No-one told her. It was on the front page of the local rag. You two were as subtle as residents of a stud farm

Carrie It wouldn't have been someone with a big mouth.

Burton All right, let's leave the domestics till later.

Carrie I'll bet it was good old *Lois Loose-Lips*.

Burton I said that's enough.

Lois Better to have loose lips than loose hips.
(*CARRIE launches herself at LOIS. BURTON and DRAUF dive in to separate. Lots of anger and overlapping dialogue*)

Carrie You slag! I'll get you for that! (*etc*)

Lois Get off! Get her off! (*etc*)

Burton Stop it! Stop it! (*etc*)

Drauf Let her go! Now! (*etc*)
(*The struggling women are separated and an uneasy peace is established*)

Burton Any more of that and you'll be arrested for assault. Now settle down.

Peter (*Angry with CARRIE*) None of this would have happened if you'd kept your mouth shut.

Carrie (*Equally angry*) Well so much for the *secret* affair. No-one need ever know, darling. Don't ever apply to ASIO. (*or MI5 or the CIA*)

Roger See what you've done, sergeant, you home-wrecker you.

Carrie (*To OTHERS*) At least I had the guts to speak up. Not like some I could mention.

Burton Meaning?

Carrie Nothing.

Burton (*Insistent*) Meaning?

Carrie Meaning unlike some I don't grass on people.

Lois Oh no. You just drop absurdly obvious hints. I've told my secret, why don't you tell yours?

Burton I'll ask again. Does anyone else have something to say? (*Pause. Silence*) No-one's being charged. There's no investigation of murder. But believe me it's far better to come clean now, particularly if you've done nothing wrong.

Lois Come clean? That sounds dangerously like confess. This wouldn't be a famous police verbal by any chance?

Burton If you've got anything relevant to say, now's the time. (*Pause. Silence*)

Roger I think we should, Lois.

Lois Shut up, Roger.

Roger We can't hide it forever, baby. This thing is bigger than both of us.

Lois Ignore him. He's a fool.

Burton He'll be a locked-up fool if he continues like that.

Lois If you must know, the lovely sleep-around Carrie has some bee in her bonnet about money. Not that it's any of her business.

Roger (*Serious*) Oh now this is ridiculous. You can't possibly link that to Katie's death.

Burton What about the money. (*ROGER annoyed*)

Peter Not so pleasant being on the other end hey, *sunshine*?

Lois You sure you want to hear this?

Burton It's my job.

Lois The whole company takes a lottery ticket each week. Katie was in charge. She collected everyone's cash, bought the ticket, chose the numbers, etcetera. One week she missed me and I didn't pay. Murphy's law of course and we won.

Burton How much?

Terri Nearly sixty grand.

Roger Yeah but split six ways.

Lois Katie jumped on her regulations high-horse, said only those who paid were eligible for a share of the winnings. It was pathetic. I'd always paid her. This week I forget. But she didn't chase me.

- Burton** So you missed out on the money?
- Lois** No way. It was put to a vote and everyone except Katie voted for me to get my share.
- Burton** Would it be fair to say that Katie was not the most popular member of the company?
- Roger** He's got it, by George he's got it.
- Carrie** But there's dislike, unpopular, hate, loathe. None of us were interested in killing her.
- Burton** So you keep saying.
- Lois** The lottery thing was a storm in a tea-cup. I told her to stick it in her bank vault.
- Burton** You didn't accept the money? None of it?
- Lois** I wouldn't give her the satisfaction. She was a sanctimonious bitch and not to put too fine a point on it, I'm not deeply into mourning.
- Burton** That wasn't the impression you gave before.
- Roger** Ah impressions, sergeant. The actor's role is to impress. You've gotta admit, she's not bad for an amateur.
- Burton** So the actor you hate and try to kill in the play in reality robbed you of thousands of dollars? *(OTHERS scoff at this remark)*
- Peter** You've got to be joking. Motive is one thing but you just draw these incredibly long bows. You saw what happened.
- Lois** She ripped me off so I killed her on stage under cover of the play. Is that what you're saying?
- Burton** Somebody poisoned her.
- Roger** Not proven as yet. But even if it is true, where's the evidence? Where's your bloody proof?
- Terri** Is this really how the police operate? Watching your methods you must be a fan of *Murder She Wrote* and all the *Perry Mason* re-runs.
(Use relevant TV titles if necessary)
- Carrie** I think he's mad. I think he's lost it. *(To DRAUF)* You don't say much. You are allowed to speak?
- Drauf** Just answer the officer's questions.
- Burton** I'm interested in two things. Forensic evidence from the medicos and motive from people who knew and worked with the deceased.
- Roger** Yes but motive isn't proof of anything. I may hate someone but if they fall under a bus, it doesn't mean I pushed them.
- Peter** I would like to leave. This whole business is off. *(At BURTON)* You're just playing a game. It's just a charade to you. Guess whodunit.
- Burton** It's not a game. It's real life. Real death. And maybe, just maybe, Katie died because someone on this stage killed her!
(Slight pause. Everyone takes in the possible truth of BURTON'S last statement)

REMAIN SEATED 41

- Peter** All right, I confess. I'm your man. (*Holds out hands to be handcuffed*) Get it over with.
- Carrie** Peter!
- Peter** I hated her. She taunted and mocked me about Carrie. She made my life an absolute misery. She drove me to hating her so much I just had to kill her. (*OTHERS shocked*)
- Burton** What happened?
- Peter** You want motive, you want desire for a vicious revenge, I'm the one. Arrest me.
- Burton** If you killed you'll be arrested. If you're lying, I'll have you for any number of things.
- Peter** You said you wanted a motive. (*To OTHERS*) Didn't he say hat? (*To BURTON*) Well I've got the best.
- Burton** We know about Katie threatening to blackmail you over your relationship with Carrie. That puts you under suspicion. (*Threatening*) Now don't waste my time.
- Peter** You don't understand. This is not your average murder. This is sororicide! (*EVERYONE stunned. Even BURTON is thrown*)
- Burton** What?
- Roger** I don't believe you.
- Terri** I don't understand.
- Roger** Sororicide is the killing of one's sister. (*More shock*)
- Burton** I'm now warning you officially. Wasting police time, making false statements and misleading an investigation are serious charges. You're looking at a very hefty fine and a possible stretch of two years.
- Peter** I'm not misleading. I'm telling the truth. Katie is ... was my sister. (*Stunned reaction*)
- Carrie** (*Shocked, concerned*) Peter, I didn't know.
- Peter** Of course you didn't. Nobody knew. (*Moving away, not looking at them as he speaks*) Our parents divorced when we were kids. Katie and I lived with our mother. Then, years later, we found out she'd been seeing the old man on the sly. She'd despise him at home but was off enjoying his money whenever it suited her. We had a big argument and split. We never spoke or saw each other for nearly twelve years. Then we both got parts in a play here and neither would back out. We just pretended we'd never met. (*Back to BURTON*) I didn't hate her because she hounded me about Carrie, I've always hated her. My motive has been on the back-burner for twenty years. I'm the man with the motive. (*Stunned silence. No-one was expecting this*)
- Roger** You devious bugger. Got any more hidden secrets?
- Burton** This can easily be verified you know.
- Peter** What do you want? Family snaps? Birth certificate? Blood? (*Extends wrist*) Here, I'll do the slashing, you get out your DNA kit.

Drauf (*Taking PETER upstage*) That won't be necessary, sir.
(*CARRIE moves to comfort PETER who brushes others aside and sulks upstage*)

Burton Well I know nothing about plays but I'd be inclined to make a few changes. Why not add some of this true stuff?

Roger Why don't you mind your own business?

Terri Roger!

Roger Oh, now I see. He's looking for a way out. Of course. Make a few jokes, win us over, shift the spotlight because soon he's gonna have to back down.

Burton You're too clever for me. I'm just a simple cop from homicide.

Roger Bingo. The key word, folks, is homicide. Here's a young, well youngish, cop sitting in the audience. A strange death occurs right under his nose. Naturally he investigates. What a break. He uncovers a bunch of weirdos who knew the deceased and all he needs do is crack the case, on his own mind, and zoom up the promotional ladder.

Burton There is a point to this garbage I presume?

Roger He's well into investigations, has an unofficial medical report of poisoning when suddenly the penny drops. It may not be homicide, it may just be suicide.

Others (*Not the police*) Suicide!

Roger What a bummer. She done herself in and there ain't no-one to arrest. Well perhaps me for overacting but that's hardly going to give the detective his career boost.

Lois Roger, don't push it. (*But ROGER does push it*)

Roger I love seeing smartarse cops take a fall. It's a damn shame you've sent the audience home. They'd adore your portrayal of the dumb detective.

Burton (*Soft but definite threat*) For the last time, shut it. Shut it or all bets are off.

Roger No, come on, be fair. You reckon Katie was poisoned. Only two possibilities. One or more of us did it or she topped herself. Now if it's us, prove it. Show us how it was done.

Terri Roger, we were winning until you started this.

Burton No, don't knock the man. He's clever. It's one of the oldest tricks in the book but it might just work.

Peter I demand you either charge us or let us go, immediately.

Burton Friend Roger here is trying to create a diversion. By getting me to concentrate on the drinks Katie took on stage, the spotlight switches to everyone and not just him. I wonder why.

Lois I don't. I just want to go home.

Burton Certainly. Just one more thing. I want exact details of who prepared and who served a drink to Katie. (*COMPANY frustrated*)

Terri You saw what happened. Roger, Peter and Carrie mix her a drink. Lois fiddles with the drinks at the opening and I prepare the stuff before the play begins.

- Lois** Perhaps we all slipped her a pill. Maybe we all done her in.
- Peter** Would five fit in the dock, sergeant?
- Roger** Go Miss Marple!
(BURTON moves upstage to bar. The others open up and move aside to watch)
- Carrie** The farce continues.
- Burton** What's in these bottles?
- Terri** Stale lemonade, very stale lemonade and tap water.
- Roger** I'd go for the tap water. Arrest the *Water Board* and you'll be made Chief overnight.
- Burton** Why do you turn your back to the audience when you're at the bar?
- Peter** Because it's in the script. Because the director told us to. What does it matter? Who cares?
- Terri** *(Moving to the bar)* Look it's all pretend. There's no grog in the bottles, the actors only pretend to mix the drinks, it's only make believe.
(TERRI holds out glass to BURTON. He hesitates. ROGER steps in and takes it)
- Roger** Ah, the cup of poison. The mystery substance that slid down the lovely Lena's throat and did the poor damsel in. *(COMPANY upset)*
- Lois** *(Annoyed)* Oh for god's sake, Roger, show some respect.
- Roger** *(Taking centre-stage and enjoying his thespian status)* Now, where is my true love? *(Spies DRAUF and approaches her)* Ah! *(He drops on one knee and plays Romeo)* Here's to my love. *(Drinks)* O true apothecary! Thy drugs are quick. Thus with a kiss I die.
(ROGER collapses on floor and feigns death. DRAUF suddenly becomes Juliet and kneels beside her dead true love and cradles Romeo in her arms)
- Drauf** *(As Juliet)* What's here? a cup, clos'd in my true love's hand? Poison, I see, hath been his timeless end:- ... I will kiss thy lips; Haply some poison yet doth hang on them ... *(DRAUF bends and kisses ROGER)* Thy lips are warm!
- Roger** *(As himself)* Too bloody right. *(Grabs DRAUF)* Give us another!
(The startled DRAUF is drawn into a brief romantic grapple with ROGER who is the aggressor. BURTON is furious)
- Burton** Right, that's enough! *(ROGER persists. BURTON intervenes)* I said knock it off!
(The couple separate. DRAUF is embarrassed, ROGER is glowing)
- Roger** What? Here on stage?
- Drauf** I'm sorry, sir. We did that at college. I mean the play.
- Roger** *(Excited)* Hey lady, you've got it. Forget the force. You belong here, darling, centre-stage.
- Burton** I think it's time we dropped the acting.
- Roger** You mean you've noticed? You actually thought I was acting? I'm flattered. I'm flabbergasted. What can I say?
- Burton** In fact, let's bring *everything* into the open.
(Pause. Tension. ROGER changes instantly to a softer very serious character)
- Roger** You don't mean that.

Burton Ladies and gentlemen, I think you'll agree I've endured a torrent of sarcasm and thinly veiled insults from your colleague, Roger, tonight. I've been called a smartarse. I've been mocked and ridiculed. And perhaps you may wonder why he's been so abusive.

Roger You promised, Burton. You gave your word.

Burton On two conditions. You co-operate fully in my investigation and leave out the cop-baiting. You've bombed out on both.

Peter Roger, what's all this about? Just apologise and then he'll let us go.

Roger No he won't. Once a bastard always a bastard.

Lois Is it too much to ask for an explanation.

Burton Your stage-husband is a real-life criminal.

Others (*Not DRAUF who is also shocked*) What!?

Roger It's not that you're a liar, Burton. I hate you because you're actually *enjoying* this. You get your kicks out of humiliating people. You've got no right to bring that up. (*Angry, loud*) Did'ja hear me? No right!
(*ROGER storms DR. Pause. OTHERS are stunned*)

Terri (*Moves part way to ROGER*) Roger?

Roger (*Snaps without turning*) No! Get lost!

Carrie Are you saying Roger's a criminal? What's he done?

Roger *Ex-criminal!* Only to him there's no difference.

Lois Well if it's true, I don't think it's got any relevance to Katie's death. (*OTHERS agree*) And it's outrageous you've told us particularly since you gave him your word you wouldn't. (*OTHERS agree again*)

Burton Circumstances change. (*OTHERS scoff*) Look you all saw me speak to him privately here in front of the audience. I told him I would question him privately if he co-operated.

Roger You just can't leave it alone can you? Once a crim always a crim.

Burton But friend Roger's past has a way of catching up with him. I would have ignored all his taunts if it wasn't for this letter. (*Produces envelope from jacket*)

Roger You bastard. You just can't leave it alone can you?

Burton I'd like to Roger but this has got to be damning evidence. This requires a please explain.

Roger You'll get nothing, copper. I've done zip. I'm saying less.

Burton (*On the attack*) This is your letter Roger. These are your instructions. This is just like the last time only worse. (*ROGER just stares at BURTON*) An old lady, okay, she was pushing ninety, in terrible pain, blah, blah, blah. But this time. This is different. This is a young woman who's fit and healthy with the whole of her life in front of her.

Roger As usual you know nothing.

Burton I know you've done time for one mercy killing and here's your letter, here's the proof you've organised another.

PREVIEW ENDS

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