

## *MURDER ON THE ORIENTAL RUG*



An Audience-Participation Murder Mystery-Comedy

*By Tony Schwartz & Marylou Ambrose*

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Thanks for buying a Lakeside Players original murder mystery package. In this package you'll find:

1. FAQ's about our audience-participation murder mysteries
2. One complete murder mystery script that may be photocopied for cast members
3. Suggested script for master of ceremonies
4. Production Notes (properties, costumes, music, helpful hints)
5. Sample news release

Whether you're a seasoned actor/director or a rookie, this envelope contains everything you need to stage the perfect crime! Happy sleuthing!

***Tony & Marylou***

***Murder on the Oriental Rug***  
By Marylou Ambrose & Tony Schwartz

**Cast of Characters:**

Director

Ascott St. James/Inspector Hercule Pierogi/Fifi the French Maid

Dirk Viagra/Dr. Charles Ovary/Bruce Boulder

Thelma the Stagehand/ Duane Yokel/ Emma Ovary

Dakota Montana/Miss Harmonia Jones/Shannon Stone

**TIME & PLACE:**

The present; a theater on the summer stock circuit

**SCENES:**

**Act 1, Scene 1:** Backstage at the theater

**Act 1, Scene 2:** Act 1 of *Murder on the Oriental Rug*, the play-within-a-play

**Act 2, Scene 1:** Backstage at the theater

**Act 2, Scene 2:** Act 2 of *Murder on the Oriental Rug*

**NOTE:** This play was written to be performed in a variety of venues, and not all of them will have a real backstage area. Consequently, the script usually only designates *when* the actors enter and exit, not whether they enter and exit stage right, left, or center. That's up to the director and depends on the venue. In our show, we hang a curtain upstage center as a backdrop, so the actors often enter and exit from either side of the curtain. However, they also enter and exit stage right and stage left.

***Murder on the Oriental Rug***

**Master of Ceremonies:** Welcome to the (*Insert your company's name*) production of *Murder on the Oriental Rug*! Tonight, you're part of the action. So keep your eyes and ears open for clues, because before the night's over, someone will be ruthlessly murdered. And it's up to you to guess "whodunit" and why.

How many of you have been to a murder mystery before? Well, this show is a little different. We won't ask you to take a part, or get up on stage, or do anything but watch if you don't want to. So you shy people can come out from under your tables now and just relax and enjoy the show. Your main job is to pay attention and play detective—and then to vote at the end. The first

*(Insert how many prizes you have)* people to correctly guess the murderer and the motive will win a prize. I'll explain the voting process to you in more detail after the show.

And now—on with the show!

## Act 1

*It's another opening night of "Murder on the Oriental Rug." The show has been traveling from small town to small town playing to small audiences. The cast hasn't been paid for weeks, but they continue to perform because they've been promised starring roles and a piece of the pie if the show goes to Broadway. A crisis arises when five members of the eight member cast don't show up. They call the director to say they've had it and are quitting the show. We look in on the remaining cast and director as the call arrives. (The first scene should be played as if the actors are behind the stage curtain or backstage where the audience can't hear.)*

### Scene 1:

*Opening music: "There's No Business Like Show Business"*

**DIRECTOR** enters and walks to **CENTER STAGE** talking on cell phone. She's arguing with someone.

**Director:** What do you mean you're not coming? The curtain goes up in 10 minutes and we have a full house! What do you mean, you don't care? You heard what? Who told you that? Of course you're going to be in the Broadway version. The entire cast is going to Broadway. We just need to get a few more performances under our belts. Look, we have a contract . . . I'll sue! What do you mean the contract says I'll pay you? Where does it say that? I know you haven't been paid, but . . . Don't hang up! You can't quit! Wait!!! Damn!!!!!!!

**Director:** Now what am I going to do? (*Walks STAGE RIGHT*)

*Enter ASCOTT ST. JAMES with flask in hand. Sits on stool STAGE LEFT, looks around, takes a nip from flask.*

**Director:** (*Notices him*) I see we're having another liquid meal.

**Ascott:** Just a little nip to take the edge off.

**Director:** You haven't had an edge in 30 years.

**Ascott:** I'm immune to your sarcasm. This show is nothing without me. Are you forgetting how versatile I am? Why, I've done William Shakespeare, I've done Neil Simon, I've done George Kaufmann . . .

**Director:** (*Sarcastically*) Not to mention Jack Daniels and Jim Beam.

**DAKOTA and DIRK enter together.**

**Dirk:** (*Demanding*) Where's my makeup person? We go on in 10 minutes!

**Dakota:** Yeah, I need help with my costumes!

**Director:** Costumes are the least of your worries. Do you even know your lines yet? We've only been on the road 2 months.

**Dakota:** Don't worry, I had a brilliant idea.

**Dirk:** First time for everything.

**Dakota:** Thanks! I hid my lines around stage! (*She picks up a vase or something and shows that lines are under it.*)

**Dirk:** That's cheating!

**Director:** Shut up, Dirk. She needs all the help she can get. We're on in just a few minutes.

**Ascott:** That's hardly possible with the other four cast members still not here.

**Dirk:** Say, where are they?

**Director:** Well....

**Ascott:** (*Taking another nip*) Next you'll be telling me I'm playing all the parts.

**Director:** (*Light bulb goes off*) Brilliant!

**Ascott:** (*To himself*) Yes, I know I am. (*To director*) Wait, what's brilliant?

**Dakota:** (*Pouting*) I had a brilliant idea, too, remember?

**Dirk:** Who could forget....

**Director:** (*Scheming*) They're not coming.

**Ascott:** Who's not coming?

**Director:** The rest of the cast.

**All:** What??!!

**Director:** (*Lying, making it up as she goes along*) It's horrible. Such a tragedy. I just got the call before you all came in.

**Ascott:** What's happened?

**Director:** Their minivan was involved in an accident!

**Dirk:** Oh my God! Were there fatalities?

**Dakota:** Or even worse, was anyone killed?

**Director:** They uh...swerved to miss a deer and collided with a truckload of pigs.

**Ascott:** Good God! Was anyone hurt?

**Director:** All the pigs are dead.

**Ascott:** Good Lord, what carnage.

**Dirk:** Ham and eggs for breakfast anyone?

**Dakota:** What do you mean?

**Dirk:** Ham comes from pigs, sweetheart.

**Dakota:** (*Laughs*) Does not. Everyone knows ham comes from hamsters!

*Others roll eyes.*

**Ascott:** But what about the other actors?

**Director:** They're fine, for the moment. But...uh...the pig farmer has taken them to an undisclosed location and is...holding them hostage! That was him on the phone. He says if we don't pay for the pork, he'll send the rest of the cast to join them in that great pig pen in the sky.

**Dirk:** Well, sucks for them. See you around. (*Starts walking offstage*)

**Dakota:** You mean I hid all these lines for nothing?

**Director:** Wait! (*Grabs Dirk's arm*) You can't leave! What about the show?

**Ascott:** What show?

**Dirk:** Look, we've been doing this show for months, and we haven't been paid a nickel yet.

**Director:** I know, I know. It's coming, I promise.

**Dirk:** I've been holding on because you've promised we're going to Broadway and we'd all

have starring roles. How long do you expect me to work for nothing? I haven't had a good role since I played Danny in the male version of *Annie*. This show was going to launch my Broadway comeback.

**Director:** I promise you, you *will* be on Broadway again!

**Dakota:** When? It has to be soon! I need the money for my mother's operation. Her condition is getting worse.

**Director:** Soon! Very soon! But for now, we have to go on with the show. For two good reasons: First, we need to raise the pig ransom and save the rest of the cast. Remember, we need them when the show goes to Broadway.

**Ascott:** Oh please, you've been promising Broadway for months now. I've lost faith. Let's just throw in the towel. I may have to do the unthinkable -- get a real job.

**Dirk:** Yeah, to pay off your gambling debts!

**Ascott:** What are you talking about?

**Dirk:** I've heard you on the phone with your bookie. In fact, I've seen some suits around asking for you. How much do you owe?

**Ascott:** Don't tell them where to find me! I've got to get my hands on some cash, fast! I'm out of here. (*Starts walking offstage*)

**Director:** No! Don't leave! There's something I didn't tell you. The second reason we have to go on with the show is that the Broadway backers are in the audience. See that table over there? (*points into audience*) Gazillionaires. Broadway gazillionaires. They're here tonight to make their final decision. We've got to give them the best damn performance they've ever seen!

**Ascott:** But in God's name, how?

**Director:** You were just bragging how versatile you are. Well, I have a plan....

**Ascott:** General Custer had a plan, too.

**Dakota:** Oh, did he invent custard pie?

**Dirk:** Tell us your plan. And it better be a good one or I'm history, too.

**Director:** It's simple really. You'll just double up on the parts!

**Dirk:** That's crazy! Besides, it's not in my contract. I refuse!

**Ascott:** What, the great Ascott St. James play two parts in one show? I also refuse!

**Dakota:** Wait a minute. If we play *two* parts, we get paid double, right?

**Ascott:** My dear woman, how much is two times zero?

**Dakota:** Two times zero? Let's see, now wait, I know this one . . . two carry the zero makes...20!

**Dirk:** *You're* saving for your mother's surgery? I think Mommie Dearest better consult a faith healer.

**Director:** I promise you, after tonight, this show is heading for Broadway. And then you'll all finally get paid what you're worth.

**Dakota:** I'm going to be a big star!

**Ascott:** You know, we've been touring with this play for so long we probably *do* know each other's lines. We might be able to pull it off! But who plays what? Plus, there are only three of us. We're one actor short.

**Dakota:** No, you're not *that* short.

**Ascott:** Not short as in height, short as in missing one person!

**Director:** I thought of that. We can use Thelma the stage hand. She knows all the lines, and she's always wanted to be in a show.

**Dirk:** Thelma? Are you sure?

**Director:** Got any better ideas? She's run lines with all of you, so she knows the script. Now, let's see . . . she can play the doctor's wife and the caretaker. You three explain it all to her. Trust me, she'll jump at the chance.

**Dirk:** But wait! Who'll help me with my costumes if Thelma's onstage?

**Ascott:** You're a big boy now. You can dress yourself.

**Dirk:** You're a great one to talk. You can't even tie your own ascot, Ascott. (*Thinking*) Hmm, I can continue to play the doctor, and I can also play the husband!

**Dakota:** And I can keep playing the doctor's assistant...and also be the patient!

**Director:** That just leaves you, Ascott.

**Ascott:** Well of course I'll continue to play Inspector Hercule Peirogi. That only leaves one character. The part of...Oh no! I'm not....



**Director:** The show must go on!

**Dakota:** Don't worry, Mr. St. James. I'll help you with your costume.

**Dirk:** This alone will be worth the price of admission.

*(DIRK and DAKOTA drag ASCOTT offstage as he takes a long swallow from his flask.)*

**Director:** Oh Thelma, can you come here a minute?

*(Thelma enters.)*

**Thelma:** Yeah, boss?

**Director:** How'd you like to be in tonight's show?

**Thelma:** Oh boss, stop teasing....

**Director:** I'm not teasing. It's a long story, but the other four cast members aren't coming. Now, run along backstage and they'll tell you what to do.

**Thelma:** You're kidding. I can't act. I have stage fright! *(Ad lib more protests as other three cast members come onstage and drag her offstage.)*

*(DIRECTOR dials cell phone.)*

**Director:** Hello, Acme Talent Agency? Let me talk to Phil. Hello, Phil? Yeah, it's me. Look, the backers are here in the audience and I've already schmoozed with them. They're excited about this show going to Broadway. Of course they're only interested if we get big stars to be in it. Yeah, this loser cast is out of here after tonight. No, they don't know yet, at least a not all of them. Half of them found out somehow and walked off the set. The rest are here and I have a plan for tonight. They still think they're going to Broadway. Yeah, yeah, so look, see if you can get Dustin Hoffman or Mathew Broderick. We need big names. See what you can do. I have to go. The show is about to start. We'll talk later.

*(DIRECTOR hangs up phone and whispers backstage.)*

**Director:** Are you guys ready?

**All:** No!!!!!!!

**Director:** Well, you're on in 30 seconds!

*(DIRECTOR walks to CENTER STAGE. The "curtain" is now "open.")*

**Director:** (*To audience*) Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to tonight's performance of Agatha Frisbie's *Murder on the Oriental Rug*. You're sure to be delighted by the talents of tonight's...uh...stellar cast! And so, without further ado, on with the show! (**exits and sits in chair, STAGE RIGHT**).

## Scene 2

(Act 1 of the play-within-a-play)

(*Brief lighting change to signify transition*)

(*Sound Cue: Organ music*)

(*DR. CHARLES OVARY and his assistant, MISS HORMONIA JONES, enter and walk to CENTER STAGE. They begin dialogue as music fades.*)

**Hormonia:** Oh Doctor, I still can't believe it!

**Dr. Ovary:** I know, I know. It's always difficult when one loses a patient.

**Hormonia:** Yes, Doctor, but this is different. This wasn't an ordinary death. Has anyone notified the next of kin?

**Dr. Ovary:** Yes, her husband, Bruce Boulder, is on his way.

(*Enter INSPECTOR HERCULE PIEROGI*).

**Inspector:** Excuse me, are you Dr. Ovary?

**Dr. Ovary:** Yes, I am. But I can't see anyone now. There's been a death.

**Inspector:** Yes, I know. That's why I'm here.

**Hormonia:** Just who are you?

**Inspector:** I am Inspector Hercule Pierogi, the famous Polish detective.

**Hormonia:** But the police have already been here to investigate.

**Dr. Ovary:** And the patient's death has been determined to be of natural causes.

**Hormonia:** If you can call that "natural".

(*Sound Cue: Organ music*)

**Inspector:** Now I'm intrigued. Please explain.

**Dr. Ovary:** Well, this is a clinic for women with female disorders -- hot flashes, primarily.

**Inspector:** I see ....

**Dr. Ovary.** But you'll have to excuse me now. I have a patient to examine.

*HORMONIA goes into audience with a wheelchair and announces, "Mrs. Drenchedalot? The doctor will see you now." She then puts patient into wheelchair and brings her on stage. This is the woman who was selected before the show. Now, DR. OVARY sings "Doctor, Doctor" to the patient. When he gets to the line, "Let's take a look, see what we find . . ." he should pretend to look into her head through her ear. We had an old doctor's instrument to do this with – without actually touching the "patient," of course. After song, Hormonia brings patient back into audience. While she's wheeling patient back and forth, she ad libs to fill in the gaps.*

**Dr. Ovary:** As I said, this is a clinic for women's disorders, primarily hot flashes.

**Hormonia:** The deceased was one of our patients being treated for severe hot flashes. The police, along with Dr. Ovary, have determined that she...that she.... (*Begins to sob*)

**Inspector:** Please, Doctor, if you could finish the explanation.

**Dr. Ovary:** It appears the patient was in the middle of what may have been the most severe hot flash in recorded female history. All evidence seems to indicate she died from ...(**Sound Cue: organ music**) . . . Spontaneous human combustion.

*(Sound Cue: Organ Music)*

**Inspector:** You mean...?

**Hormonia:** She burst into flames!

*(Sound Cue: Organ Music)*

**Inspector:** Unbelievable! And where did the combustion occur?

**Hormonia:** The...ashes...were found on that Oriental rug.

*(She points to a rug hanging on a rolling rack UPSTAGE. The rug is facing backwards.)*

**Dr. Ovary:** The police are sending someone by later on to pick it up. They're satisfied with my findings in regards to the cause of death, but they still have some formalities to attend to.

**Inspector:** May I see it? (*Points to the rug*)

**Dr. Ovary:** I guess there's no harm. They're finished with their preliminary investigation.

*(HORMONIA rolls out the rug and turns it around for the audience to see. There's a chalk outline of a body with big boobs.)*

**Inspector:** *(Examining the rug with a magnifying glass, focusing mostly on the breasts)* Most extraordinary!

**Hormonia:** I'd call it tragic!

**Dr. Ovary:** So would I. That rug was an heirloom!

**Inspector:** I must say, this is the most bizarre case I've ever encountered.

**Dr. Ovary:** I just told you, Inspector, there is no "case." The woman died of natural causes. It was bound to happen sooner or later. You have no idea how excruciating hot flashes can be unless you've experienced them yourself.

**Inspector:** And *you* have experienced them yourself?

**Dr. Ovary:** Of course not. But a good doctor feels his patients' pain. I've made it my life's work to end the suffering of middle aged women by finding a cure for hot flashes.

**Inspector:** Very noble, but I think, my dear doctor, your cure comes a bit late for this woman. *(Pointing to the rug)*

**Hormonia:** But you haven't told us why you're here, Inspector. Who called you?

**Inspector:** In good time, Madame. In good time. For now, I must continue my investigation. You won't mind me looking around if there's nothing to hide, Doctor?

**Dr. Ovary:** Of course, but allow me to give you a tour of the lab. In the meantime, Hormonia, why don't you find Duane, the handyman, and get him to move the rug into the hall closet where it will be safe. Come along Inspector.

*(Sound Cue: Organ Music)*

*(The DOCTOR and INSPECTOR exit. HORMONIA is left alone with the rug. Filled with grief, she looks at the chalk outline.)*

*(DUANE YOKEL enters.)*

**Duane:** Oh, hello, Miss Hormonia. Well, that rug sure could use a good beatin'. Just look at the dust on that thing.

**Hormonia:** No, Duane. Those are ashes.

**Duane:** Oooooh...But I thought this was a smoke-free facility.

**Hormonia:** Yeah, well, no one told *her*. (*Points at outline on rug*)

**Duane:** I'm confused.

**Hormonia:** Hasn't anyone told you about the death?

**Duane:** I don't know what you're talkin' about, Miss.

**Hormonia:** A woman burst into flames and died right here on this rug!

**Duane:** (*Takes a few steps back*) Holy Smokes! No one told me! Is that what's left of her on the rug there? (*Traces outline with finger*)

**Hormonia:** I'm afraid so.

**Duane:** Wow! Nice (*traces boobs*) ... uh, *hair*. Say, that outline looks kinda' familiar. Who was she?

**Hormonia:** I'm afraid it was Shannon Stone, the famous movie star.

(*Sound Cue: Organ Music*)

**Duane:** Shannon Stone! (*Looks shocked*)

**Hormonia:** She was here for treatment under an assumed name, but I guess it doesn't matter who knows now. Once the tabloids get wind of this, it'll be all over the news. The publicity will be terrible for the clinic! Look, take care of this rug. I have to help Dr. Ovary in the lab.

*Hormonia exits.*

(*Sound Cue: Organ Music*)

**Duane:** (*Talks to himself to give other actors time to change costumes.*) Take care of this, take care of that. That's all people think I'm good for around here. They think I'm some kind of dumb hick, and I let 'em think that. I learn a lot that way. But I'm smarter than I look, and "Miss Stone" found that out the hard way.

(*Sits on stool, STAGE LEFT*) I had a very interesting conversation with Miss Stone yesterday, right here in this very room. Miss Stone, my behind. I remember when she was just good ole' Irma Lou Lebowitz, the girl voted most likely to conceive ... by the entire football team. And she apparently applied that philosophy all the way to the casting couch. Why I remember that conversation I had with her as if it was yesterday. Hell, it *was* yesterday! (*Leans face on hand and looks dreamy*)

(*Sound Cue: Dream sequence music. The following is a flashback.*)

*(Enter SHANNON STONE wearing sunglasses and scarf on her head as disguise)*

**Shannon:** Oh, excuse me. I didn't realize anyone was in here.

**Duane:** Oh, sorry, Ma'am. I was just leavin'. You can have the ... say, wait a minute. Ain't you Shannon Stone, the famous movie star? *(gets up and looks her over)*

**Shannon:** What? No! I get that all the time. People say I look like her.

**Duane:** You can't fool me, Miss Stone. I've followed your career for years.

**Shannon:** I tell you, you're wrong!

**Duane:** I got photos of you all over the trailer. I'm your biggest fan. In fact, I have a photo of you when you were wearin' your cheerleadin' outfit.

**Shannon:** What are you talking about? I was never a cheerleader.

**Duane:** Oh sure you was, Miss Stone. Or should I say Irma Lou Liebowitz!

**Shannon:** Where did you hear that name?

**Duane:** Why Irma Lou, don't you recognize me?

**Shannon:** No!

**Duane:** From Heifer Hollow High? I was captain of the football team.

**Shannon:** Oh my God! Duane? DuaneYokel?

*Sound Cue: Organ Music*

**Duane:** Yup! Some of us *kept* our real names.

**Shannon:** I can't believe it! Why I haven't seen anyone from high school in over 35 years. Oh my God, I mean ... I never saw you before in my life!

**Duane:** So, how's that young husband of yours? What is he, about 25 years old? And let's see now, I'm 53, so that would make you....

**Shannon:** Shut up!

**Duane:** Does he know how old you really are? Does anyone out there in Hollywood know how old you really are?

**Shannon:** Shut up, I say! Shut up!!

**Duane:** You've been passing yourself off as 25 for, what, about 25 years now. Some trick! But you look damn good for an old broad! What's your secret? Face lifts? Fountain of youth? Some of Dr. Ovary's secret treatments? I've seen that gizmo. You'd never catch me puttin' my head under that contraption!

**Shannon:** Dr. Ovary is a genius! Look, there's no use trying to hide it. We've known each other a long time. I've begun having severe hot flashes, and it's getting difficult to hide them in public. People are starting to notice, and I'm running out of excuses. Sooner or later someone is going to find out my real age!

**Duane:** Like your husband, Bruce Boulder?

**Shannon:** Leave Bruce out of this! He doesn't know. He thinks I'm at the Betty Ford Clinic!

**Duane:** Why?

**Shannon:** I'd rather have him think I'm an alcoholic than old enough to be his mother!

**Duane:** Well, for the right kind of cash, he doesn't have to know.

**Shannon:** Are you blackmailing me?

**Duane:** You bet your ass, if that *is* your real ass.

**Shannon:** You're blackmailing *me*? It's your word against mine. Who are they going to believe? A movie star, or a dumb hick like you? And by the way, this *is* my real ass!

*Sound Cue: Organ Music*

*(SHANNON walks grandly off stage.)*

**Duane:** I ain't as dumb as you think I am .... *(Sits in stool with face in hand again)*

*Sound Cue: Dream sequence music to end flashback.*

*Enter FIFI, the French maid, with feather duster.*

**Fifi:** Ahhh, Monsieur Duane, Dr. Ovary is looking for you.

**Duane:** *(Does a take and stifles a giggle when he sees it's ASCOTT playing the maid.)* Let him keep lookin'. Sooner or later he'll find me.

**Fifi:** No, no, you must go! He needs your help to move the "equipment" to a safe place.

**Duane:** Why?

**Fifi:** The doctor says now is not a good time for someone like the police to be snooping around the experimental machine!

*DUANE gives her a once over look, slaps her butt, and exits.*

**Fifi:** Fresh! *Giggles*

*Sound Cue: Organ Music*

*FIFI dusts a bit and also snoops around.*

*Enter BRUCE BOULDER as organ music fades.*

**Bruce:** Excuse me, Miss.

**Fifi:** Oui? (*Sees BRUCE and is immediately attracted to him.*) Ooooooh, Monsieur, how may I be of service? (*Adjusts fake breasts.*)

**Bruce:** (*Realizes it's ASCOTT. Says in stage whisper*) Oh my God ... (*stifles laugh, tries to pull himself together*) ... I'm ...uh ...(*in stage whisper*) Who the hell am I?

*From offstage we hear in unison: "Bruce Boulder."*

**Bruce:** Bruce Boulder! Excuse me, Miss. There was no one in the lobby and I'm looking for the person in charge.

**Fifi:** Uh, that would be Dr. Ovary. But he's not here right now.

**Bruce:** How long will he be away?

**Fifi:** (*To self*) Only 10 to 20 years, if he's lucky.

**Bruce:** Excuse me?

**Fifi:** Oh, uh ... he'll be back soon. He's working in his laboratory. May I be of assistance? (*Flirting, winks*)

**Bruce:** I'm Shannon Stone's husband. I'm here to pick up my wife's remains.

**Fifi:** Ooooooh ... (*Her eyes dart back and forth between BRUCE and the rug. She wheels rug over to him.*)

**Bruce:** What's this?

**Fifi:** Part of her. The rest is in the vacuum cleaner.



**Bruce:** I don't understand. Where's my wife's body? I demand to speak to the doctor in charge!

**Fifi:** But Monsieur, that is impossible.

**Bruce:** Why?

**Fifi:** (*Stage whisper*) Because you're playing the doctor, too! (*They exchange panicky looks. A male-sounding voice comes from backstage.*)

**Voice:** Fifi, is there someone out there to see me?

**Fifi:** (*Caught off guard*) That depends. Who are you?

**Voice:** Why Fifi, it's me. Dr. Charles Ovary!

*Arm wearing lab coat extends through upstage curtain. FIFI and BRUCE exchange looks like, "Now we get it!" BRUCE goes over and shakes hand.*

**Bruce:** Glad to meet you, Dr. Ovary. I'm the bereaved husband.

**Voice:** (*Arm gestures elaborately as following is said*) Terrible tragedy, terrible. I can't tell you how sorry I am. Unfortunately, I'm tied up with another medical emergency. But I'll be with you as soon as I can.

**Bruce:** But Doctor, I want some answers now. (*Arm disappears. BRUCE begins to sob.*)

**Fifi:** (*Comforts BRUCE*) Now, now, Monsieur Boulder. Try to calm down. Here, sit by me.

*FIFI and BRUCE sit on stools at table, and FIFI puts her arm around BRUCE. BRUCE is still sobbing. FIFI pulls a sock out of her bra and hands it to BRUCE, who pretends to blow his nose in it. He hands it back to FIFI, who tosses it over her shoulder.*

**Bruce:** (*Continuing to sob.*) How will I live without her? What am I going to do?

**Fifi:** There, there, Monsieur, everything is going to be okay. (*She pulls BRUCE'S head into her bosom. He looks alarmed but goes along with it.*)

*DUANE wheels in the portable hot flash extractor.*

**Duane:** (*Talking to "Doctor" backstage*) So, where do you want me to put this, Doc?

**Bruce:** What in hell is that?!

**Fifi:** Uh ... it's the new barbecue grill!

**Duane:** (*Notices BRUCE and FIFI for the first time. Chuckles sarcastically.*) Yeah, and with this grill, you always come out ...well done.

*Sound Cue: Organ music as CAST exits.*

*End of Act 1 of the play within the play.*

*“Intermission”*

*The lighting changes to signify intermission. The DIRECTOR enters.*

**Director:** (*Talking to actors as if backstage, really still on stage in view of audience*) Good work, people! I want to give you some notes now.

*CAST enters.*

**Dakota:** Okay, I’ll go backstage and get the rest of the cast.

**Ascott:** My dear woman, we *are* the rest of the cast.

**Dakota:** Oh yeah, right.

**Director:** The backers think this show is a riot! I saw them laughing their heads off.

**Dirk:** I thought this show was a drama.

**Director:** Not any more! That bit with the arm coming from backstage was brilliant! I’m glad I thought of it.

**Thelma:** What are you talking about? That was my idea.

**Dakota:** Yeah, but it was my arm!

**Director:** Whatever ... just keep up the energy. Now get backstage and get ready for Act 2.

**Ascott:** Wait a minute! I just thought of something regarding the final scene. How is Dakota going to be onstage as Harmonia when she also playing Shannon Stone, the patient.

**Director:** I already figured it out. I’ll deal with that when the time comes. Don’t worry! Now get backstage and get ready for Act 2.

*CAST begins to head backstage, although hesitantly.*

**Director:** Do you all know who you are?

*CAST stops short and looks puzzled.*

**Director:** Oh, just go study your scripts!

*CAST goes backstage except for THELMA, who turns back to DIRECTOR.*

**Thelma:** Say, boss, acting on stage is way better than working backstage. Do you think I can keep this part when the show goes to Broadway?

**Director:** What? I realize you're a "big star" now. But have you forgotten about the hostage situation? Those poor actors being held against their will by a psychopathic pig farmer?

**Thelma:** Oh my God, I forgot all about them! I feel so guilty! I got caught up in the excitement.

**Director:** Well I haven't forgotten about them! We must save them! And the way to do that is to go on with the show. The box office take will provide the ransom money, and once they're rescued, they'll naturally assume their original roles.

**Thelma:** Of course, Boss. What was I thinking? I'll get backstage and get ready for Act 2.

*THELMA exits behind curtain, STAGE RIGHT.*

**Director:** What a fool. (*Walks STAGE LEFT keeping her back to spot where THELMA exited. Takes out cell phone, dials.*) Hello, Acme Talent Agency? Let me speak to Phil.

*THELMA returns to stage. She raises her hand as if to say something to the DIRECTOR, but stops when she realizes the DIRECTOR is on the phone. THELMA eavesdrops on the conversation, not revealing her presence.*

**Director:** Hi, Phil. That all-star cast I needed for the Broadway show? Cut it down from eight to four. Yeah, you heard me right. I got this loser cast to double up on the parts, and this show's gone from a drama to a comedy and it's hysterical. The audience is rolling in the aisles. So are the backers. With some big names, some people who *really* know how to act, this will be the hottest thing to hit Broadway since *The Producers*! What? Who cares what happens to them after tonight? Let them go audition for the Ritz Theater in Hawley!

*DIRECTOR exits STAGE LEFT, laughing maniacally. THELMA calls the rest of the cast onto the stage.*

**Thelma:** Oh my God, guys, you won't believe what I just heard. The Director was just talking to a talent agency saying we're not going to Broadway with the show! She's hiring big-name actors instead!

**All:** Oh my God! (*plus other ad libs*)

**Dirk:** That bitch. I'm outa' here!

**Ascott:** I'm right behind you!

**Thelma:** Wait! What about the hostages?

**Ascott:** She probably made that up, too. The other cast members probably just quit.

**Dakota:** But what if she didn't make it up?

**Dirk:** Who cares? I never liked those people anyway.

**Ascott:** I'm leaving before my bookie catches up with me.

**Dakota:** But if they are being held hostage, and we raise the money to rescue them, think of the great publicity we'd get!

**Dirk:** Good point, Dakota. I didn't think you had it in you.

**Thelma:** We could be on the cover of "People" magazine!

**Dakota:** Or better yet, the "National Enquirer!"

**Dirk:** You know, it probably would be to my advantage to stay. The publicity might land me more roles.

**NOTE:** *All actors must look at DIRECTOR when they say the following lines. DIRECTOR continues to keep her back to actors.*

**Ascott:** I agree. It could be a blessing in disguise. But no matter what happens, I'm out a lot of money. Madame Director must pay up, one way or another.

**ASCOTT exits.**

**Dirk:** Well, as the saying goes, break a leg. And I'd like to break the Director's. As well as a few more of her body parts.

**DIRK exits.**

**Thelma:** My career ended before it even began. I'll never forgive her for this. Never!

**THELMA exits.**

**Dakota:** I trusted the director and she let me down. I promised my mother that operation and now I'm letting *her* down! I need my money!

**DAKOTA exits.**

*Intermission ends. Act 2 of the play within a play begins.*

**DIRECTOR** returns to CENTER STAGE.

**Director:** Ladies and gentlemen, we now continue with Act 2 of *Murder on the Oriental Rug*.

**DIRECTOR** exits to chair STAGE RIGHT and sits in view of audience.

*Sound Cue: Organ Music*

*As organ music fades, BRUCE enters with FIFI. He pauses as he passes the DIRECTOR and glares at her, punches his hand with his fist, then continues to CENTER STAGE and joins FIFI.*

**Bruce:** How much longer do I have to wait to see the Doctor?

**Fifi:** I'm sure he'll be here soon, Monsieur.

**Bruce:** I want some answers.

**Fifi:** What kind of answers?

**Bruce:** Like why my wife has been reduced to a pile of ashes!

**Fifi:** Oh, *reduced*? Was she here to lose weight?

**Bruce:** I don't know why she was here. I thought she was at the Betty Ford Clinic.

**Fifi:** So you don't know what they do here?

**Bruce:** No, enlighten me.

**Fifi:** (*Trying to block the Hot Flash Extractor with her body*) I don't know what they do here. I'm just the maid.

**Bruce:** Well, then I'm going to search this house and find the Doctor. I'll get some answers my own way! Say, what's that thing behind you?

**Fifi:** Nothing!

**Bruce:** Let me take a look at that!

*He brushes FIFI aside and studies the Extractor. He touches all parts of it while saying his next few lines.*

**Bruce:** I've never seen anything like this in my life! It looks like something right out of a science

fiction movie. Judging from the looks of this wiring, this machine is packing some extremely high voltage. And you have no idea what it does?

**Fifi:** Monsieur, how would I know? I'm just the hired help.

**Bruce:** Well the Doctor will know. If my wife was reduced to a pile of ashes, this thing might have had something to do with it. I'm going to find the Doctor and get some answers, even if I have to beat them out of him!

***BRUCE storms off. The DIRECTOR is visible to the audience. As BRUCE passes the DIRECTOR, he says to her in stage whisper:***

**Bruce:** *(In "real" voice; that is, as DIRK)* I'd like to reduce *you* to a pile of ashes!

***BRUCE exits. Enter HORMONIA.***

**Hormonia:** Mr. Boulder seemed to be in a hurry. Where's he going?

**Fifi:** To look for the Doctor. I couldn't stop him.

**Hormonia:** *(Glaring at the DIRECTOR. Says following in "real" voice; that is, as DAKOTA)* Someone else may need a doctor before this night is over.

**Fifi:** *(Stage whispers the following line in "real" voice; that is, as ASCOTT)* Stay focused!

**Hormonia:** Did you say anything to Mr. Boulder?

**Fifi:** Of course not. He was asking questions, but I just played dumb.

**Hormonia:** What's the Hot Flash Extractor doing here? Did he see it? *(She begins to touch it, making adjustments.)*

**Fifi:** I don't think so. I ... uh ... concealed it.

**Hormonia:** Good! Now you'd better go after him. He must not find Dr. Ovary.

**Fifi:** What shall I tell him?

**Hormonia:** Tell him the Doctor is in the horse stable. Steer him that way.

**Fifi:** With pleasure, Mademoiselle. Perhaps I can persuade Mr. Boulder to have a little romp in the hay with Fifi. *(FIFI exits)*

***HORMONIA turns her back and starts examining the Hot Flash Extractor and makes a few adjustments. EMMA OVARY enters.***

**Emma:** Miss Jones?

**Hormonia:** (*Startled*) Oh! Mrs. Ovary! You startled me.

**Emma:** What's that contraption? (*Points to Hot Flash Extractor*) Is that something you and my husband work on behind locked doors? Why must everything you two do be a secret?

**Hormonia:** As a matter of fact, this is our latest experiment. We were about to unveil it to the scientific community when we had this ... little setback.

**Emma:** Your setback wouldn't have anything to do with the untimely death of that patient, would it?

**Hormonia:** Of course not. That patient died of natural causes.

**Emma:** Perhaps. I only know there are strange things going on in this house. I just can't put my finger on it.

**Hormonia:** I think you're letting your imagination run away.

**Emma:** Last month's electric bill was through the roof! Was that my imagination? What are you and my husband up to?

**Hormonia:** (*Caught off guard*) Up to? What are you implying? Dr. Ovary and I are doing groundbreaking medical research.

**Emma:** I know that. What did you *think* I meant?

**Hormonia:** (*Stammering*) I ... I think this is something best discussed between you and your husband. Now, I must get back to the lab.

**HORMONIA exits hurriedly.**

**EMMA goes over to Hot Flash Extractor and starts snooping around. She touches components as if making adjustments, too. She picks up the head gear and is about to place it on her head when DR. OVARY enters.**

**Dr. Ovary:** No!!!

**Emma:** Charles! You scared me!

**Dr. Ovary:** (*Yanks head gear away from her*) Sorry, darling. But this equipment is dangerous in untrained hands.

**Emma:** Whatever you say, Charles. But you're not leaving it in the living room, are you? It doesn't go with the drapes.

**Dr. Ovary:** Of course not, dear. I don't know what it's doing here. I told Yokel to move it to the supply closet. Why he left it here is beyond me.

**Emma:** **(Sighs)** It's soooo hard to get good help these days, especially from the local Yokels. Now -- tell me about this machine, Charles.

**Dr. Ovary:** Oh, that. That.....uh.....is your birthday present!

**Emma:** Oh Charles, you remembered. Thank you. But what is it?

**Dr. Ovary:** It's a ...uh ....

**Emma:** It looks like a hairdryer.

**Dr. Ovary:** Brilliant!!

**Emma:** What?

**Dr. Ovary:** I mean, yes! It's a hairdryer. A new type of hairdryer.

**Emma:** It looks very powerful.

**Dr. Ovary:** Oh it is. Under the right settings, it can dry your hair ... instantly.

**Emma:** But what's in that beaker?

**Dr. Ovary:** Uh ... shampoo!

**Emma:** Really?

**Dr. Ovary:** *(Attempting to explain how the machine works, pointing to the tube connecting the beaker to the headgear.)* Oh yes. Why, through this tube comes both shampoo and water. The machine automatically shampoos your hair, then removes the excess water. Then it dries you!

**Emma:** Why Charles, it's like a mobile beauty parlor for the home! Thank you so much!

**Dr. Ovary:** Yes, well, you're welcome. But it still has a few bugs in it. That's why I stopped you from using it. I'll have it ready in time for your party this weekend. **(Sit on stool, STAGE LEFT.)**

**Emma:** Charles, you promised me we'd go on holiday for my birthday. **(Sit next to him on stool.)**

**Dr. Ovary:** I'm afraid that's out of the question now.



**Emma:** Oh Charles, your work always comes before me!

**Dr. Ovary:** It has nothing to do with work. Even though that patient's death has been determined to be of natural causes, the police have asked me to remain in town for a few more days until they're finished with their investigation. So you see, leaving town is out of the question.

**Emma:** But you promised!

**Dr. Ovary:** Sorry, dear. It's out of my hands. Now, would you please go find Yokel and ask him to move this machine to the closet?

**Emma:** Yes, dear, of course.

*EMMA exits, glaring at the DIRECTOR on the way out.*

**Emma:** *(Stage whisper to DIRECTOR; say following in "real" voice; that is, as THELMA)* You won't get away with this.

*INSPECTOR enters.*

**Inspector:** Excuse me, Doctor. I need to speak to Mr. Boulder.

**Dr. Ovary:** *(Stand up. Say in stage whisper in "real" voice; that is, as DIRK)* Not now!

**Inspector:** *(Stage whisper in "real" voice; that is, as ASCOTT)* Yes, now! It's in the script!

**Dr. Ovary:** *(Stage whisper, as DIRK)* I don't care! I can't be two people at the same time! Besides, I've been on stage long enough.

**Inspector:** *(Stage whisper, as ASCOTT)* But this is a critical scene! It's where I tell the Bruce what I suspect!

**Dr. Ovary:** *(Stage whisper, as DIRK)* Sorry, I'm leaving. *(DR. OVARY exits.)*

**Inspector:** *(Nervous because he's on stage all alone now.)* Right, well, if Bruce were here now I'd tell him exactly what I've pieced together regarding his wife's death. *(Pacing, take stage.)* You see, I believe Dr. Ovary and his assistant, Harmonia Jones, have been experimenting on menopausal women who are desperate to find a cure for their hot flashes. I believe Miss Stone came here seeking help and her death is a direct result of these experimentations! I think the person I need to interrogate now is ... is ....

*INSPECTOR inches UPSTAGE where other CAST is waiting.*

**Inspector:** *(Stage whisper)* Who's supposed to be out here with me?

**All:** Fifi!

**Inspector:** (*Stage whisper*) Right! Send her out!

**All:** We can't -- you're Fifi!!

**Inspector:** Right . . . Oh my God.... (*Looks at audience with panic.*)

**Inspector:** Yes, well, I must find Fifi.

*INSPECTOR disappears behind upstage curtain, where he begins doing both voices.*

**Inspector:** Fifi, I'd like to have a word with you.

**Fifi:** But of course, Monsieur Inspector.

**Inspector:** I want you to tell me everything you know about Miss Stone's death.

**Fifi:** But Inspector, I know nothing. I am only the maid.

**Inspector:** Come now, Fifi, I've learned over the years that the hired help know everything going on in a household.

*He walks onstage now dressed as FIFI. He stops to glare at the DIRECTOR, makes a stabbing motion with the feather duster, then begins dusting the machine, also touching knobs, buttons, and other parts of it.*

**Fifi:** I tell you, I know nothing! I am but a mere servant. I do my work, get paid and go home. I ask no questions, and I have no answers for you!

*He turns now, facing where FIFI was standing, and talks in the INSPECTOR'S voice.*

**Inspector:** All right, Fifi. If you won't talk, perhaps I'll take a stab at explaining what happened to Miss Stone.

*He now realizes he's just spoken as the INSPECTOR while dressed as FIFI. He runs back stage and repeats the same line from behind the curtain.*

**Inspector:** All right, Fifi. If you won't talk, perhaps I'll take a stab at explaining what happened to Miss Stone.

*He runs back out still dressed as FIFI and takes the pose FIFI had when she spoke her last lines.*

**Fifi:** Go ahead if you must, Inspector. I would be curious to hear what you have to say.

*FIFI goes behind the curtain as she continues talking.*

**Fifi:** But remember, Inspector, I know nothing of what happened here.

*He now comes on stage dressed in the INSPECTOR'S trench coat and hat, but without his pants. He still has the fishnet stockings on and Fifi's wig on under the hat.*

*DIRECTOR should exit behind STAGE RIGHT screen that once concealed the Hot Flash Extractor. Out of view of audience, she sits in wheelchair and puts sheet over her head. She is now playing the patient.*

**Inspector:** *(Takes stage, paces, examines machine when appropriate.)* I believe Miss Stone was here for some new, bizarre treatment for hot flashes, developed by Dr. Ovary and Miss Jones. I believe this machine had something to do with it. I'm no scientist, Fifi, but using my elementary knowledge of anatomy, science, and physics from my high school days, I am deducing this machine is designed to ... to ... it's designed to absorb ... Good God, woman, it sucks the heat right out of a woman's body through her cranium! Isn't that right, Fifi? *(Pause, silence)* Isn't that right, Fifi?

*He realizes he's FIFI and runs behind the curtain. Again, he speaks in both voices.*

**Inspector:** Isn't that right, Fifi?

**Fifi:** I don't know what you're talking about!

**Inspector:** You better talk, Fifi. You do realize withholding evidence from a murder case makes you as guilty as the murderer, don't you? Don't you?

**Fifi:** No, no, I did nothing wrong!

**Inspector:** You'll rot in jail, Fifi!!

**Fifi:** All right, all right, I'll tell you everything!!!

*She comes onstage.*

**Fifi:** I had nothing to do with it, nothing! I admit, I was snooping around the laboratory. It was always locked; no one was permitted in there. Ever. Not even to dust! But one day, I found a key on the Doctor's desk, a key I never saw before. I suspected it was the key to the laboratory. Temptation got the best of me and I went in. I spotted that machine and other strange things in there, too. Suddenly, I heard voices! People were coming! So I locked the door and hid in the supply closet. Obviously, the Doctor had a second key. I cracked the door open to peek out. He came in with Miss Jones. They were wheeling in a patient who was all covered up. I couldn't see who it was. Oh Inspector, it was horrible! I can't erase this from my mind! I remember it soooooo clearly ...

**FIFI freezes. Assumes dream pose, with face in hand.**

***This is the entire script minus the last five pages.....***