

# SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

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# Murder Inn

Howard Volland  
and Keith McGregor

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



**SAMUEL  
FRENCH**  
FOUNDED 1830

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*MURDER INN* was first presented at Off The Wall Theatre in Monroe, Washington, where it opened on April 28, 2000. The production was directed by Keith McGregor and featured the following cast, in order of appearance:

|                                      |                      |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|
| JAKE TALBOT . . . . .                | Christopher Crawford |
| MARTHA TALBOT . . . . .              | Candy Schorpp        |
| AGNES TATE . . . . .                 | Vicki Dorsey         |
| CAROLYN PICKETT . . . . .            | Tami Lynn            |
| ELLEN HALSEY . . . . .               | Dawn Blankenship     |
| MURIEL LAMPMANN . . . . .            | Leslie Foley         |
| PATRICIA SIMPSON . . . . .           | Joanie Sorensen      |
| TODD CURRIER . . . . .               | Steve Heiret         |
| PROFESSOR LAWRENCE CURRIER . . . . . | Ron King             |
| GRACE SHARP . . . . .                | Anita Rich           |
| DORIS BROOKS . . . . .               | Marlene Arnot        |
| DONALD SCHULTZ . . . . .             | Richard Morris       |

## CHARACTERS

**JAKE TALBOT**—(20's) Son of the owner of the Barnsley Inn. A sturdy, no-nonsense young man.

\***MARTHA TALBOT**—(50's) Owner of the Barnsley; cantankerous, short and plump with gray hair.

\***AGNES TATE**—"Middle Aged (40-50+)" Meddlesome, antagonistic, sarcastic, inconsiderate. Everyone's murder victim of choice.

**CAROLYN PICKETT**—(20's) Niece and traveling companion for Agnes; attractive and unassuming.

**ELLEN HALSEY**—(25-35) The tour guide, attractive and professional.

\***MURIEL LAMPMANN**—"Middle Aged (40-50+)" Petite and...ethereal. A true believer in the occult. An airhead of sorts, but very sweet. Traveling alone.

\***PATRICIA SIMPSON**—"Middle Aged (40-50+)" Reserved, nervous, always tense. Traveling alone.

**TODD CURRIER**—(20's) Congenial, intelligent and well dressed in a casual way. He's traveling with his father.

\***LAWRENCE CURRIER**—(Mid to late 50's) A college professor on sabbatical, doing research for a book. Widowed in the last couple of years. Distinguished and intellectual.

\***GRACE SHARP**—(60+) A retired school teacher; she's petite and "fluffy," and she looks helpless, which is by no means the case. Traveling with her longtime friend, Doris Brooks.

\***DORIS BROOKS**—(60+) Retired nurse practitioner. Matter-of-fact and sarcastic. Traveling with Grace.

**DONALD SCHULTZ**—(In his 40's) The van driver. Physically either heavy or very thin. Morose.

\*Note: All the characters with an asterisk—Martha, Agnes, Muriel, Patricia, Lawrence, Grace, and Doris—have a good bit of flexibility as to age, as long as they work as a group. Grace and Doris are retired, and they are older and wiser. Lawrence is distinguished...and he is of an age that Muriel, Patricia and Agnes would find attractive, especially since he is available. He also has to be old enough to be Todd's father; and Martha has to be old enough to have a son Jake's age—or with minimal script changes she could be Jake's grandmother.

## SETTING

The Barnsley Inn—New England

## TIME

Contemporary, early November

## **SYNOPSIS OF SCENES**

### **Act I**

Scene 1 - Late afternoon

Scene 2 - After dinner

### **Act II**

Scene 1 - A few minutes later

Scene 2 - Several hours later

Scene 3 - A few minutes later

Scene 4 - A few minutes later

Scene 5 - Late that night

*We dedicate this play to Mary Alice Volland, who died shortly before its first production. She always said she wanted “to come out of the theatre feeling better than she walked in.” With that in mind, we wrote this play.*

## ACT I, Scene 1

*(The scene is the sitting room of the Barnsley Inn—see the set description and diagram at the end of the script. It is a late afternoon in early November. When the lights come up, no one is on stage. JAKE TALBOT enters through the dining room door with his mother, MARTHA TALBOT, hot on his heels. JAKE is a sturdy young man in his 20s. He wears jeans, work boots, and a flannel shirt. MARTHA is 50ish. She wears a house dress with an apron, slippers, and a worn cardigan. JAKE moves around the room, opening drapes, removing dust covers, getting the room ready for guests. MARTHA follows him, talking rapidly.)*

**MARTHA.** I ask you—Who's the owner here? Me! And I say they can't stay. You never should'a told them they could. We're shut! What'll I feed 'em? Who's gonna' make all them beds? Not me! You gonna' do it? Or maybe you expect Him to? And what about Him?

*(JAKE has moved to the fireplace and is checking the fire.)*

Jake Talbot—are you listening to me? Jake!

**JAKE.** *(kneeling at the fireplace)* What is it, Ma?

**MARTHA.** They can't stay.

*(JAKE notices a carving knife stuck in one of the logs beside the fire. He casually pulls it free and lays it on the mantle.)*

**JAKE.** They got to. The road's flooded in one direction and blocked by mudslides t'other. Ain't no place else to stay.

**AGNES.** *(offstage, at the front door)* Hello? Hello? Is anyone here?

**JAKE.** Ah, they're here.

*(He hands MARTHA the armload of furniture covers, grins at her, kisses her on the forehead, and exits upstage.)*

**MARTHA.** *(calling after him in a loud whisper)* Jake! Jake!

*(an exasperated sigh)*

This is gonna' be a nightmare.

*(MARTHA exits to the dining room. An instant later, AGNES TATE enters from the hall. She is middle-aged, dressed expensively but not in the best of taste, with a raincoat draped over her shoulders.)*

**AGNES.** She can't be serious! Carolyn! Carolyn!

*(CAROLYN PICKETT enters from the hallway. In her twenties, attractive, and smartly dressed, CAROLYN is AGNES's niece and traveling companion.)*

**CAROLYN.** Right here, Aunt Agnes.

**AGNES.** You must tell Miss Halsey that we cannot possibly stay in this...this establishment.

*(ELLEN HALSEY enters. ELLEN is the tour guide for this group. She is attractive, cheerful, and professional. She carries a clipboard and a copy of the guide book, "Ghosts and Ghouls of New England." She pauses, looking at the space. She is not impressed, but she is trying to cover—make the best of it. She calls off to the others.)*

**ELLEN.** If everyone will join us in the parlor, we'll assign rooms so we can all settle in.

*(CAROLYN looks around the room. The others begin to enter. First in are MURIEL LAMPMANN and PATRICIA SIMPSON, two ladies who are each traveling solo. Both are middle-aged. PATRICIA is high-strung, nervous. She crosses to the fireplace, taking in the place. She picks up the carving knife from the mantel, looks at it in surprise, and puts it back. She pulls out her cell phone and opens it, checking for a signal, and she is obviously annoyed when she can't get one.)*

**AGNES.** Miss Halsey—you don't actually intend for us to spend the night in this... this...

**CAROLYN.** Oh, it's not that bad. It has a kind of rustic charm.

**AGNES.** So do the La Brea Tar Pits, but I wouldn't spend the night there!

*(As the conversation continues, TODD CURRIER and his father, PROFESSOR LAWRENCE CURRIER, enter and move toward the bar. TODD sits on a bar stool. He is in his 20s, dressed casually, but in good taste. LAWRENCE is in his 50s—a distinguished, educated gentleman. He is dressed more formally in tweeds with a tie.)*

**ELLEN.** Oh, Agnes, you have such a wonderful sense of humor. *(to the group)* I hope the rest of you will take this little inconvenience...

**AGNES.** "Little inconvenience?!"

**ELLEN.** ...with the same good humor that Agnes is showing. It could be worse.

**AGNES.** I'd like to know how.

*(GRACE SHARP and DORIS BROOKS appear in the opening. Both are in their 60s. GRACE should appear rather helpless, but she is anything but. She carries a purse, a travel bag and a camera case, all of which are horribly overstuffed. She is overloaded and immediately drops much of her load onto the floor. GRACE always wears a dress, while DORIS is always in slacks. DORIS has a no-nonsense air about her. She carries a small, efficient-looking bag.)*

**GRACE.** *(looking around)* Oh, this is delightful!

**DORIS.** *(not believing what she heard)* What is?

**GRACE.** This place. It's just what I was hoping for.

**DORIS.** Grace Sharp! Are you out of your ever-loving mind? This place? It's...it's... *(she's at a loss for words)*

**GRACE.** It's creepy, eerie...scary—exactly what you'd expect from a haunted inn. I mean, no offense, Ellen, but those first two stops? Ghostly inns? They were more like Holiday Inns. This? It's perfect.

**ELLEN.** (*surprised and relieved by GRACE's enthusiasm*) Well...a stay at the Barnsley is a rare treat. It's always closed this time of year—

**AGNES.** (*interjecting*) Closed? It should be condemned.

**ELLEN.** ...because that's when the manifestation is most active.

**MURIEL.** Really?

**ELLEN.** If you'll look on page one-hundred-twelve of your handbook, *Ghosts and Ghouls of New England*, you'll see that the Barnsley is said to have an intriguing poltergeist. Very fond of knives.

**MURIEL.** Oh, wonderful!

(*MURIEL, and several other guests take out their copies of a small paperback. MARTHA enters from the dining room.*)

**ELLEN.** Now—everyone's on the second floor. Keys are in the doors. (*looking at her notes*) Let's see—Patricia, why don't you take room number one? And Muriel, number two.

(*MURIEL starts for the hallway.*)

**PATRICIA.** Are there telephones in the rooms? I need to make an important call and my cell phone doesn't seem to work here.

(*ELLEN looks at her clipboard to find an answer to the question.*)

**MARTHA.** That's right. None of 'em do. You can use the phone in the office, back by the front door. That's the only phone we got.

(*Everyone is startled by her voice—they didn't notice her come in. PATRICIA seems particularly startled. Some of the others pull out their cell phones to check for reception, looking a bit annoyed. MURIEL continues on out the hallway.*)

**PATRICIA.** It's a very important, private call.

**MARTHA.** Then shut the door.

(PATRICIA starts out, but pauses when ELLEN mentions LAWRENCE.)

ELLEN. Lawrence, you and Todd can have number four.

TODD. What happened to number three?

MARTHA. That's His room.

DORIS. "His" room?

MARTHA. Sleep in there and you'll be chopped liver by mornin'.

TODD. (*amused*) Okay, fine. No need to share.

MARTHA. Dinner's at six.

(*She exits to the dining room.*)

LAWRENCE. (*obviously quoting, hamming it up, as he starts for the hallway*) "From ghoulies and ghosties and long-leggety beasties and things that go bump in the night, Good Lord, deliver us!"

PATRICIA. Who wrote that one?

LAWRENCE. It's an old Scots prayer.

(LAWRENCE and PATRICIA exit toward the stairs.)

ELLEN. Doris and Grace, why don't you take... number five.

DORIS. No ghoulies and ghosties, I hope.

ELLEN. Matching Queen Anne singles with a view of the valley.

GRACE. Sounds lovely.

(GRACE moves to collect her things.)

ELLEN. Oh, Grace, wait a moment, please. I...need a favor.

GRACE. Certainly. (*to DORIS*) Doris? Would you mind taking this stuff on up?

DORIS. (*sarcastic*) Do I look like a pack mule? Don't answer that! (*a sigh*) Just load me up.

(GRACE loads her down, and DORIS exits as the scene continues.)

ELLEN. Agnes, you and Carolyn shall have the room next to the bathroom... number...

**AGNES.** *Next to the bathroom?! I never share a bath!*

*(JAKE appears in the hallway, coming from stage right. He pauses.)*

**ELLEN.** I'm sorry; there are no private suites at the Barnsley.

**AGNES.** Then you must make other arrangements. My contract guarantees double accommodations with a full, private bath.

**JAKE.** Then you can sleep in the barn.

*(He continues down the hallway, exiting stage left.)*

**AGNES.** The barn!?

**ELLEN.** *(looking hurriedly at her information)* Jake must mean the, uh, "Honeymoon Cottage." It does have its own bath. *(reading)* "The cottage is reached by following the covered walkway outside the French doors."

*(She quickly crosses and opens one of the French doors.)*

Ah, here we are.

**AGNES.** *(moving to the French doors)* Humph! Don't think you've heard the end of this, Ellen. I am staying here under protest. *(Pausing in the opening. A command, not an invitation:)* Carolyn, are you coming?

**CAROLYN.** I'll be right there.

*(AGNES goes out through the French doors. ELLEN closes them.)*

I must apologize for my aunt. Tact has never been one of her strong suits.

**ELLEN.** I've seen worse. But this is my last year with Tyburn Tours. I want a nice, relaxed, low stress job—maybe teaching drivers' ed. *(turning to GRACE)* Grace, I was wondering if you would help me with...something.

**GRACE.** Of course.

*(ELLEN and GRACE exit up center.)*

**TODD.** ...So...What is there to do...when you're stuck in a dreary inn with a bunch of boring old fuddy-duddies?

**CAROLYN.** Who are you calling a "boring old fuddy-duddy"?  
—Your dad or my aunt?

**TODD.** Either. Both. To tell the truth, all of ‘em...except you, of course.

**CAROLYN.** What’d you expect on this kind of tour?

**TODD.** About what we got. I only came along to keep Dad company. This tour’s the first thing he’s shown an interest in since Mom died. He’s always been fascinated by the paranormal, so when—

*(DONALD SCHULTZ enters from the hall. He’s the van driver. Middle-aged, DONALD is dressed in slacks, a white shirt, and a pullover knit vest. He enters noisily, loaded down with AGNES’s luggage.)*

**DONALD.** *(mumbling to himself)* Oh boy. You’d think—

*(sees TODD and CAROLYN)*

Pardon me. Your aunt—is she going to want all her bags?

**CAROLYN.** Afraid so, Donald.

**DONALD.** Oh boy.

*(He exits awkwardly through the French doors.)*

**TODD.** Your aunt packs lightly...for someone on a world tour.

**CAROLYN.** She doesn’t pack at all. She tells me what to pack for her.

**TODD.** Don’t take this wrong, but she is a character.

**CAROLYN.** She can be. I just hope she doesn’t go on a tear.

**TODD.** A tear?

**CAROLYN.** When she gets bored she can be...incredible. And there’s nothing I...or anyone else can do to stop her.

**TODD.** Why do you put up with it?

**CAROLYN.** She’s all the family I have. My parents died when I was twelve. Since then I’ve lived with Aunt Agnes, even when I went to college. She’s been so generous. I owe her so much.

**TODD.** What about what you owe yourself? Husband. Family. A life of your own.

**CAROLYN.** I'm not an old maid yet.

**TODD.** (*a new subject*) Do you believe any of this ghosts and goblins stuff?

**CAROLYN.** Not really. You?

**TODD.** No way. What about your aunt?

**CAROLYN.** Definitely not. But it's the hot topic with her friends. This tour will give her plenty to talk about all winter.

**DONALD.** (*Entering from the French doors. To CAROLYN:*) Pardon me, but your aunt said to tell you she needs you.

(*He heads for the hallway exit, up center.*)

**CAROLYN.** Thanks. (*to TODD*) Sorry. Duty calls.

(*She heads toward the French doors.*)

**TODD.** Suppose I should go up and unpack, too.

(*CAROLYN exits, closing the French door behind her.*

**JAKE** enters from the dining room carrying an ice bucket, heading to the bar.)

**DONALD.** Not yet. Afraid your bags are still on the bus. I've got to finish with...her ladyship first.

(*He exits through the hallway.*)

**JAKE.** (*as he moves behind the bar*) You want'a drink? Compliments of Tyburn Tours.

**TODD.** Sure. How 'bout a bourbon and seven?

(*As JAKE begins mixing, MARTHA enters from the dining room.*)

**MARTHA.** Jake, you seen me big meat cleaver?

**JAKE.** Nope. There's a carving knife on the mantle.

(*MARTHA crosses to the mantle, talking as she goes, and picks up the carving knife. GRACE and DORIS appear in the hall entrance.*)

**MARTHA.** It's gone. It's His favorite and I hid it, like I do all the knives, but He finds 'em. He always does. And then what happens? With all these noisy folks, Shish-kee-bob?

**TODD.** On a meat cleaver? Hardly.

**MARTHA.** Go ahead and laugh, young man. But I tell you this. He'll have the last laugh. Not you.

*(DORIS and GRACE enter the room, and the others notice them.)*

**JAKE.** Ah, good evening ladies.

**MARTHA.** You folks ought'a find some other place to stay. It ain't safe here this time of year.

*(She exits through the dining room door.)*

**JAKE.** Something from the bar? Miss Halsey said, long as you're stuck here, the drinks are on Tyburn Tours.

**GRACE.** Your mother seems *very* upset.

**JAKE.** She's just trying to scare you.

*(JAKE gives TODD his drink when it's ready.)*

**DORIS.** She's doing an excellent job.

**JAKE.** Oh, don't mind her.

**DORIS.** It's not her I mind. It's all this stuff about the flying knives.

**JAKE.** We haven't lost anybody at the Barnsley yet.

**DORIS.** Yet?

**GRACE.** Oh, Doris, don't be silly.

**DORIS.** Me? Silly? Wouldn't think of it.

*(DONALD enters from the hallway with more of AGNES's luggage. He works his way clumsily over to the French doors and out.)*

**GRACE.** *(to JAKE)* You were saying something about...beverages?

**JAKE.** Yep. Got a first rate dry sherry.

**DORIS.** Sherry? Yecchk! Scotch rocks.

*(JAKE begins to mix her drink.)*

If I'm sleeping with knife-tossing ghosts, I want to be prepared. *(turning back to GRACE)* How I ever let you talk me into this...

**GRACE.** (*sitting on the sofa*) Last year you dragged me through every microbrewery in the state of Washington—and you know I can't stand beer. Ghostly Inns of New England is educational, with lots of history—and it's non-fattening.

**DORIS.** But New England? In November?

**GRACE.** It's your own fault. You were too cheap to go during high season.

(**JAKE** hands the drink to **DORIS**, who is standing near the bar)

**DORIS.** Thank you.

(**DORIS** takes her drink and crosses left, behind the sofa.)

High season was Halloween! That was last week. I didn't see why I should pay an extra eight hundred bucks to go one week earlier.

(**AGNES** enters through the French doors, followed by **CAROLYN**. **DONALD** brings up the rear. He closes the door and goes out through the hallway.)

**GRACE.** I believe I will have a glass of the sherry, please, Jake.

**AGNES.** Make that three, Mister...?

**JAKE.** Call me Jake. Three sherries, comin' up.

(*As the scene continues, AGNES crosses to join the other women. She sits in the center chair. CAROLYN stops near TODD at the bar. When the sherries are ready, she takes two from the bar and serves AGNES and GRACE and then returns to the bar for hers. She sits on a bar stool beside TODD.*)

**AGNES.** I hope your accommodations are better than ours. They've put us in the barn! Me—sleeping with the horses!

**DORIS.** (*under her breath, almost*) Poor horses.

**JAKE.** Ain't been horses in there since World War Two. Kept some pigs there a while back. But we done it over real nice. It's our Honeymoon Cottage now.

(**AGNES** reacts as **MURIEL** enters from the hall carrying a Ouija Board. She has changed into something soft, flowing, and eccentric. She crosses to the card table.)

**MURIEL.** Isn't the atmosphere of this place just charged with...with eerie resonance. It's thrilling. I brought down my Ouija Board. Thought we might attempt contact before dinner.

**DORIS.** With who?

**GRACE.** With *whom*?

**DORIS.** (to **GRACE**, aggravated) Excuse me! (back to **MURIEL**) With "whom?" Cleopatra?

**TODD.** Given this place, more likely Jack the Ripper.

**MURIEL.** And what's everyone drinking? I might have a sherry, if that's what you're all having.

(**DORIS** holds up her glass, to show that sherry isn't the only option)

**DORIS.** Some of us are getting in the *spirit* of things. Ellen's paying.

**MURIEL.** Oh, then I might be tempted with a small martini.

**DORIS.** Thought you might.

**MURIEL.** Tanqueray?

**JAKE.** All we got's Gordon's.

**MURIEL.** Oh, drat. In that case, use lots of Vermouth.

(She starts to light a cigarette. **JAKE** begins mixing a pitcher of martinis)

**JAKE.** Sorry—no smokin' inside. Fire marshal says the place is a fire trap. Wouldn't want ya'll endin' up crispy critters. You can smoke on the porch. But be careful.

(**MURIEL** starts out the French doors.)

**DORIS.** (grabbing her purse) Wait up, Muriel. I'll join you in smoker's Siberia.

(**DORIS** and **MURIEL** leave through the French doors.)

**CAROLYN.** So, ...Jake, tell us about this knife-throwing poltergeist of yours.

**JAKE.** Ain't nothing to tell.

**AGNES.** You mean this place isn't actually haunted?

**JAKE.** Maybe it is; Maybe it ain't. Now, Ma, she'd swear it is. She's always pullin' knives out'a walls and such this time of year. How the knives get there is another question. Could be Him—could be her.

*(He pours MURIEL's martini and adds an olive.)*

Now, if you'll excuse me.

*(He takes MURIEL's martini and exits through the French doors.)*

**AGNES.** So here we are—trapped in a haunted inn that may or may not be haunted. It is, however, cold as a morgue and in desperate need of major repairs. Are we having fun yet?

**CAROLYN.** It's not that bad.

**AGNES.** Well it certainly isn't what I paid for.

**CAROLYN.** Give it a chance. You may be surprised.

**PATRICIA.** *(entering from the hallway, arm and arm with LAWRENCE)* Professor Currier...

**LAWRENCE.** *(He is obviously quoting.)* "Oh, call it by some better name." *(then chuckling)* Call me Lawrence. "Professor Currier" reminds me of work.

**PATRICIA.** Sorry, I can't help it. You're so...knowledgeable. All these quotes. How do you remember them all?

*(JAKE returns and goes behind the bar.)*

**LAWRENCE.** As long as I've been teaching?—something had to sink in.

**PATRICIA.** I recognize that one. Romeo and Juliet?

**LAWRENCE.** No, that's, "Then call it by some *other* name. A rose, by any other name would smell as sweet." I said, "Oh, call it by some *better* name" and it continues "... for friendship sounds too cold." That's Thomas Moore.

**PATRICIA.** *(drawing closer to LAWRENCE)* You know, I just loved the way you read *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* that first night at the Longfellow Inn.

**AGNES.** Yes, "Lawrence;" it was truly enchanting. It sent

chills up and down my spine. I hope you'll read something for us again tonight. Liven up this dreary place.

(*PATRICIA reacts coldly to AGNES's complimenting of LAWRENCE.*)

JAKE. Anything to drink? Compliments of Tyburn Tours.

PATRICIA. Oh, Profe...Lawrence. I'd love a dry martini.

JAKE. Just made a fresh pitcher.

LAWRENCE. I'll have one too.

JAKE. Comin' up.

(*DONALD enters from the hall with the last of AGNES's and CAROLYN's luggage. He starts to the French doors. ELLEN enters behind him.*)

ELLEN. I believe that's the last of Ms. Tate's luggage.

(*DONALD pauses, turning back to ELLEN.*)

DONALD. Boy, I sure hope so.

CAROLYN. It is. Thank you so much. Can I...get you something to drink?

(*DONALD looks back to ELLEN. She nods her approval. He immediately is in a better mood as he turns to JAKE.*)

DONALD. Got anything back there as plebian as a beer?

JAKE. Don't know what you mean by "plebeeran," but I got Bud.

DONALD. Just what the doctor ordered.

(*JAKE grabs a bottle of beer, as DONALD shifts the luggage to free up a hand. He takes the beer and takes a healthy swig. Then he raises the bottle in a toast to the assembled company, crosses, and exits through the French doors. As he goes out, ELLEN moves up center where she can be seen by everyone in the room.*)

ELLEN. Please. Everyone. If I could have your attention.

(*CAROLYN opens the French doors and signals for MURIEL and DORIS to return, which they do.*)

**ELLEN**(*cont.*). I called the state police. They think it may take up to forty-eight hours before they can reopen the road.

*(groans and reactions from the guests)*

So it could be worse.

**AGNES.** You keep saying that.

**ELLEN.** (*ignoring AGNES*) I'm sure we're all very grateful that Jake and Martha have agreed to take us in on such short notice.

*(a disgruntled hurrumph from AGNES, which ELLEN tries to ignore. )*

Under the circumstances, we'll just have to make the best of things. I have a few ideas to keep us entertained.

*(She glances at GRACE, who nods slightly—no one notices.)*

To begin, I'll ask Lawrence to read you a little about the Barnsley from an article on little-known haunted inns of New England.

*(She hands the journal to LAWRENCE; the page is marked.)*

I've marked the spot.

*(LAWRENCE crosses to ELLEN and takes the journal. He opens it, clears his throat, and prepares to read. ELLEN crosses to the bar.)*

*(to JAKE, quietly)* Gin and tonic.

*(As LAWRENCE begins, JAKE places the two martinis on the bar and starts on ELLEN's drink. PATRICIA collects the martinis and moves back toward LAWRENCE, holding his drink for him as he begins. When she sips her martini she reacts—too much vermouth! Soon after LAWRENCE begins, MARTHA enters from the dining room.)*

**LAWRENCE.** "We conclude our list with the Barnsley, an unassuming inn only four hours from Boston but in a different world. Hidden away in its isolated valley, it has long been known locally as Murder Inn."

AGNES. "Murder Inn?" If this is your idea of a joke, Ellen, I'm not laughing.

LAWRENCE. "The main part of the inn dates back to 1742 and has been expanded and remodeled a number of times. Architecturally, it is, unfortunately, a shambles and bears little resemblance to its original colonial charm."

AGNES. You can say that again.

(LAWRENCE looks at AGNES then resumes reading.  
ELLEN takes her drink and exits quietly through the French doors.)

LAWRENCE. "Reportedly the inn is haunted by the ghost of Marco, a gypsy who was the first husband of Ramona Ashe. As the story goes, Marco discovered his wife, Ramona, and the inn's proprietor, Thomas Ashe, in a compromising situation in room number three. He allegedly threw several knives at the couple, but missed each time."

DORIS. Must have been nearsighted.

MURIEL. We could ask him on my Ouija Board.

AGNES. Oh by all means, do.

LAWRENCE. Ahem! "In the ensuing fight, Marco fell down the stairs and was killed. The ghost is said to have a penchant for knives, which appear mysteriously throughout the inn only during November—the month when the gypsy band was encamped at Barnsley. Martha Talbot—a direct descendent of Ramona and Thomas Ashe—keeps the room locked and has allowed no one inside for years. However, many have claimed to feel an eerie presence, regardless of the time of year, as they pass the room's door."

MURIEL. Oh, yes. Yes. I felt it when I've walked by.

AGNES. Nonsense. Those were your bunions.

MARTHA. Bunions! My buttercups!

LAWRENCE. (*hamming it up*) "Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there, wondering, fearing, doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before."

**MARTHA.** What are you talking 'bout? It ain't dreams you gotta worry about. It's knives.

**GRACE.** (*can't resist*) Actually it's from Edgar Allen Poe's *The Raven*.

**MARTHA.** What's he know about it?

**LAWRENCE.** Probably more than most.

**MARTHA.** Humph!

**MURIEL.** Well, isn't this all so fascinating. I must try to contact Marco with my Ouija Board. Would someone join me? I need a partner.

(*No one is interested. Finally GRACE volunteers.*)

**GRACE.** Sounds like fun.

**MURIEL.** No, it's serious—very serious. You must be open to accept the...vibrations of the ether, or it won't work.

**GRACE.** I'll do my best.

(*They go to the table and sit with GRACE facing the dining room door. MURIEL sits with her back toward it. They quietly set up the Ouija Board. TODD crosses to the French doors and looks out.*)

**TODD.** The rain's stopped. Anyone up for a walk? Carolyn?

**CAROLYN.** Will you need me, Aunt Agnes?

**AGNES.** What I need is a helicopter to Bermuda. No such luck.

**TODD.** (*checking his watch*) We've got half-an-hour before dinner.

**AGNES.** I wonder what culinary delights we should expect this evening?

**MARTHA.** We wasn't expectin' guests. Best I could do was meat and mashers.

(*MARTHA exits through the dining room door.*)

**AGNES.** (*not impressed*) "Meat and mashers?" ...I don't believe I'll dress for dinner.

**MURIEL.** (*softly to the Ouija Board*) Is Marco here?

**AGNES.** (*rising and starting out*) I think I'll lie down for a few minutes, before..."we dine."

(**AGNES** exits through the French doors. **JAKE** turns to **TODD**.)

**JAKE.** I wouldn't go over the bridge at the creek. It'll prob'ly flood there 'fore much longer.

**TODD.** So we'll be cut off from the village, too?

**JAKE.** Usually are when it floods like this. But it doesn't stay up too long. Here, ya better take this flashlight. It's almost dark.

(*She takes the flashlight that **JAKE** pulls out from behind the bar.*)

**CAROLYN.** Thank you.

(**CAROLYN** and **TODD** exit.)

**LAWRENCE.** You happen to have another flashlight handy, Jake? Some fresh air sounds good.

(*He puts the journal down on the coffee table.*)

**JAKE.** Got plenty in the office. Power's touchy this time of year. Surprised we still got it. I'll go get ya' one.

(*He goes out through the hallway.*)

**DORIS.** Oh, this gets better and better. Now we'll have a nearsighted ghost throwing knives in the dark. I can't wait to get into my jammies.

**MURIEL.** (*softly to the Ouija Board*) Are you happy?

**PATRICIA.** Pro...I mean Lawrence, could I go with you? I'd love to get out, as long as I'm not alone.

**LAWRENCE.** I'd welcome the company.

(***LAWRENCE** offers his arm, and they cross to the hallway doors and exit. **DORIS** walks over to the bridge table.*)

**DORIS.** (*sarcastically*) Talk to Elvis yet?

**GRACE.** Go away.

**MURIEL.** (*in a stage whisper*) He's speaking to us.

**DORIS.** (*with some surprise*) He is?

**GRACE.** Marco, not Elvis. Don't be ridiculous.

**DORIS.** Of the people in this room, I am not the one being ridiculous.

*(DONALD enters from the hall. He reaches behind the bar for a fresh beer.)*

**DONALD.** If you ladies don't mind, I'm gonna' prop my feet up in front of the fire and see if I can dry them out.

**GRACE.** Certainly. Make yourself comfortable.

*(As the scene continues, DONALD crosses stage left and takes the desk chair and moves it to the upstage side of the fireplace, beside the offstage end of the sofa. He settles into the chair and puts his feet upon the hearth. He sips his beer and stares at the fire.)*

**MURIEL.** *(in another whisper)* He is terribly unhappy.

**DORIS.** Who?

**GRACE.** Marco, Doris. We are communicating with Marco.

**DORIS.** How can you tell?

*(MURIEL takes her fingers off the planchette and answers in a normal and obviously exasperated voice.)*

**MURIEL.** I asked him.

**DORIS.** Right.

*(GRACE also removes her fingers from the planchette)*

**MURIEL.** Haven't you ever used a Ouija Board before?

**DORIS.** Not on your life. I can look foolish enough without props. So how do you ask... whoever or whatever?

**MURIEL.** See—the board has all the letters of the alphabet, numbers, and a Yes and a No. We lightly touch our fingers to the planchette...

*(She holds up the planchette for DORIS's benefit.)*

...ask our questions, and the planchette moves of its own accord to the answer, spelling it out if necessary.

**DORIS.** You mean you think Marco is controlling that thing?

**MURIEL.** That's how it works.

**DORIS.** Give me a break! You're just pushing it around the board.

**MURIEL.** *(outraged)* We are not! We barely touch the planchette. We certainly don't push it around. Do we, Grace?

**GRACE.** *(with a bit of a smile)* Certainly not consciously.

**MURIEL.** Well I don't push it around period.

**DORIS.** Show me. Ask Marco if he plans to stick a knife in any of us.

**MURIEL.** I don't think—

**DORIS.** Ask him. Or are you afraid to?

**MURIEL.** Certainly not, but it's hardly a suitable—

**DORIS.** Then ask him. It's something we all want to know, anyway.

*(Reluctantly, GRACE and MURIEL resume using the planchette.)*

**MURIEL.** Marco, do you plan to...stick a knife in any us now staying at the inn?

*(The planchette moves to the word, yes.)*

Yes, he says yes! *(forgetting herself)* Who Marco, who do you plan to kill?

*(The planchette begins to move. It spells out D-O-N with DORIS reading out the letters as the planchette points to them.)*

**DORIS.** D...O...N...

*(After the "O" DORIS reacts, but then she relaxes with the "N.")*

**MURIEL.** It's Donald! The Ouija says it's Donald!

*(The women look at DONALD. Apparently he has dozed off. His beer is on the floor beside him, his arms are crossed, and his head is resting on his chest, with his hat pulled down over his eyes.)*

**DORIS.** *(quietly, to keep DONALD from hearing)* Really? Somehow he doesn't seem too concerned.

**MURIEL.** The Ouija tells the truth! But it doesn't have to happen.

*(She rises and crosses toward DONALD.)*

Donald, I'm sure we can find a way to appease Marco.

**MURIEL**(*cont.*). He wouldn't really do such a thing. He is just so lonely that he is calling out for attention.

(**DONALD** *doesn't move.*)

Donald. ...Donald? ...Donald!

(*Her voice rises with each repetition. The third time, her voice is loud enough to waken him. He jerks awake, startled.*)

**DONALD**. Huh!? What!? What is it?

**MURIEL**. (*embarrassed*) Oh, I'm sorry. I thought...

**DONALD**. Huh? What?

**DORIS**. Muriel's Ouija board just told her you're slated to be Marco's first victim.

**DONALD**. Oh boy, that just makes my day.

**MURIEL**. You scared me to death. I thought...I thought you were dead.

**DONALD**. Nope—just dead on my feet. Soon as we eat I'm hittin' the sack.

(**ELLEN** *enters from the hallway. When the scene shifts away from him, DONALD goes back to the same position he was in before.*)

**ELLEN**. Well, how are things in here?

**DORIS**. Just deadly. Marco tells us, via the Ouija, that Donald's first for a knife in the back.

**MURIEL**. I'm so upset. I didn't mean to...

**GRACE**. I don't think Donald's too worried. Looks like he's dropped off again, already.

**ELLEN**. Not surprised. That man can go to sleep faster than anyone I've ever seen.

**DORIS**. Hardly the best qualification for a bus driver.

**ELLEN**. Oh, not on the road. But once he's done for the day... And he goes deep. Sleeps like Rip Van Winkle.

**MURIEL**. So we noticed.

(*Voices are heard from the hallway. Everyone except DONALD looks toward the doorway expectantly. LAWRENCE and PATRICIA enter.*)

ELLEN. Back so soon?

LAWRENCE. "Loud roar'd the dreadful thunder, the rain a deluge showr'd." Well, there wasn't any thunder, but it did start to rain again, so we came back.

PATRICIA. Lovely quote. (*tentatively*) Shakespeare?

LAWRENCE. Andrew Cherry.

PATRICIA. But it was beautiful outside—until the rain started. Lawrence is such wonderful company.

(*PATRICIA takes LAWRENCE's arm and they move to the fireplace and stand with their backs to the fire.*)

AGNES. (*making a grand entrance through the French doors*) Well, I've had my Pepto Bismol. Bring on dinner.

(*As the dialogue continues, AGNES crosses purposefully to stand on the other side of LAWRENCE. PATRICIA bristles, but LAWRENCE is comfortable with the dual companions. About here we begin to hear distant thunder, which builds to the end of the scene.*)

DORIS. I don't think Pepto will do much for a knife in the gut.

AGNES. Whatever do you mean?

DORIS. According to the Ouija Board, Marco's on the move. Who's for fricassee of tourist? Fillet of tour guide? Bus driver en-brochette? Supposedly that last item is already on the menu.

GRACE. (*amused, but critical*) Doris! That's in the worst possible taste.

AGNES. Totally in keeping with the rest of this disastrous tour.

GRACE. Ellen. I want you to know that I am having a wonderful time on our little adventure.

AGNES. Thank you, Pollyanna.

GRACE. This tour is turning out even more exciting than I'd hoped. ...Isn't it, Doris?

DORIS. ...Whatever you say.

GRACE. We all realize the flood isn't your fault.

**AGNES.** (*quite loudly*) However, lack of planning is!

**ELLEN.** (*ignoring AGNES*) Thank you. This delay is a bit frustrating, but...

**AGNES.** Frustrating! If you had the least shred of competence, we wouldn't be stuck in this nightmare! Ever hear of contingency planning? The minute we're out of here, I intend to leave this tour and I expect Tyburn Tours to refund every nickel of my money. And then some.

(**AGNES** walks to the French doors and stares out, her back to the room. We begin to see some lightning as the storm's intensity builds. After a short silence **TODD** appears in the hallway. **CAROLYN** walks past the opening, going toward the downstairs bathroom. **TODD** comes into the room, brushing the water out of his hair. He puts the flashlight down on the bar.)

**TODD.** Ah, great walk, till the rains hit. And Jake's right—the road's flooded at the creek.

**AGNES.** (*sarcastically*) Another delightful touch to Ellen's unplanned little adventure.

(*Offstage, CAROLYN calls loudly. It is almost a scream.*)

**CAROLYN.** Todd! Todd!!

(*Everyone reacts, but before they can go to her rescue, CAROLYN rushes into the room and into TODD's arms. JAKE appears in the hallway opening. MARTHA enters from the dinning room.*)

There's a knife stuck in the bathroom door! It's huge. I walked right into it.

**PATRICIA.** Oh my God.

(**JAKE** disappears in the direction of the bathroom.)

**TODD.** (*soothingly*) Just someone having a little joke, that's all. It wasn't meant for you. Anyone could have discovered it.

**AGNES.** But it wasn't anyone, it was *my* niece. Grace, you may feel that levitating knives are part and parcel with

fine tour management. I do not! This is another example of Ellen's total incompetence—getting us cooped up with a murderous lunatic!

(**JAKE** returns with a big carving knife. **MARTHA** crosses to him and takes it.)

**MARTHA.** I figured He wouldn't wait too long. *(She turns and faces the guests, gesturing with the knife for effect.)* He is not happy about this; not happy at all. I warn you—this won't be the last knife flyin' tonight. If you insist on stayin', you'd best be ready—ready for a night you won't forget.

*(There is a flash of lightning outside the window, followed almost immediately by a huge peal of thunder. The power fails and the lights go out. There are several vocal reactions when it does. Note—be ready for the audience to think this is the end of the scene—keep the vocal reactions going until the audience quiets down and MARTHA can be heard. While the stage is dark, DONALD places another, even larger kitchen knife under his upstage arm to look like he's been stabbed in the chest.)*

*(casual, off-handed, aggravated)* Oh blast it! Jake, get that generator goin'. These folks are 'fraid of the dark. But it ain't the dark that's gonna get 'em!

*(After a moment—long enough for DONALD to get set—TODD recovers his flashlight from the bar and turns it on. He moves the beam around—not letting the light reveal DONALD.)*

**JAKE.** I'll call the power company, then I'll crank up the generator.

(**JAKE** exits, through the hallway.)

**MARTHA.** Here, le'me have that.

*(She grabs TODD's flashlight and goes to the bar. She pulls a battery lantern from behind the bar and turns it on. It casts eerie shadows. Nobody notices DONALD.)*

**ELLEN.** Everyone, just relax. Jake'll have the lights back on before you know it.

*(CAROLYN and TODD move to the bar. AGNES remains by the window. DORIS joins MURIEL and GRACE at the bridge table.)*

**MARTHA.** You folks are gonna' have to fend for yourselves. I need to go check on me kitchen.

*(She exits, passing behind DONALD, without illuminating him.)*

**LAWRENCE.** Here, let's sit down.

*(He guides PATRICIA to the sofa and seats her, not far from DONALD, though their focus is back toward the bar and the lantern.)*

**PATRICIA.** *(Her voice is quiet; she is close to hysteria.)* Are there any of those martinis left?

**LAWRENCE.** *(He crosses toward the bar.)* "Quickly, bring me a beaker of wine, so that I may wet my mind and say something clever." ...And that was Aristophanes.

*(JAKE enters from the hallway, with several flashlights.)*

**JAKE.** No dice on callin' the power company. 'Fraid we lost the phone too.

*(PATRICIA reacts. The situation is really getting to her.)*

Here's some more flashlights.

*(He puts several more flashlights on the bar. TODD takes one, turns it on and shines it around the room, avoiding DONALD.)*

I'll get the generator goin'.

*(JAKE exits through the hallway.)*

**LAWRENCE.** *(behind the bar)* One martini coming up, Patricia. Anyone else?

**TODD.** Count me in. Carolyn?

**CAROLYN.** No, no. I'm fine.

**LAWRENCE.** Donald? Another beer?

**MURIEL.** He must be asleep again.

**LAWRENCE.** How could anyone sleep through...?

**MURIEL.** Ellen said he's a very sound sleeper.

**LAWRENCE.** (*chuckling*) “Preserve me from unseasonable and immoderate sleep.” Samuel Johnson. It’s almost dinner time. Patricia, perhaps you better wake him up.

(**PATRICIA** *leans over to tap DONALD on the arm.*)

**PATRICIA.** Donald? Donald?

(*She shakes him and he falls over to the side and forward. His upper body lands on the edge of the sofa—his head almost in PATRICIA’s lap. At the same time, TODD shifts his flashlight to focus on him. The knife is clearly visible. If anyone noticed, it is obviously stuck between his arm and his body—but no one onstage notices that. PATRICIA reaction is not a scream, but rather the quiet voice of hysterical overload; she can barely breathe.*)

Oh my god! There’s a knife! He’s...he’s been stabbed!

(*blackout*)

**End of ACT I Scene 1**

## Act I, Scene 2

*(An hour later, glasses etc. have been cleared away. The Ouija Board is still on the bridge table, but it has a large carving knife sticking straight up from the board. The writing table chair has been returned to its proper place. PATRICIA comes in from the dining room. She is upset. Through the open door can be heard the sounds of dinner winding down. PATRICIA sees the knife stuck in the Ouija board, and she moves into the room, cautiously. GRACE enters with a mug of coffee. DORIS is behind her, also with a mug.)*

**GRACE.** Patricia? Are you all right? They didn't mean anything. It was just friendly teasing.

**PATRICIA.** Friendly? I don't think so. If you'll excuse me, I have medication that must be taken immediately after dinner.

*(She goes through the hallway and out.)*

**DORIS.** *(once PATRICIA's gone)* She's in a foul mood.

**GRACE.** It was unfortunate—her discovering the...body.

**DORIS.** Her reaction was a bit much. *(chuckling)* Especially when the..."corpse" started to move. She must have thought it was *Night of the Living Dead*.

**GRACE.** Still, Agnes was merciless at dinner. She would not let it go.

**DORIS.** That woman has a mean streak a mile wide

*(AGNES enters. She has a glass of red wine.)*

**AGNES.** It's beyond me why anyone would want to dilute decent Burgundy with coffee. Especially after that disastrous dinner. And those chairs—straight out of the Spanish Inquisition. My back will never recover.

**DORIS.** *(escaping)* You'll have to excuse me. I want to catch a smoke before the inquest.

*(AGNES toasts DORIS with her wine glass. DORIS looks at GRACE, then returns AGNES's toast, using her mug.)*

Well...Tah-tah. *(She exits, snickering.)*

GRACE. Now, Agnes, be fair. Dinner was delicious.

AGNES. What was it?

GRACE. Pot roast.

AGNES. I knew that! I meant the mashed up orange stuff?

GRACE. The mashers? Parsnips, potatoes, and carrots—roasted, and then pureed with herbs and spices. I intend to beg, borrow, or steal the recipe before we leave.

AGNES. I only want to know where they got this delightful little Burgundy.

GRACE. Didn't you hear? Martha makes it herself.

AGNES. *(looking at the glass, admiringly)* A woman of...unusual talents.

*(She notices the knife stuck in the Ouiji board.)*

I see Marco paid a visit during dinner. I'm afraid Muriel won't appreciate the placement.

*(MURIEL appears in the doorway, with a mug of coffee. She has added a matching shawl to her ensemble.)*

Speak of the devil. Muriel...

*(AGNES gestures toward the board. MURIEL rushes over to look.)*

Apparently our resident poltergeist paid a visit, and you missed him. Or should I say he missed you?

MURIEL. Oh my, it looks as though Marco is not happy with us—not happy at all.

*(MURIEL carefully pulls the knife out and rubs her finger over the spot where the knife was stuck. While the three women are focused on the table, MARTHA enters from the dining room with a coffee pot, heading for the bar. The others don't notice her.)*

AGNES. Right through the "M"...for Muriel.

GRACE. It could just as easily signify Martha, or Marco.

AGNES. Or murder... or mashers. Perhaps Marco finds them as distasteful as I do.

*(MARTHA, who has put the coffee pot on the bar, crosses down to the women. When she speaks, she startles them.)*

**MARTHA.** *(to AGNES)* More likely you—if you keep on joking about Him that way.

*(JAKE appears in the hallway, as MARTHA takes the knife.)*

Giv'me that knife. I swear. No respect. None of you got no respect for what you don't want to understand. I've warned you. He's warned you. If you know what's good for you, you'll get out...while you still can.

**JAKE.** Ma, quit playin' with the knives, and scarin' the guests. They'll think you're serious.

*(MARTHA turns on him, gesturing with the knife for emphasis. ELLEN comes in from the dining room with a mug of coffee in time to see and hear most of this.)*

**MARTHA.** *(to JAKE)* What makes you think I ain't? I told you—no guests this time o' year. He don't like 'em. I don't like 'em. Now get 'em out of here while they can still get!

*(MARTHA exits, in a huff. JAKE follows her. AGNES focuses on ELLEN and raises her glass in a toast. ELLEN turns back to the dining room.)*

**ELLEN.** If everyone will join us, we'll get started.

*(She moves toward the upstage center of the room.)*

*(to GRACE)* Where's Patricia?

*(As the scene continues, CAROLYN and TODD come in, followed by LAWRENCE. They're talking among themselves quietly. CAROLYN and LAWRENCE have mugs of coffee. TODD has a glass of the burgundy. LAWRENCE crosses to the bar and sits on a stool. TODD and CAROLYN move to the sofa and sit—with CAROLYN to the center.)*

**GRACE.** Upstairs, taking her medication.

**ELLEN.** Is she all right?

GRACE. Upset, but I think she'll be fine.

ELLEN. I hope so. And Doris?

GRACE. Outside, destroying her lungs. I'll call her.

*(GRACE exits through the French doors. AGNES joins LAWRENCE at the bar, and MURIEL sits at the table, fiddling with her Ouija Board.)*

ELLEN. If everyone will get comfortable, we'll...

*(PATRICIA appears in the hallway opening.)*

Patricia, thank you for joining us.

*(ELLEN gestures for PATRICIA to join MURIEL at the table. Instead, she crosses all the way down left and sits on the hearth of the fireplace.)*

As soon as Doris and Grace come in, we'll begin.

TODD. Where's the corpse?

ELLEN. In the kitchen.

TODD. *(facetiously)* Uh-oh. What's for breakfast?

*(That gets some chuckles from MURIEL, ELLEN, LAWRENCE, and CAROLYN. PATRICIA and AGNES are not amused. GRACE and DORIS pick this moment to return. They join MURIEL at the card table.)*

CAROLYN. *(teasing)* Behave! This is a solemn occasion.

ELLEN. Now, if everyone's ready? Lawrence has agreed to preside over our murder investigation.

LAWRENCE. "Truth will come to light; murder cannot be hid long." *Merchant of Venice.*

*(A nod toward PATRICIA, who ignores him.)*

So, why don't we start by reviewing what we know?—which isn't much. Donald was murdered during the blackout caused by the power failure. The knife was one from the inn. It appears that any one of us could have killed him. Unfortunately, we have no idea who might have had a motive.

TODD. It's obvious? Marco done it. Did it. *(lighter)* But how do you execute a ghost?

**DORIS.** Ghostbusters?

*(Chuckles from the friendly group, but not the others.)*

**LAWRENCE.** Exorcism. But is Marco our only suspect?

**CAROLYN.** What about Martha?

**AGNES.** Yeah, she's a fruitcake if I ever saw one.

**CAROLYN.** I meant...she's not happy to have us here.

**TODD.** Maybe she stabbed the first person she could find.  
Figured it would scare us off.

**CAROLYN.** And the murder would be blamed on Marco,  
reinforcing the legend of Murder Inn.

**LAWRENCE.** You know, this is incredible—a wonderful setup  
for a murder. I may have to steal it.

**AGNES.** Steal it?

**LAWRENCE.** I'm working on a book—a mystery thriller  
with aspects of the paranormal. This trip is part of  
my research. And this is a perfect setup. A group of  
strangers, trapped by a flood at a haunted inn. The  
power goes out...

**DORIS.** Sounds like Laurel and Hardy to me.

**LAWRENCE.** Perhaps, but with all of us running around  
in the dark—no alibis—any one of us could commit  
murder, and it would be very difficult to prove.

**DORIS.** *(to GRACE)* Remind me to pile every stick of furni-  
ture against our door tonight.

**CAROLYN.** So how do we solve Donald's murder?

**LAWRENCE.** We need means, motive, and opportunity.

**DORIS.** Let's see... The means was still sticking out of him.  
That's one. Opportunity?—any one of us could have  
done it when the lights went out. No help there. That  
leaves...motive.

**TODD.** *(facetiously)* How about jealousy? Could there be a  
jealous lover among us?

**AGNES.** Which very conveniently lets out you and your  
father, and Jake.

**GRACE.** It lets some of the rest of us off as well. We're far  
too old for Donald.

AGNES. I hope you're not including me in that "old" group.

DORIS. Of course not. We wouldn't dream of including you with us...would we, Grace?

ELLEN. All right, jealousy is one possibility. What else?

LAWRENCE. What about greed? Could Donald have been blackmailing one of us?

MURIEL. What could he possibly know? He only met us three days ago.

LAWRENCE. Are you certain of that fact? Even so, he could have found out something.

ELLEN. How?

TODD. He could have overheard a conversation, or a telephone call.

*(PATRICIA squirms in her seat and looks uncomfortable.)*

GRACE. And once he had the information...blackmail is the easiest crime in the world.

DORIS. Speaking from experience, are we?

CAROLYN. So any one of us could have had reason to kill Donald.

LAWRENCE. Including Jake and Martha. Which puts us right back where we started.

AGNES. *(ever the wet blanket)* Ellen, don't you think this has gone on long enough? Some of us have better things to do, like... *(looks around)* ...counting the cracks in the plaster.

DORIS. *(rising, moving more center stage, hamming it up.)* She's trying to divert us, which means she must have done it. I remember now. I heard Agnes last night. Late. Arguing in the garden. You know how her voice carries. She must have been arguing with Donald.

MURIEL. That's right. I heard her, too. Voice like a foghorn. I went to look. I could see it was Donald she was arguing with.

*(AGNES bristles at the foghorn reference but is otherwise enjoying being the center of attention.)*

AGNES. In the dark?

MURIEL. It was a full moon.

AGNES. Which is why we're stuck here in a flood. It was pouring.

MURIEL. Well...it must have...I mean. The light must have come from somewhere. I saw him. Patricia saw him too, didn't you?

AGNES. Yes Patricia, do tell us why you were in the garden, in the rain, so late. With someone, perhaps? Perhaps you were with Donald. Maybe it was your voice that Muriel heard. You do have something to hide, don't you?

PATRICIA. (*stiffly*) I don't know what you're talking about.

AGNES. Shall I refresh your memory?

PATRICIA. Ellen, I think...

ELLEN. (*quickly, to rescue an obviously upset PATRICIA*) Why don't we...uh...ask Donald...who he was talking to?

(*ELLEN crosses to the dining room and calls DONALD to come in.*)

TODD. Great idea. Crank up the old Ouija Board.

(*Everyone reacts laughing or chuckling, except for MURIEL, who is not amused and PATRICIA, who sits tensely on the edge of her seat.*)

MURIEL. I will not have my Ouija Board used for fun and games!

GRACE. Sorry, Muriel. This has been a trying day. We're letting off a little steam.

(*DONALD enters from the dining room.*)

AGNES. Ah, the corpse appears. Perhaps it will bleed at the sight of her. Lawrence, I'm sure you have the perfect quote.

LAWRENCE. ...*Richard the Third*. "For 'tis thy presence that exhales this blood, from cold and empty veins, where no blood dwells."

AGNES. (*dryly*) I knew you'd have one. Donald, go stand next to Patricia and bleed on her so she'll confess. Otherwise I'll have to tell what I know.

(*AGNES stares at PATRICIA. DONALD looks to ELLEN for guidance. PATRICIA looks from AGNES to ELLEN—obviously PATRICIA is ready to jump up and flee the room. GRACE rises, moving centerstage.*)

**GRACE.** (*hamming it up—melodramatic to break the tension in the room*) Keep Donald away from me. Keep him away. I'll confess. I did it. Yes, He was my poor, dead brother's son. We had no other family—he was my only relative—the heir to our great family fortune...once I was gone. But he wanted it now. I told him I intended to leave it to my good friend, Doris. He threatened me—told me I'd never finish this trip alive. It was self defense. I was only protecting myself.

(*As she reaches the end of this "confession," GRACE breaks down, into phony sobbing. DORIS moves to comfort her. Most of the others are laughing and smiling, except, of course, PATRICIA and AGNES.*)

**ELLEN.** (*hastily and with relief*) Let's have a big round of applause for Grace and Donald, for doing such a great job on our little murder mystery.

(*Everyone applauds except the honorees, and PATRICIA. AGNES claps slowly, about three times. DORIS takes the opportunity to return to her seat at the table. GRACE stands beside ELLEN.*)

Tomorrow—coffee will be served in here anytime after seven and breakfast will be at eight.

**TODD.** What's on the menu? Donald and dumplings?

**ELLEN.** Whatever it is, I'm sure it will be delicious. Thank you all for being such good sports.

**DONALD.** (*to the group in general, yawning widely*) Well, if nobody needs me, I'm gonna' hit the hay.

(*He starts out, exiting up center.*)

**CAROLYN.** Good night.

(*There is a chorus of "Good night," "See you in the morning," "Sleep tight," etc. as he goes out. The group breaks up into smaller groupings. TODD and CAROLYN are cozy on the sofa—enjoying the fire. ELLEN has a few*

*words with GRACE and then grabs her clipboard from the desk and moves to sit in the chair center stage to make some notes. The main focus shifts to LAWRENCE who moves over to MURIEL and DORIS at the card table.)*

LAWRENCE. Mind if I join you?

DORIS. You play bridge?

LAWRENCE. *(taking a seat)* Actually, I'd like to ask Muriel about her Ouija Board. For my book.

AGNES. Yes, your book. You must tell us all about it.

*(As she speaks, AGNES moves behind LAWRENCE, on his right side.)*

LAWRENCE. Afraid that's bad luck.

AGNES. *(wheedling)* Oh, come on, don't be superstitious.

*(PATRICIA rises and crosses to LAWRENCE, coming to his defense. She moves to a position behind him, on his left side.)*

PATRICIA. Agnes, if he doesn't want to talk about his book, you shouldn't badger him.

AGNES. Badger? Moi?

*(AGNES puts a hand on LAWRENCE's shoulder, possessively. PATRICIA, not to be pushed away, places her hand on his other shoulder. A bit of a turf war develops, with LAWRENCE as the turf.)*

LAWRENCE. *(He continues, trying to ignore what's going on above him.)* Ah...Muriel, I'd love to know more about the Ouija—the history—the theory behind it.

MURIEL. Certainly. They come from ancient Egypt, and are used to communicate with...the beyond. I've always found the Ouija board very truthful when approached with a serious and open mind. Although, given the aura of cynicism in this room, perhaps we should move into the dining room.

*(She rises and collects her Ouija board. LAWRENCE welcomes the opportunity to escape AGNES and PATRICIA's shenanigans.)*

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