

The Mystery at Dunbar Mansion

By

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ACT I

Scene 1

Lights come up on a typical upper class English Drawing Room. To one side of the stage is the narrator speaking into an old fashioned microphone.

NARRATOR

The guests at the Dunbar mansion were nervous. It wasn't the fact that a savage storm had taken their lights and they had to do with old candelabras. Nor was it the fact that there were strange noises in the very walls of the mansion. And it was not that the storm had taken out the old bridge and downed the telephone lines leaving them cut off from civilization until such time as the bridge was reopened or the telephone lines were repaired. No, it was the presence in the mansion of Inspector Wallingford. For wherever he stayed there seemed to be an outbreak of that most hideous of social misconduct: Murder.

(thunder)

The guests were talking among themselves that evening when suddenly a scream was heard from the library. Upon entering the library they found the maid in a state of shock.

INSPECTOR

"What is it?"

NARRATOR

The inspector asked. The guests glanced at one another expectantly.

MAID

"The. . . The . . .The..."

NARRATOR

The maid stuttered-

INSPECTOR

Snap out of it woman. What did you see?

MAID

There's a ...

INSPECTOR

Go on-

(CONTINUED)

MAID

It's horrible. There's a - behind the sofa-

INSPECTOR

What? What did you see?

MAID

There's a mouse behind the sofa.

NARRATOR

The guests heaved a collective sigh of relief.

MAN

A mouse? Where did you say it was?

MAID

Over there-

NARRATOR

The maid continued.

MAID -

behind the sofa, (long pause) on the dead body.
(Thunder)

NARRATOR

A hush fell on the party guests.

INSPECTOR

Ahhhh, yes. A corpse, of course. And the killer is probably still in this room-

MAID

Whose killer?

INSPECTOR

The dead man's killer, of course.

MAID

But that makes no sense at all, inspector. You can't kill a dead man.

INSPECTOR

No of course not. But he wasn't dead when he was killed.

MAID

If he wasn't dead when he was killed, when did he die?

INSPECTOR

Never mind. I will need to ask everyone in the mansion a few questions if you don't mind. Everyone stay where you are. When did you first see the body?

MAID

When I saw the mouse, I suppose.

INSPECTOR

Do you know his name?

MAID

Of course not. I never saw that mouse before in my life.

INSPECTOR

I meant the dead man. Mice don't have names.

MAID

Except Micky.

INSPECTOR

All right, except Micky.

MAID

And Minnie.

INSPECTOR

I mean real mice, not cartoon mice. Real mice have no names. Now, someone tell me who is this man?

YVONNE

That's my husband.

NARRATOR

A voice rang out from the crowd of guests.

INSPECTOR

Who said that?

NARRATOR

I did. But don't talk to me. I'm the narrator. You can't hear me or see me. Only the audience can.

INSPECTOR

I wasn't talking to you. And I certainly can see you and hear you.

NARRATOR

No you can't. How many fingers am I holding up?

INSPECTOR

Three.

NARRATOR

Lucky guess.

(CONTINUED)

INSPECTOR

Good, can we along then? You, Madam, what is your relationship to the deceased?

YVONNE

We were married, once.

INSPECTOR

No Mam, I've never met you before. And I've never been married.

YVONNE

Not you. I was married to the dead man.

MAID

Oh that's just gross.

INSPECTOR

Madam, the important question here is: Do you have an alibi?

YVONNE

I must. My husband brought me everything. Let me look in my purse.

INSPECTOR

You can't have an alibi in your purse.

YVONNE

I can if I want to. I carry a lot of things in my purse. Look, my makeup, my pen, tissues -

INSPECTOR

Yes, yes, you have many things in your purse but you can't have an alibi

YVONNE

Wait. I have doggy treats, a can of hairspray, two tickets to something, a parrot,

INSPECTOR

Madam listen to me. An alibi is not something you can carry in your purse.

YVONNE

That's what they said about the parrot. Well, if I don't have an alibi maybe I could use my husbands. I'm sure he had one. He owned everything.

INSPECTOR

Your husband is the one person who doesn't need an alibi.

YVONNE

Oh I know. He had a lot of things he didn't need.
Horses he couldn't ride, gold plated hats, pms -

INSPECTOR

Ironically, although he didn't need an alibi, he has
the best one of all.

YVONNE

Of course. It was only the best for my husband. Could
you help me put all this stuff back in my purse?

INSPECTOR

Now look, all of you. If I ask you for an alibi, it
means tell me where you were at the time of the murder.
Do you have that?

YVONNE

I think so. But you make everything so confusing. Just
ask simple questions with simple words. I liked the
question about the mouse's name.

INSPECTOR

I don't want to know the mouse's name.

MAN

Then why in the world did you waste so much time asking
about it? I think it's a red herring.

MAID

No it's definitely a mouse. I know what a mouse looks
like. They're small and grey and they wiggle their
noses like this-

INSPECTOR

No, miss. He wasn't referring to that. It's a term that
means misleading information- Because people used to
use red herring to throw hunting dogs off their trail.
So you see, A red herring is something that doesn't
matter.

MAID

If it doesn't matter, why do you keep talking about it.

MAN

Right, well, it matters to me.

YVONNE

And why should red herring matter to you?

MAN

I'm a fisherman.

NARRATOR

That explains the smell. How many fingers do I have up?

MAN

One.

NARRATOR

Ha! Wrong. This is a thumb. I don't have any fingers up. Ha, Ha. You can't see me. You can't see me.

INSPECTOR

What most people fail to realize is this: You can't catch red herrings, because in fact, a herring is red only after it's been smoked. So how can you catch them?

MAN

It's a mystery, ain't it!

INSPECTOR

What do you mean by that?

MAN

This is a mystery, ain't it? And there's always lots of red herrings in a mystery. That's why I come here. Best place ta catch 'em.

OLD WOMAN

Yes it's true. I used to have red hair. Couldn't tell now, it's just grey.

INSPECTOR

I wasn't talking about red hair. Enough of this. Let's get down to business. Who killed this man?

MAID

Oh right. Like someone is likely to say, "Oh, since you asked in such a forceful way- I did." Besides, if we tell you that- well what kind of mystery would this be?

YVONNE

None at all. I'll tell you that. I think this inspector should stop worrying about mice and fish, and start trying to solve this case.

OLD WOMAN

and all this talk about lullabies. Who cares?

INSPECTOR

alibis- not lullabyes.

CORPSE

Ohhhhhh

(CONTINUED)

YVONNE

Inspector look! The dead man. He's alive!

INSPECTOR

Yes, of course he is. Look at the knife in his back. The odd angle at which it was forced into him and the shallowness of the wound will tell us who the murder is.

MAN

But inspector, if he's alive, shouldn't we get him to a hospital?

INSPECTOR

In time. But for now he is the only evidence we have. Now lets take a closer look at this knife.

CORPSE

Ohhhhhhhh

INSPECTOR

It seems to be in deeper than I thought. Could I get someone to help me here? Thanks. Now pull.

CORPSE

ohhhhhhhhhhh

MAN

It's definitely stuck.

INSPECTOR

We have to pull together. I'll count to three then I want you to pull. Ready one two...

CORPSE

ohhhhhhhhhh

INSPECTOR

What are you doing? I said pull after three.

MAN

I thought you meant on three, you know: one, two, pull.

INSPECTOR

If I meant one, two, pull, I would have said one, two, pull. I said one two three pull. Now try again.

CORPSE

Ohhhhhhhhhh

OLD WOMAN

Why are they dancing? When are they going to sing the lullabies?

YVONNE

No granny. There are no lullabies.

OLD WOMAN

There are too lullabies. Lots of lullabies, young lady. Thousands of them and some of them are very pretty. Like the one that goes: rock a bye baby on the tree top, when the wind blows-

CORPSE

ohhhhh ohhhhhhhh ohhhhhhhh ohhhhhh

OLD WOMAN

That's right, everyone sing along.

MAID

Inspector, I think the corpse is trying to tell you something.

INSPECTOR

Yes, so he is.

CORPSE

My haaaaa...

MAID

What is it inspector? What is he saying?

INSPECTOR

I'm not sure. It sounds like "my haaaaa..."

YVONNE

My hat. He's saying my hat. He wants his hat.

CORPSE

yuron my haaaaa...

INSPECTOR

No I don't think so. My haaaaa. What are some haaa words?

YVONNE

Hat is the only one I can think of.

MAID

Habit-ham-hang-hand -half and half-

INSPECTOR

Wait a minute. Go back.

NARRATOR

The guests at the Dunbar mansion were nervous. It wasn't the fact that a savage storm had taken their

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NARRATOR (cont'd)

lights and they had to do with old candelabras. Nor was it the fact -

INSPECTOR

Not that far back. Right before half and half.

MAID

Ham? You think he has a ham?

INSPECTOR

No, he doesn't have a ham- or a hat. But he does have a hand.

YVONNE

Hand. That's it. You're standing on his hand.

CORPSE

yuuuh stan din on haaaaa. . .

INSPECTOR

Well that's the obvious explanation. Anyone can figure out the obvious.

CORPSE

geee offf my haaaaa!!!!

INSPECTOR

In all my days investigating these sort of things, I think I can honestly say that I have never heard a dead man complain so much. There, I'm off your stupid hand. Are you happy now?

CORPSE

yuuuuuuh

INSPECTOR

Well as long as you're so full of chit-chat this evening, suppose you tell us this: WHO IS YOUR MURDERER?

sfx: (thunder)

MAN

Well, there he goes again. Tryin' to get someone else to do his work. A fisherman wouldn't get very far with that sort of lazy attitude.

YVONNE

He's not much of a detective is he?

MAID

All this fuss over a mouse. I'm sorry I mentioned it.

OLD WOMAN

I was thinking about that lullaby - Why would someone rock a baby in a tree top? You see what comes of it- babies falling and all that.

MAN

Granny, its just a song.

OLD WOMAN

Yes it's wrong. Scares the poor children. That's what you should be investigating, Inspector. Not wasting your time on mice. We just need a cat.

INSPECTOR

Wait a minute. Where are you all going? Don't leave. I haven't told you who the killer is.

MAN

As if you knew.

INSPECTOR

Time, it takes time.

YVONNE

C'mon everybody lets go into the Dining hall and play clue until the television comes back on.

NARRATOR

And so, the guests retired to the sitting room where they played clue until the television came back on. And no one could hear me, or see me, and they certainly didn't know how many fingers I have up.

INSPECTOR

Four, and a thumb. You're not invisible.

NARRATOR

And you're not too good at solving mysteries.

CORPSE

Caaaaa somewhaaaa cahlllllll nine wunnnnnn wunnnnnnn
fuhhhh meee pleeeeeeeese?

NARRATOR & INSPECTOR

Oh Shut up!

sfx (thunder)