

A murder mystery to die for



Remain Seated

By Cenarth Fox

A fast-moving mystery thriller with plenty of suspense.

Tongala Little Theatre Inc

A combination of drama, comedy and farce with more twists than a country lane. **Sunshine Community Theatre Inc**

A challenging play for both actors and audiences. The final scene is a real cliffhanger. **Kingsport Players**

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

REMAIN SEATED

A Mystery Thriller!

A play by Cenarth Fox
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Production Notes

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



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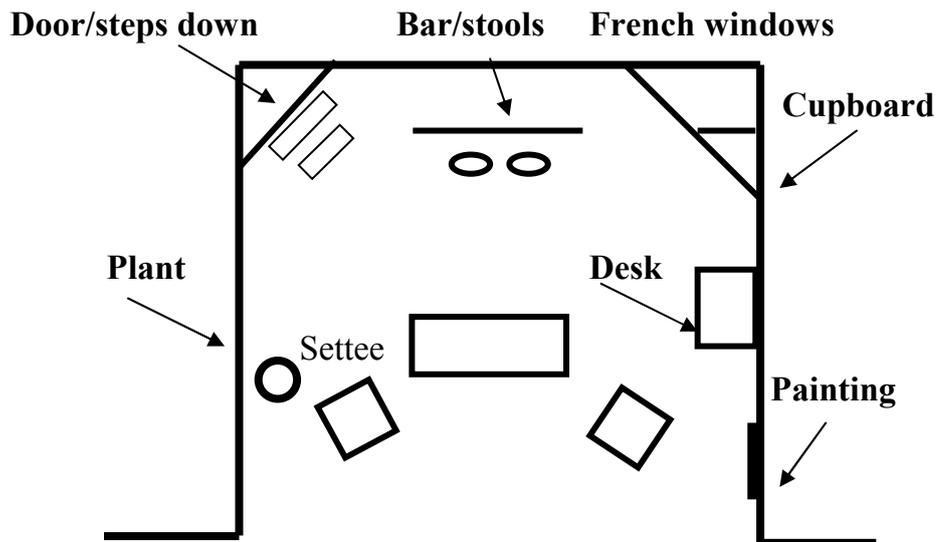
Synopsis

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

Setting and Time

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

Stage Setting



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Characters

COLIN DOUGLAS - middle-aged, self-made, self-educated, successful businessman, owns his own business, not a slob but lacks sophistication, no flair, not a film-star
ROGER GRIFFITH - the actor playing Colin, flashy, sophisticated, self-indulgent, a touch over-the-top, if there is such a thing as a stereotype thespian - he's it
SHIRLEY DOUGLAS - Colin's wife, middle-aged, lacks style or class, not common but certainly down-to-earth, loud, gives as good as she gets, enjoys a drink and a laugh
LOIS FENWICK - the actor playing Shirley, mature, generally quiet and polite
GARY DOUGLAS - Colin and Shirley's son, young adult, immature, too big for his boots, self-indulgent, pushy, chauvinist, impolite, wise guy
PETER REYNOLDS - the actor playing Gary, caring, sensitive, quietly-spoken
DENISE DOUGLAS - Gary's wife, young adult, quiet, timid, insipid, suffers in silence
CARRIE ALMOND - the actor playing Denise, independent, strong, articulate
TERRI FENTON - stage manager, could be young [20] or older [up to 50], loves live theatre, gets on well with actors, good at her job, good at her work, a professional
SUE TROMPP - young or middle-aged woman who works in the local theatre company
LENA FRANCIS - Colin's accountant, 30ish, sophisticated, intelligent, attractive, well-dressed, successful businesswoman, independent, decision-maker, slight foreign accent
ROBERT BURTON - middle-aged policeman, detective-sergeant attached to homicide-squad, dedicated, industrious, an average, ordinary, battling copper
LOUISE DRAUF - policewoman, constable, youngish, inexperienced, quietly spoken, good officer, dedicated, career policewoman likely to succeed
Note: The first ten characters require only five players.

ACT ONE

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

Colin *(From off-stage UR)* 'Later' I said. Come on, let's have a drink.
(SHIRLEY panics, looks around, terrified. She closes the drawer, darts to settee and slips gun under closest corner. She turns and races upstage. French windows are locked. "Damn" she mutters again and dives for the adjacent cupboard/closet. Both doors i.e. UR and cupboard [UL] open simultaneously. SHIRLEY enters cupboard and closes door. COLIN enters followed by LENA. He looks across at cupboard)

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

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- Lena** Unlike her husband who can't do *anything*.
- Colin** Lena, please, you know I'm crazy about you.
(Phone on bar rings. It has a soft tone. No-one moves. LENA stares at COLIN)
- Lena** Your phone's ringing.
- Colin** *(Ignores it. He's serious)* You know I want us to be together - forever!
(Moving to her) I love you.
(She hasn't moved. He starts to close in for a kiss but stops because she raises her glass and sips. Simultaneously cupboard door opens. SHIRLEY's head appears. All three freeze. Pause. Suddenly phone stops ringing. Freeze continues. Suddenly UR door opens and GARY enters. COLIN falls back from attempted kiss-position, SHIRLEY withdraws, quickly closes her hideaway door. LENA amused)
- Gary** *(Annoyed)* Dad. Phone. *(Pause because COLIN is worried about LENA)* Did you hear me?
- Colin** *(Rising, annoyed)* Yes, I'm coming.
- Gary** It's L.A. *(or London or Sydney)*
(GARY moves to bar. LENA places her glass on side-table and hastily puts on her shoes. She starts to follow COLIN wearing only one shoe. COLIN goes to bar, deposits his glass thereon and heads to door UR. LENA calls in haste)
- Lena** That'll be Max. Could be the contract!
- Colin** I'll take it in the study. *(He's about to exit but stops as LENA calls)*
- Lena** Insist on the terms as stated. No discount.
(LENA is about centre trying to replace her other shoe. She stops when COLIN, at the door UR, turns and speaks with a touch of nastiness)
- Colin** I'm a big boy, Lena. Just keep an eye on Junior.
(COLIN exits. LENA is off-balance holding one of her shoes. Pause. LENA's awkward balance adds to the embarrassment caused by COLIN's rebuke. GARY moves to LENA and holds her allowing the shoe to be replaced. GARY grins smugly and refuses to release the now well-balanced LENA)
- Gary** Nice shoes. Nice legs. How 'bout a drink?
- Lena** *(Recovering)* I'm fine.
- Gary** *(Leans closer)* I mean a *real* drink.
- Lena** *(Rhetorical)* What, from a *real* man? *(LENA drifts back to settee).*
- Gary** *(GARY takes empty glass back to bar)* Relax, lose the shoes. *(LENA shakes her head at the juvenile remarks and sits above hidden gun. GARY mixes drinks)* So what was that all about?
- Lena** *(Out front)* Where's your lovely wife?
- Gary** *(Ignores her)* A lovers' tiff, hey? *(LENA ignores him, removes her shoes and again tosses them on the floor near the hidden gun)* Not to worry. One of my cocktails and you're a new woman.

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(LENA rolls her eyes, draws her stockinged-feet up onto the settee. GARY comes down carrying two glasses. He's oozing cheap charm which hardly impresses the sophisticated LENA. GARY hands her a glass, sits where his father sat and proposes a toast)

Gary To the best-looking accountant in the world. *(They clink glasses and drink. GARY is anxious to get her reaction)* Well?

Lena Don't look now but your insincerity's showing.

Gary *(Smug)* So you and the old man are splitting?

Lena Curiosity killed the brat.

Gary *(Smiles at her barb but counters)* Y'see I'm hoping when you drop off Dad, you might land on me - *literally* speaking.

Lena Well let's face it, figuratively has too many syllables.

Gary I like an intelligent bimbo.

(Cupboard door opens slowly and SHIRLEY looks out. Pause. The conversation continues. SHIRLEY crouches and gingerly moves forward towards the settee)

Lena *(Between sips)* So how long before you take over Daddy's business?

Gary Don't ask me. I'm not his sleeping partner.

(GARY slides towards LENA. This causes SHIRLEY to drop on all fours. She freezes. After a pause she continues her journey downstage crawling carefully)

Lena You know there's something fascinating about a love-hate relationship.

Gary Magic. Dangerous. You never know what'll happen next.

(GARY is trying to seduce his father's mistress. LENA's simply playing along. SHIRLEY reaches the L side of the settee and feels for the gun. She must negotiate LENA's shoes. After some fumbling, SHIRLEY locates and delicately retrieves the gun. Above her, the combatants continue their word games)

Lena Isn't it past your bedtime?

Gary It is. And you could tuck me in.

Lena What? No story?

Gary Of course. Let's have *Snow White and the Handsome Prince*.

Lena You'd make a lovely dwarf.

Gary *(Sings a la Maurice Chevalier)* And little men get bigger every day.

(GARY leans across to kiss LENA. SHIRLEY has the gun and kneels up pointing it straight at LENA's back. GARY can't see his mother because of LENA. SHIRLEY is about to speak when the door UR opens and DENISE enters. She's a shy woman treated poorly by her chauvinistic husband. One day she'll stand up to GARY but not today)

Denise *(Looking for her husband)* Gary?

(SHIRLEY nearly dies and ducks down beside the settee. GARY freezes, quietly fumes then slides back away from LENA)

Gary Ah the wicked witch. *(Holds glass aloft)* Denise, same again.

(DENISE comes down, takes GARY's glass, stops, looks at LENA)

Denise Where are your shoes?

Lena *(Suddenly drains her glass and holds it towards DENISE)* You're too kind.

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

Gary Denise! What the hell?

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

Gary *(Rising)* What?

(LENA replaces her shoes. DENISE comes down. GARY confronts her C)

Denise She's in the cupboard.

(GARY looks towards silent, shut cupboard, quickly dismisses DENISE's claim)

Gary God you're bloody stupid?

Denise *(Close to tears)* Don't speak to me like that.

Gary I'm trying to do some important business with Lena.

(GARY points a finger at DENISE threatening her. Suddenly UR door opens and COLIN enters. He surveys the scene. GARY is caught threatening his wife)

Colin What's going on?

Gary *(Snaps back)* Nothing.

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

Denise Shirley's in the cupboard.

Colin *(Coming down and ignoring DENISE)* Take Denise home.

(COLIN brushes past GARY and confronts LENA from behind)

Gary *(Angry)* No! Mum invited us for tea.

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

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

Lena *(Rising)* I think I'll leave too.

(LENA starts to move but stops when COLIN speaks)

Colin *(Threatens LENA)* You stay!

(Pause. Tense moment. LENA pauses then starts towards the UR door)

Lena No thanks. Give Shirley my apologies.

(COLIN moves upstage, may have to push GARY aside and blocks LENA's path)

Gary *(Alarmed)* Dad! Behave!

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

Lena I charge double for house calls. *(COLIN grabs her arm)* Ow, you're hurting me!
(COLIN won't let go and LENA tries to break his hold. She slaps him and the fighting escalates. GARY leaps on his father and they struggle RC/DR. LENA stumbles DL. DENISE distressed and flits between helping LENA and separating the men. Ad lib simultaneous dialogue)

Colin Get off! Get off me! *(etc)*

Gary *(Grabbing COLIN's flailing arms)* You bastard! Are you mad? *(etc)*

Denise Stop! Somebody help! Gary! *(etc)*

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- Lena** *(Holding her face) My arm! Get a doctor! I'll kill you, Colin! (etc)*
(The activity and ad lib dialogue continues for several seconds. It builds to a fever pitch when suddenly a gun is discharged)
- FX** **Gunshot**
(Everyone freezes. Slowly they disentangle themselves and all turn to face the cupboard. Pause. Slowly the cupboard door opens and SHIRLEY emerges. She holds the gun and looks as horrified as the others)
- Colin** *(Stunned) Shirley?*
- Gary** *(Likewise stunned) Mum?*
- Denise** I told you she was in there.
- Lena** *(Recovers. Sarcastic) Well, well, if it isn't Annie Oakley.*
(SHIRLEY recovers. She points the gun at LENA and has evil in her eyes. Pause. She is about to shoot)
- Colin** *(Moving towards C) I'll take that. These things can be ... (COLIN stops suddenly when SHIRLEY points gun at him) ... dangerous.*
- Gary** Mum! Don't! Please!
(SHIRLEY relaxes her aim a little. The immediate threat seems over. Pause)
- Colin** *(Nervous) Are you all right?*
- Shirley** *(Smiles) Fine. (Others visibly relieved that SHIRLEY seems normal) But your golf-bag scored a hole-in-one. (Feeble laugh from others)*
- Lena** *(Calm and a bit disgusted) How long were you in there?*
- Shirley** Long enough. *(Waves gun to settee) Why don't we all sit down?*
- Lena** I was just leaving.
- Shirley** *(Suddenly nasty) Sit down. (SHIRLEY menaces LENA with gun. LENA pauses then sits in usual spot on settee. SHIRLEY snaps at the others) All of you.*
(The others are timid, afraid. GARY and DENISE go to settee and sit next to LENA. GARY is between the two women. COLIN tries to reason)
- Colin** Shirl, darling, let's talk.
- Shirley** Oh we'll talk, *darling. (Indicates settee with gun. Angry) Sit!*
(COLIN nervously crosses to single chair beside settee RC. SHIRLEY crosses DR)
- Shirley** Competition-time, folks. One lucky winner wins the silver-slug.
- Gary** *(Nervous, afraid) Mum! This is crazy!*
- Shirley** *(Suddenly nasty) No talking! (Wandering behind settee. Others even more scared not knowing what is happening behind them) Right then, question one.*
(SHIRLEY moves as she speaks) Calling myself a devoted husband and father, I'm really a conniving, two-timing womaniser. (Snaps at COLIN from slightly upstage) Who am I? (Pause. COLIN petrified. This is it. Confess and die) Well? (Slowly COLIN raises his hand. SHIRLEY delighted) Well?
- Colin** *(Can hardly speak) Colin? (SHIRLEY is thrilled, macabre delight)*

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- Shirley** Correct. Well done. *(Suddenly disgusted and turns on the frozen others)* Oh come on, a little encouragement, please. *(Pathetic applause from others. SHIRLEY instantly back to evil inquisitor/quizmaster)* Now, with lousy taste and plastic everything, I specialise in books, blokes and beds. *(Super nasty behind LENA)* Who am I? *(LENA doesn't hesitate and raises her hand. LENA is calm)* Ah, a confident contestant.
- Lena** Moi.
(OTHERS look confused. Even SHIRLEY thrown but quickly recovers)
- Shirley** *(In close to LENA. Sarcastic)* Nice one, Moi. *(SHIRLEY steps back and continues her game)* A pathetic copy of my chauvinistic father, I treat my wife like dirt. Who am I?
(Pressure too great for GARY who blurts out answer without raising his hand)
- Gary** Me! It's me! Oh Mum, I'm sorry ... *(Buries head in hands and sobs)*
- Shirley** *(Annoyed)* Proper names, proper names.
- Gary** *(Almost chokes his confession)* Is it Gary?
- Shirley** Yes! Correct! Come on; give it up for Number Three. *(OTHERS give polite applause. GARY returns to silent sobbing)* Now checking the scores we have *(Big mock-excited voice)* a three-way tie! *(SHIRLEY sudden mood change again as she swings back into the game)*
Right, final question. I'm the weak and miserable wife of a moron who walks all over me *(Emphasises)* and gets away with it! *(Louder near DENISE)* Who am I?
(DENISE is far too scared and confused to know what to do. Pause. SHIRLEY jabs DENISE who screams/whimpers. GARY decides to help her out)
- Gary** *(Whispers)* It's you. *(SHIRLEY is enraged and roars at GARY)*
- Shirley** *(Furious)* No cheating! *(Pause. Fear dominates. DENISE looks in fear at GARY who gives a tiny nod. DENISE briefly raises her hand. SHIRLEY delighted. Mock surprise at having found a winner)* Yes, over here.
- Denise** *(Pathetic whimper)* It's me. *(Almost choking with fear)* Denise.
- Shirley** *(Instantly SHIRLEY back to mock-delight)* Correct. *(SHIRLEY suddenly mock-surprised)* Oh no! It's a four-way tie. One more question. Sudden-death. *(Suddenly sotto-voce, evil)* Sudden-death. Get it? *(OTHERS do get it but dare not respond. SHIRLEY steps back)* Right. Who am I? Born a long time ago, I consider myself attractive to the opposite sex. I'm wrong. My greatest talent lies in using people. I earn far more than I deserve. I have no friends and delight in destroying others. I'm selfish, conniving and decidedly evil! *(Pause)* Who am I? *(SHIRLEY wanders back and forth behind settee. Others unsure)* Well? *(GARY raises his hand. It has to be him)*
- Gary** It's me. Gary.
- Shirley** *(Scoffs)* Wrong! *(Relieved, GARY withdraws his hand. Pause. Tension mounts. COLIN is feeling the heat. With fear and trembling he slowly raises his hand. SHIRLEY is pleased)*

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Aha! We're getting warmer. *(In close to COLIN)* Nice try but wrong! *(COLIN quickly withdraws his hand and breathes deeply. Pause. SHIRLEY steps back and looks at LENA. The others turn and look at LENA. They can't turn too much. Just when we expect LENA to raise her hand, she calmly rises, moves DL and adjusts her hair in a mirror [or maybe reflection of glass over the crummy print. SHIRLEY is white with rage. OTHERS freeze])* Hey! Get back! Now!

- Lena** *(Adjusting her hair. Cool)* Game over, Shirl.
- Shirley** *(Recovering and now nasty)* Oh it's a game is it? Monopoly versus marriage. Pass go, collect two million quid and *(spiteful)* my husband!
(LENA continues adjusting her hair and could even touch up her lipstick)
- Lena** *(Not turning)* It's not a nice look, being the sore loser.
- Shirley** *(Points gun at LENA's back)* Guess who's the loser? Turn around.
- Colin** *(Desperate)* Shirley! For God's sake!
- Lena** *(Turning, calm)* But then class and money don't always go together.
- Shirley** *(Takes aim at LENA)* I'm going to enjoy this!
- Colin** *(Rising, facing SHIRLEY)* Shirley!
(Pause. Just as SHIRLEY is about to shoot LENA she suddenly swings the gun at COLIN. He nearly dies of fright. GARY and DENISE crouch in fear)
- Shirley** *(Nasty at COLIN)* Come on hero. Save your damsel in distress. *(Pause)* Try it. I dare you! *(COLIN is no hero and cowers in fear. Finally GARY breaks the ice)*
- Gary** Mum! We can talk this out!
- Shirley** *(Moves into GARY and mimics him)* Well I'm hoping when you drop off Dad, you might land on me - *literally* speaking. *(GARY is petrified)*
- Gary** It was a joke. *(Desperate to the calm LENA)* Lena. Tell her it was a joke.
- Lena** You're the joke.
- Gary** *(Can't believe it)* What?!
- Lena** Like father, like son. You're all clammy hands and clichés.
- Shirley** *(SHIRLEY is amused)* Oh I like that.
- Lena** We've got something in common, Shirl. Both involved with the same morons.
- Colin** *(Mixture of fear and anger)* Lena! This is not funny!
- Shirley** Nice try, Honey, but it won't work.
- Lena** Of course it will. You liquidate the losers and take the lot.
- Gary** *(Desperate)* Liquidate!
- Colin** Right that's enough. You're both acting like idiots.
- Shirley** *(Threatens COLIN)* Don't you dare call me an idiot, you idiot!
- Lena** Paris, New York, furs, fellas. Look with hubby and offspring deceased, the company's yours.
- Shirley** *(Turning on COLIN)* You said the business was bust.
- Colin** It is! We're virtually broke!
- Lena** *(Laughing)* Broke! He just clinched a deal worth ten mill.
- Shirley** *(Staggered)* Ten million!
- Colin** *(Rising)* This is insane.

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- Shirley** *(Angry at COLIN)* Sit down!
- Colin** *(Angry. Decides to make a stand)* No! Give me the gun.
(SHIRLEY takes aim at COLIN. LENA slowly and carefully moves upstage)
- Shirley** Certainly. Here's a down-payment.
- Colin** *(Freezes but still defiant)* You'll get twenty years.
- Shirley** You'll get life!
(LENA is now behind SHIRLEY and grabs a small statue from the writing-desk. LENA raises statue and moves to attack SHIRLEY. DENISE sees this and screams! SHIRLEY turns just in time to avoid being hit. Instead, LENA's statue hits the gun which is sent flying UC. SHIRLEY and COLIN dive for the gun. LENA falls over LC. SHIRLEY gets gun, points it at COLIN who quickly backs DR. GARY and DENISE crouch on the settee until GARY suddenly grabs DENISE and scurries DL. GARY holds DENISE in front of him using her as a shield. Typical! LENA grabs SHIRLEY from behind. They grab one another's hands in struggle for gun. Lots of grunting/puffing as they head upstage. Gun is swung towards COLIN who suddenly ducks and holds his head expecting the worst. The well-choreographed fight moves behind bar. The women fall to the floor out of sight. The following lines spoken ad lib and often over the top of one another. Who speaks what is not important. "Get off!" "Bitch!" "Let go!" "Ow!" "Ahh!" "I'll kill you!" "No!!" "Stop it!" etc. A mixture of screams and yells are mixed with dialogue. OTHERS peer nervously at unseen fighters. Suddenly two shots are heard in rapid succession. OTHERS are mortified. Pause. Silence. What has happened? Slowly SHIRLEY's head and shoulders appear. SHIRLEY looks dazed as if she's been shot)
- Colin** *(In a trance)* Shirley?
- Gary** *(In a trance)* Mum?
(Slowly LENA's head and shoulders appear above bar)
- Denise** Lena?
(LENA too looks dazed as if shot. The women turn and look at one another. Their faces are expressionless. Pause. Slowly they both slide from view. Pause. The others start to move to bar when SHIRLEY hops to her feet, clutching the gun and dusts herself down. The others freeze. LENA EXITS UNSEEN)
- Shirley** *(Enjoying herself, good spirits, moving C)* Well so much for the arm-wrestling. Now where were we?
- Colin** *(Still distressed)* Shirley! What happened?
- Gary** *(Equally distressed)* Mum! Where's Lena?
- Denise** *(The only one genuinely concerned)* Are you okay?
- Shirley** *(Cool as if nothing's happened)* I'm fine. *(Brief look at the unseen LENA)* But the bookkeeper's ah ... in the red! *(SHIRLEY enjoys her pun and gives a crazy laugh and smile. COLIN starts towards her. SHIRLEY instantly changes to nasty maniac. Pointing gun)* Freeze! *(COLIN stops dead)*
- Colin** *(Pleading)* Shirley, she might be dead.
- Shirley** *(Blowing casually into gun-barrel)* No might about it.
- Colin** You killed her.

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

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

Colin We'd better call the police.

Shirley *(Angry and threatening again)* Not yet. She died accidentally so we forget the fight and call it suicide.

Others *(In shock)* Suicide!

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

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

Gary I don't want anything to do with this.

Denise I'm going to be sick.

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

Shirley A fight means a possible trial. If I'm charged, this whole bloody mess goes viral. We'll be on everyone's smart phone. Is that what you want? *(Pause)* Well?

Colin *(In frustration)* You stupid, stupid woman.

(He breaks down and sobs. SHIRLEY is ice-cool)

Shirley Right, suicide it is. Denise, check the body.

Denise *(Sits up horrified)* No! No!

Gary I'll do it.

(GARY moves behind bar, disappears. DENISE follows. We can't see them. COLIN stops sobbing. SHIRLEY wipes the gun with a handkerchief. COLIN turns, emotional)

Colin I loved that woman. She meant the world to me.

Shirley *(Casual, wiping gun)* Is this how you remove fingerprints?

Colin You could have taken the money.

Shirley Oh I will. The lot.

(Now begins a time when the actors pretend to be ad-libbing. They pretend to have broken away from the script)

(Suddenly DENISE screams and rises horrified. She clutches her face and staggers downstage. SHIRLEY moves LC. GARY rises shocked. COLIN and SHIRLEY are stunned)

Denise *(Pointing behind bar)* She's dead. *(The others freeze)*

Gary Ah, Denise ... it's okay. Everything's fine.

Denise *(Hysterical but able to be understood)* She's dead! Oh God, Katie's dead!

(DENISE dissolves into hysterical sobs. COLIN moves to her. SHIRLEY is thrown by this and suddenly threatens COLIN with the gun)

Shirley *(Threatens)* Nobody moves! *(COLIN comforts DENISE)* Did you hear me?

Gary *(Nervous)* Ah, Mum. *(Delivers the line as if it has never been in the script before)* Don't you think we should call an ambulance?

REMAIN SEATED 13

- Shirley** *(Genuinely confused)* What?
- Colin** *(Comforting distraught DENISE)* Yes. I think we should call an ambulance.
- Shirley** *(Getting angry)* Look I'm in charge here. I give the orders.
(DENISE breaks free from COLIN and staggers towards SHIRLEY)
- Denise** Lois, Katie's turned blue. I think she's really dead!
- Shirley** *(Thrown again)* Who's Katie?
- Denise** *(Turns DL, shouts off-stage)* Oh for God's sake, Terri. *(Dramatic)* She's dead!
(DENISE collapses. Pause. GARY then COLIN then SHIRLEY all rush to help her. Pause. Suddenly, quickly the lights dim. BLACKOUT. Audience can hear muffled talking. TERRI enters. We can see everyone gathering upstage. Actors and stage-manager are discussing situation. It's very dim but during next few seconds we see frantic activity. We can just make out a dummy of LENA being carried offstage with most of the company lending a hand. Finally TERRI is ordered to do something and the nervous stage manager moves DC)
- Terri** Ian, could I have a spot, please?
*(A spot shines on TERRI who shields her eyes. The real house lights do **not** come up and the audience remain in darkness. TERRI is not used to public-speaking let alone emergencies)*
- Terri** Ladies and gentlemen, if I could have your attention. *(Waits for hubbub to subside)* I don't know how to say this. We've had to call an ambulance because one of our actors is ill. *(TERRI chokes)* The last part of that scene wasn't actually in the script. Could you please remain seated for a short time whilst I just check the situation? *(COLIN screams/cries in anguish from upstage/offstage. TERRI thrown)* I'll be right back.

(TERRI disappears upstage out of the spot. Again we hear muffled conversation/frantic whispers as the cast discuss the situation. This needs to be heard but not heard. Too dramatic a scene could provoke laughter. It's serious not farcical. After several seconds, TERRI emerges once again. The lights glare and she again shields her eyes to address the pretend audience)
- Terri** Ah, ladies and gentlemen. *(Audience quietens)* Thank you. *(TERRI shocked and struggling to speak)* I'm not sure what to say. As I said, we've called an ambulance as one of our actors is ... *(She chokes then recovers)* I'm sorry. I don't think we can continue. There's been an accident. Nothing to do with the play. I think it's serious. It's *(Fighting back tears)* I'm not sure what to suggest. Perhaps we could take an early interval ... if you wouldn't mind.
- FX** *(Sound of an ambulance siren is heard in the background)*
- Terri** Look, I'm really sorry. As I said, perhaps you could move to the foyer and ...
(Distressed, TERRI hands to head)
- Burton** *(From rear of theatre)* Is there a problem? *(TERRI looks into audience)* Can I help?
- Terri** *(Head up, shading eyes, looks in direction of BURTON'S voice)* I'm sorry.
- Burton** *(Starts moving down aisle)* Is this part of the play or a real emergency?

REMAIN SEATED 14

- Terri** No it's real. There's been an accident.
- Burton** *(Still coming forward)* So I'm not interrupting anything?
- Terri** No, it's not part of the play. Are you a doctor?
- Burton** Police. How can I help?
(BURTON holds his ID card aloft and TERRI waves in acknowledgment)
- Terri** Thanks. *(Is now embarrassed so tries to speak confidentially but without success)*
Look, it's bad; they're taking her straight to hospital.
- Burton** Is the actor dead?
- Terri** *(Ddistraught)* We're not sure. She looked terrible and ... Look, can you come backstage? *(TERRI breaks down, recovers. BURTON takes control)*
- Burton** Calm down. Call the local police. Tell them I'm here. Tell them an ambulance is on its way and if I need their help, I'll call them on my radio.
(DRAUF enters from side entrance or at side of stage. BURTON sees her) Wait. They're here already. *(To DRAUF)* Are you local?
- Drauf** Who are you?
- Burton** *(Again shows ID)* Burton. Homicide. And you are?
- Drauf** Constable Drauf, sir. Just transferred from City. We followed the ambulance.
- Burton** Right. Have your partner stay with the ambulance. Get statements from the paramedics and the hospital. Call the station. Explain the set-up. Tell them we'll call for back-up if necessary.
- Drauf** Yes sir. *(DRAUF exits back through the theatre)*
- Burton** *(Calling)* Then report back to me.
- Drauf** *(Calling before she disappears)* Right sir.
(She exits. BURTON moves backstage. TERRI alone on stage, more confused)
- Terri** *(To audience)* I'll just check on things, ladies and gentlemen. *(Scratching her head as she departs)* I'm sorry about this.
(She exits to darkness. Another 10-20 second pause. Muffled voices. Whispers in the darkness. BURTON enters from the wings and moves DC. This is the first time he's had to look directly into the lights. He shields his face)
- Burton** Ladies and gentlemen. *(Pause if necessary for hubbub to cease)* As you've heard from the stage manager, one of the cast has collapsed. I'm afraid it's serious. If there are any friends or relatives of the actor here tonight, will you please go to the foyer now. *(Pause. You could have one/two plants who get up and go. Please make sure that anyone who does know the actor is not put through unnecessary distress. This part of the play may need to be explained to some people)* Right, well the constable spoke briefly with the ambulance crew and I regret to advise ... *(Pause, softer)* the actor would appear to have died. *(Pause)* My name is Burton. I'm a detective-sergeant with the Homicide Squad. I was off-duty in the audience. Obviously the play can't continue and I guess the company will make some announcement in due course. Meanwhile, I'll conduct a brief inquiry, certainly until the local officers get here. Some of you may need to make a statement. Don't worry.

REMAIN SEATED 15

It's just routine and won't take long. So, *(Turns to the wings DL)* if we could have some more lights, please.

(Pause. Slowly general stage lighting comes up. On stage, lighting is full or almost so. Company are sorry lot. CARRIE on sofa being comforted by PETER. TERRI and DRAUF are UL inspecting bar/cupboard. TERRI explaining how it is used. DRAUF has note-pad/pencil. LOIS slumped in chair DR and ROGER sits on steps UR. He has a drink and takes a swig from time to time. When lights come up, actors are unimpressed. They try to cover their emotions but are not happy. BURTON turns to face them)

Burton Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

Roger Is this really necessary?

Burton Yes sir, it is.

Roger *(Not happy)* Not the questions. *(Indicates audience)* Them. Send them home or at least close the damn curtain.

Lois *(Also embarrassed at exposure to audience)* I agree. The play's over.

Burton Please, I need to take statements from the company and then discuss things with the audience.

Roger What? *All* of them?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lois How long will that take?

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

Roger *(Furious)* Oh terrific. We lose a colleague in tragic circumstances. We're literally in shock and you make us sit in the corner. *(Cast upset)*

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

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

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

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

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

Lois Roger, it's their job.

REMAIN SEATED 16

- Roger** Wonderful. *(Pause)* Well can we get on?
- Burton** Yes and I'd like the lights on the audience please. *(Looks around)* Can we do that?
- Terri** *(Calls)* Cue the house, Ian.
(Slowly a spot comes up on the auditorium wall and we pretend the audience is lit. In fact they remain seated in the dark)
- Burton** Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. This is a preliminary investigation. I need to obtain details concerning the incident in case such information is required at a later date. Please bear with us. The company members will answer a few questions. So please keep the noise down and if you wouldn't mind, remain seated.
(BURTON addresses the COMPANY. Obviously he allows his voice to be heard in the auditorium even though he is speaking only to those on stage)
- Burton** *(Takes out note-pad and pencil)* Let's start from when you first found the deceased. *(CARRIE sobs again and is comforted by PETER)*
- Peter** *(Comforting CARRIE, speaking to BURTON)* Is it possible to use a little tact. She was a member of our company. We did know her.
- Burton** I'm sorry. I know it's hard and I'll be as quick as I can. So, who first discovered ...
- Drauf** Katie, sir.
- Terri** You can't be serious. You were in the audience. You saw what happened.
- Lois** Terri, you can't win.
- Carrie** *(Raises a hand but is still distressed)* I discovered Katie. With Peter.
- Burton** Thank you. And where was that?
- Peter** *(Still comforting CARRIE nods with his head)* Upstage. Behind the bar.
- Burton** And when did you first notice something was wrong?
- Roger** Oh come on. We knew she was dead because instead of sneaking out unseen to return to the dressing-room, she stayed on the floor slowly turning blue!
- Burton** You're not helping, sir.
- Peter** Give it a rest, Roger.
- Burton** Could I have your name, sir?
- Roger** It's in the program – under Star!
- Terri** *(Angry)* Roger! Knock it off!
- Burton** Look I think I know where the acting stopped and the real drama began but if you'll co-operate we can all go home. It's up to you.
- Roger** *(Mock respect)* I bow to the director's request.
- Terri** That's a first. *(ROGER quietly fumes, says nothing. LOIS breaks the silence)*
- Lois** Everything was as you saw it until Carrie and Peter went to check the body. That was in the script. From then, well, we started to ad lib.
- Burton** Thank you. *(Pause. Back to ROGER)* Have we met before?
- Peter** Can we please investigate the accident?
(COMPANY agree. BURTON looks hard at furious ROGER then continues)

REMAIN SEATED 17

- Burton** Right. Peter and Carrie, please show me where you found the body.
- Roger** *(Angry)* Why? You barge in here, *(Indicates audience)* flaunt yourself in front of them and what for? Anyone'd think Katie was murdered!
(Other cast members flinch at "murdered". CARRIE visibly upset. BURTON has allowed ROGER his go then counter-attacks, not viciously but with force)
- Burton** A person died here in unusual circumstances. That warrants a police investigation.
- Drauf** It's standard procedure.
- Lois** But what if it was just a heart attack?
- Burton** *(Seizes on LOIS's comment)* Did Katie have a heart condition?
- Lois** No. I'm just suggesting a possible cause.
- Burton** Well does anyone know if Katie had any health problems?
(OTHERS shake their heads)
- Terri** She wasn't sick. Just the opposite. Never missed a rehearsal.
- Burton** What about enemies, ex-boyfriends? Was anything troubling her?
- Roger** *(Angry again)* Hang on. What's with the personal questions in public?
- Peter** I agree. It's outrageous.
- Roger** *(Continues attack)* You're enjoying this. You're performing in front of this lot *(Indicating audience)* turning them into a bunch of voyeurs!
- Drauf** I think you've said enough, sir.
- Roger** *(Heaps scorn on DRAUF)* That's right, stick together. You know this is wrong.
- Drauf** I don't know that.
- Roger** You're playing along because Sherlock here is pulling rank.
- Lois** That's enough, Roger.
- Roger** *(To OTHERS)* It's a game? *(Indicates BURTON)* He gets his kicks prying into privacy. He *dreams* about these moments. This is a buzz for the fuzz!
- Burton** *(Keeps calm despite ROGER's attack)* I gather you'd prefer to make your statement at the station, sir.
- Roger** *(Sarcastic, mock surprise)* Oh no! Not the wet blanket in the cell routine!
- Burton** *(Has had enough)* I'm warning you, sir. Shut it. Now!
- Lois** Roger. Grow up!
- Burton** So we've had some experience of cells have we?
- Roger** Don't come the royal we with me, Plod. *We* mind our own business.
- Burton** This *is* my business.
- Carrie** *(Distressed)* Stop it! Stop it now! *(OTHERS freeze. She attacks)* Katie is dead and you want to fight. Who cares about police procedure, the audience, anything! *(Emphatic)* Katie was my friend and now she's dead!
- Roger** *(Pause. Ashamed)* Sorry, Caz. Really.

REMAIN SEATED 18

- Carrie** I don't care about them. *(Brief indication of audience)* I don't care about any of you. I care about Katie. *(Silence. The OTHERS are ashamed and moved at CARRIE's speech)* I don't know how she died or why but she did. And the very least we can do is show her respect. *(Pause)* Especially you. *(OTHERS stunned. BURTON recovers and addresses group in softer voice)*
- Burton** Why don't we all sit down?
(Gestures and after a pause those standing sit as follows. PETER is still on the settee, LOIS in chair DR. Reluctantly, ROGER sits on the DR end of settee with CARRIE joining him sitting between the two men. BURTON moves the arm-chair DL closer to the settee and offers it to TERRI. She accepts. DRAUF moves behind settee between LOIS and ROGER. BURTON moves C. Pause. Everyone settles. ROGER mimes his apology to CARRIE. She nods her acceptance)
- Carrie** *(Softly)* Could I have some water?
- Terri** *(Rising)* I'll get it. *(Exits LC or DL)*
- Burton** Okay. We've established no-one knew if Katie was ill or in trouble. What about family and friends?
- Lois** She had none, apart from us that is. She came from interstate last year.
- Peter** She told me her parents were dead and she's an only child.
- Burton** And what about her movements tonight? Before the play?
- Lois** She had a meal at my place. Nothing special.
- Burton** And you both ate the same meal?
- Lois** Yes exactly.
(TERRI enters with glass for CARRIE who nods, sips slowly. TERRI sits)
- Burton** What about here in the theatre? Did she have anything to eat or drink?
- Peter** She drinks on stage. We all do. Roger and I both give her ... *(Suddenly stunned)* Oh you don't mean she was poisoned!
(Time this well. PETER'S final word is explosive and CARRIE responds by blowing what's in her mouth straight out front. It should be a spray not a torrent. This naturally causes distress. CARRIE is mortified at the suggestion and upset at the mess. ROGER takes her glass, gives it to DRAUF who places it upstage on the bar. PETER is full of apologies and comforts CARRIE who brushes herself of excess moisture)
- Carrie** *(Expelling moisture)* Peter!
- Peter** Sorry, Caz, sorry.
(Don't make a scene of this and have things settle promptly. BURTON keen to pursue matters)
- Burton** So Katie had two drinks on stage before the fight?
- Roger** *(Annoyed but restrained)* Including one of my cocktails. Neat.
- Peter** But I mixed her a drink too. And we both drank it. *(To ROGER)* As did Roger.
(ROGER suddenly grabs his throat in mock horror at having poisoned himself. He is ignored and things move on quickly)
- Terri** You've opened a very large can of worms, sergeant. The entire cast handled the drinks and I prepared the brew in the first place.
(Pause. OTHERS momentarily think ROGER may have fixed KATIE'S drink)

REMAIN SEATED 19

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

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

Lois *(To BURTON)* That's what you want me to say, isn't it?

Burton I want you to tell the truth.

Lois I fought with Katie. I struck her.

Roger Pretended to.

Lois Behind the bar, out of sight, where even the other actors can't see what's happening, And then I shot Katie.

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

Burton Did something accidental happen during the fight?

Lois No.

Burton Did Katie hit her head on the floor?

Lois No.

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

Lois No.

Terri That's true. From the wings I can see Katie behind the bar.

Burton And Lois?

Terri Not as well but Katie performed as if nothing had happened.

Burton Nothing that you could see?

Terri They played it straight. They fight, move behind the bar then fall out of sight. The gun is heard with the actors unseen. Once out of sight, they stop fighting. It's called make believe.

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

Company What!?

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

Terri I told you what happened.

Lois So did I.

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

Roger What for?

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

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

Burton Thank you.

Lois We fight here and then drop out of sight.

Burton Show me what happens. *(COMPANY continue their anger)*

Lois Nothing happens.

Burton Nothing?

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

REMAIN SEATED 20

Roger *(Same old sarcasm)* It's called "suspense".
Peter It's called unnecessary interference.
Terri *(Grabs gun and heads C)* All right, I'll show you. Come on Lois.
(LOIS joins TERRI in front of settee. Police move DL. OTHERS move aside)
Lois I don't like this, Terri.
Terri *(To BURTON)* We're now behind the bar. I'm Katie. And this is what happens every night and did tonight.
Burton You realise this is serious?
Roger Serious! You've turned it into a circus.
Burton *(To the women)* Continue.
Terri You have to imagine we've been fighting and then we drop out of sight.

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

Police spellbound. Ad lib dialogue flies thick and fast. "Get off!" ... "Let go!" ... "You bitch!" ... "Ahhh!" ... "I'll kill you!" ... "No!" etc. TERRI claps her hands making a slapping sound and then holds her face and screams/groans. LOIS then points the gun to the roof while TERRI plugs her own ears and grimaces)

FX Gunshots

(LOIS puts a finger in one of her ears, fires the gun twice, puts it on the floor and wrings her hand. TERRI is rubbing her ears. Suddenly both women stop "acting", rise, dust themselves and move aside. TERRI picks up gun)

Terri Sorry to disappoint you, sergeant, but we did warn you.
Burton And that's exactly what happened tonight?
Lois Give or take the odd scream.
Roger Maybe she died of overacting.
Burton May I see the gun? *(He takes and examines it)*
Terri It's a starting-pistol. A prop. It fires blanks.
Lois Very loud blanks.
(BURTON hands gun to DRAUF who examines/places it on the writing-desk)
Burton So after the shots, what next? *(More frustration from cast)*
Roger Aw look why don't you go back to your seat and we'll run the whole show from the top. Constable Plod here can play Katie. Or maybe you'd like the part. What dress size are you? I could be your dresser.
Peter *(Worried that ROGER has finally gone too far)* Roger, shut up!
(BURTON wanders UC, stops, turns and beckons to ROGER who indicates himself and mimes speaking "Me?". BURTON is cool, nods. ROGER, with a face about to cry moves to BURTON. ROGER arrives UC and faces front alongside BURTON. We see ROGER's face. He's playing the naughty school-boy about to be reprimanded by the headmaster)
Roger I'm sorry, headmaster. *(Holds out his hand to be caned)* I'll try not to cry.

REMAIN SEATED 21

(ROGER a touch over the top. BURTON ignores histrionics and leans forward whispering in ROGER's ear. We see ROGER's face change. At first he's confident in role of the school-boy mocking the police. But BURTON whispers something which scares ROGER. His expression returns to normal then looks sullen and serious. ROGER turns his head and looks at the expressionless, motionless BURTON. Suddenly ROGER turns and walks back to his place DR. He stops, turns to the cast who gaze at him in wonder. What was said?)

Roger *(Casually, sarcastic)* It's all right. He's bought my silence.
(The OTHERS look at ROGER, at BURTON and one another)

Peter *(Concerned)* Did he threaten you?

Roger My lips are sealed.
(OTHERS angry with his sarcasm. BURTON is suddenly back into his investigation as if nothing has happened. Moving UL, he speaks)

Burton Now what happens here in the cupboard [*closet*]?
(BURTON stops at cupboard UL, turns. Pause. TERRI moves to BURTON)

Terri Lois waits inside ... like this. *(TERRI opens the cupboard door and steps inside)*
She first fires the gun in here. Another blank of course.
(BURTON looks at TERRI then suddenly moves to the back of the settee)

Burton Thank you. I've seen enough.

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

Peter *(Surprised, relieved)* You mean, we can go?
(TERRI comes out of cupboard and joins the group)

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

Peter Yes. I was late with an entrance.

Lois And I took too long loading the gun.

Burton And that fight scene demo was exactly what happened?

Lois Exactly!

Burton No-one slipped or had an accident?

Lois Oh don't cast me, I murder my fellow actors.

Burton That's the sort of thing you'll be asked at an inquest.

Peter Terrific.

Burton It's quite possible this was a tragic accident and I'm actually on your side.
(Pause. COMPANY quiet) Now, what happened *after* she was shot?

Roger You mean who murdered her after she was killed?

Carrie Roger!

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

Terri It gets a little complicated.

Burton Try me.

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

Burton You've lost me.

Peter She comes back into the play.

REMAIN SEATED 22

- Burton** So she isn't really killed? (*Frustration from COMPANY*)
- Terri** In the play Lena is killed but she returns later as a spirit.
- Drauf** A ghost?
- Lois** Not every play is naturalistic. And not everything is as it seems.
- Burton** So Katie exits from behind the settee immediately after the fight?
- Terri** In the play, yes.
- Burton** I'm lost.
- Terri** In the script the body remains on the stage but its spirit departs. In order to play the spirit, Katie has to exit and change costume. But in order to fool the audience, a pretend-Katie remains on stage.
- Roger** A dummy, dummy.
- Burton** Remains where? (*CAST exasperated*)
- Peter** Does it matter? Does anything matter except Katie's death?
- Burton** Well if it doesn't matter why are you still acting? (*CAST furious*)
- Lois** We're not acting. This is real!
- Burton** This wouldn't be some sort of theatrical superstition?
- Carrie** No it's called shock, distress, bereavement. We just had an awful experience and we're still upset. And *you* are making it worse!
(*Longish pause. CAST stare at BURTON who remains calm*)
- Roger** I think we should continue the play.
- Company** (*Huge shock*) What!? ... Roger! ... Are you mad? ... *etc.*
- Roger** No, no, wait. Hear me out.
- Carrie** I can't believe you could do this to Katie.
- Roger** (*Sincere*) Let me explain. (*Pause*) If we show them what happens after the fight, I bet they'll see there's nothing amiss and let us go.
- Peter** It's absurd.
- Roger** It means we can all go home. (*Pause. OTHERS are thinking*)
- Terri** (*To BURTON*) If we do this, can we go home?
- Burton** I don't see why not.
- Roger** Right, you heard the man. (*He claps his hands and moves DR*) Places for after the fight. (*Pause*) Well, come on.
(*CAST look at one another, mutter disapproval then move to enact the next scene. ROGER DR, CARRIE and PETER sit on settee. LOIS moves to the writing desk. TERRI takes the police offstage DL speaking as she goes*)
- Terri** This way ladies and gentlemen.
(*TERRI indicates with her hand and the police exit. Suddenly the lighting changes. The spot on the auditorium wall if used is killed. On stage it's now very late at night. Dim lighting. Those on the settee slump back in exhaustion. The men undo a shirt button or two and ruffle their hair. The actors are now back into the characters we met at the beginning of the play. DENISE is a mess. She has been crying for hours. SHIRLEY is cool and determined but even her patience is wearing thin. She speaks from the desk*)

REMAIN SEATED 23

- Shirley** We have to do something. (*Pointing behind setting. Annoyed*) The body's getting cold! (*DENISE leans forward, sobs again. The men are exasperated and exhausted*)
- Gary** (*Annoyed at his snivelling wife*) Oh shut up, Denise.
- Shirley** (*Moving behind settee RC*) We've been arguing for two hours!
- Colin** (*Still staring at ceiling*) Three.
- Shirley** I'm not taking the blame. Unless you back my suicide theory, I'll throw so much mud you'll wish you were never born.
- Colin** (*Suddenly up and angry. He storms UC*) All right. You want a story. I confess. (*OTHERS sit up/turn stunned*) I killed her.
- Others** (*Shocked*) What?
- Colin** I've been stealing from the company for years. Lena found out. I told her to forget it. She wouldn't. I swapped her vitamin pills for sleeping pills. (*Huge gasp from OTHERS*)
- Shirley** You're lying. You haven't got the guts.
- Colin** You want an excuse for your own stupidity, here it is.
- Shirley** Listen moron, she's wearing two bullet holes. How does that tie in with an overdose?
- Colin** You asked for motive, I've got one.
- Denise** So have I. (*OTHERS dumbfounded. All turn and stare at DENISE*)
- Shirley** I think I shot the wrong person.
- Denise** I hated her. She laughed at me, taunted me, said I wasn't in her class.
- Gary** You're not.
- Denise** Well tonight I got my own back. When I made her a drink tonight, I put poison in her glass. (*Huge shock from others. GARY clutches his throat*)
- Gary** You bitch! You've killed me.
- Colin** What poison?
- Denise** It kills quickly.
- Colin** Oh lovely. Two of us poison her and another shoots her.
- Shirley** Accidentally! You two were deliberate. You really wanted her dead.
- Colin** So did you!
- Shirley** Now listen, there's no way I'm wearing this on my own.
- Gary** (*Quietly*) Nor me.
- Shirley** Two of you attempted cold-blooded murder and I'm the bunny taking the blame.
- Gary** I said, "Nor me."
(*Longish pause. OTHERS stop and turn to GARY*)
- Shirley** Meaning?
- Gary** She rejected me, made me look a fool.
- Colin** You *are* a fool.

REMAIN SEATED 24

- Gary** She ridiculed me in front of my friends. I hated her. I fixed her car.
- Shirley** You what?
- Gary** I fixed her brakes. Tonight she would have lost control on the way home and been killed.
(Pause. These revelations take a bit of time to absorb)
- Shirley** I had you lot down as wimps but you're the local Mafia. I'm surprised there wasn't a real life hit man.
- Colin** Well actually there was.
- Others** *(In shock)* What?!
- Colin** I asked a mate to rough her up a bit.
- Shirley** Rough her up! You've already poisoned her!
- Gary** That is disgusting.
- Colin** You wrecked her car!
- Gary** Yeah but organising thugs.
- Denise** Shut up! Both of you. My husband and father-in-law are both killers.
- Colin** You whipped up a lethal cocktail.
- Denise** She deserved it.
- Gary** You could have killed me.
- Denise** Pity I didn't.
- Gary** *(Moves to DENISE and grabs her. She fights back)* You rotten little bitch!
- Denise** *(Fighting GARY)* Get off! Get off! *(Continues)*
- Colin** *(Over the other voices)* That's right, beat a woman. Let her go! *(Continues)*
(GARY, DENISE and COLIN all shout at one another and fight for a few seconds. Suddenly SHIRLEY points the gun to the ceiling and fires it. The noise frightens the others and the duck in fear. They cover their heads thinking they're about to be shot)
- FX** **Gunshot**
- Colin** *(Cowering)* No, Shirley. No!
(Pause. SHIRLEY hasn't moved. She lowers the gun. Slowly the OTHERS sit up and look around. SHIRLEY looks at ceiling. OTHERS follow her example)
- Shirley** *(Calm)* Ceiling needs painting.
- Colin** *(Sheepish)* I'll do that, Shirl. First thing tomorrow.
- Shirley** *(Suddenly back to business of LENA/KATIE)* There won't be a tomorrow unless we sort out this mess! *(Moving around behind them, threatening in low voice)*
Every one of you tried to kill Lena. In fact I'm the only one who didn't!
- Colin** *(Indignant, accuses SHIRLEY)* You shot her!
- Shirley** *(Furious, screams at COLIN)* Accidentally! *(OTHERS cringe)*
- Colin** *(Backing down)* Yes, all right. Accidentally.
- Shirley** Now either you come up with some brilliant scheme to get me off the hook or I tell the cops everything you've just told me. And with your pathetic planning, it'll be a cinch to prove you're the real killers.
(OTHERS spin round in despair. They are scared/worried. They beg for mercy)
- Gary** No Mum, please.

REMAIN SEATED 25

Colin Shirley.

Denise I didn't mean to.

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

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

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

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

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

Colin Wait! I've got it.

Shirley This better be good.

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

Denise Sue Trompp. She lives round the corner.

Colin She *hates* Lena.

Shirley So?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Colin That's brilliant.

Gary Let's do it.
(Pause. OTHERS now convinced. They'll grasp at straws)

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

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

REMAIN SEATED 26

- Colin** *(Excited)* She's coming.
- Shirley** *(Has wiped and replaced gun. Hopeful)* I've fixed the gun.
- Colin** *(Heading C rubbing hands)* She'll do *anything* to get even.
- Shirley** *(Also getting enthusiastic)* Right, Colin you do the talking. Gary and Denise hide behind the bar. *(They move UL. SHIRLEY thinks aloud - checking)* Now gun, body ... *(Looking around)* Where is it?
- Gary** It's safe.
- Colin** What'll I say?
- Shirley** It's your idea, lover-boy. But first, call the cops.
- Colin** *(Suddenly chicken)* Me!?! No way!
- Shirley** *(Adamant)* Yes, you!
- Colin** *(Gone to water)* I can't. I'll blow it. Please, Shirl, you do it.
- FX** **(Doorbell rings. All panic except SHIRLEY)**
- Denise** That's her.
- Gary** What'll we do?
(GARY, DENISE and COLIN all panic)
- Shirley** *(Calm. To COLIN)* Get the door. *(COLIN starts to exit UR)* Wait! I need to call the cops. *(SHIRLEY goes to phone on bar)* What's the number?
- Colin** *(Nervous)* It's on the phone.
- Shirley** *(Calm)* Hide, Gary. *(She lifts receiver and punches digits talking at the same time. GARY and DENISE look to hide. DENISE to cupboard, about to open door)*
- Gary** Not there! Here.
(GARY grabs DENISE and pulls her behind bar)
- FX** **Doorbell rings again**
- Colin** *(Nervous tension taking over)* Oh God!
- Shirley** *(Into phone. Pretending to be upset)* Police? ... I want to report a murder. *(Puts hand over receiver and speaks angrily to COLIN)* Get the door! *(COLIN leaps into action and exits UR. SHIRLEY resumes phone conversation using distressed voice)* Yes, come quickly. What? ... Oh the address is twenty-seven ... *(SHIRLEY turns upstage. Moments later she replaces receiver)* They're on their way.
- Colin** *(From offstage)* Thanks for coming. We really appreciate it. In here.
(SHIRLEY signals to GARY and DENISE who hide behind bar. SHIRLEY darts DR and collapses in chair. UR door opens and SUE enters with COLIN)
- Colin** Come in. *(Indicates settee)* Have a seat.
- Sue** *(Sits on settee)* Thanks. Nice place you've got.
(SHIRLEY sobs quietly and doesn't look up)
- Colin** *(To SHIRLEY)* Darling. *(No response)* Sweetheart this is Sue Trompp.
(SHIRLEY moans) I'm sorry, Sue. As you can see, we're in a bit of a mess.
- Sue** Please, don't apologise. That woman is evil.
- Shirley** *(a la trance)* She took everything. Everything.
(The last word dissolves into more sobbing)
- Colin** *(Goes to comfort his dear spouse)* Come on, Shirl. Be brave. That's my girl.

REMAIN SEATED 27

Sue She did it to me, too. I hate the woman.

Colin Our business is ruined. Thirty years of work down the tube all because of one crafty accountant.

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

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

Sue Murder's too good for her. She wrecked my life. And I'd have no worries killing Lena.
(Pause. COLIN and SHIRLEY look at one another then at SUE)

Shirley You can't mean that.

Sue I do. Give me the chance and I'll flick her light switch!

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

Colin *(Genuinely shocked)* What!?

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

Sue Nothing would surprise me with that tart.

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

Sue *(Pause then shocked)* A gun!

Shirley Lena has it in her bag.

Colin I rang her and she said if I told anyone I'd be dead.

Shirley She threatened all of us.

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

Shirley Do you think it's real?

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

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

Colin Do you think you could disarm it for us?

Shirley We shouldn't have a real loaded gun lying around.
(Pause. SUE looks at gun and then at COLIN and SHIRLEY)

Sue No problems. *(She takes gun out and examines it)* It's real all right. *(SHIRLEY steps back)* And it smells like it's been fired recently.

Shirley *(Instant switch of character)* Of course it has, several times, by you.

Sue *(Pause)* Sorry?

Shirley Gary. Denise. *(GARY and DENISE appear)*

Sue Hey, what's going on?

Shirley Now be very careful with that gun. It's the one you used to kill Lena.

Sue Lena!

Colin Now there are four witnesses who all saw the murder.

Sue What murder? Who's been murdered? *(GARY opens cupboard door)*

Gary Da-dah!

REMAIN SEATED 28

(Everyone looks at the draped body of LENA. It pauses then suddenly pitches forward crashing onto the carpet. SUE is stunned. The OTHERS are grinning)

- Shirley** Typical. Never could hold her liquor.
- Gary** I believe you two know each other.
- Sue** *(Suddenly happy)* Oh this fantastic. You've really killed her. Congratulations.
- Colin** Not so fast. She *is* dead, but *you* killed her.
- Sue** *(Suddenly back to being worried)* Very funny. You know I've just arrived.
- Gary** No. You broke in three hours ago and have kept us prisoner all that time.
- Sue** Look, she's dead. That's all that matters.
- Shirley** To us, but unfortunately not to the police.
- Sue** The cops!
- Colin** They're on their way. And when they arrive, we're all agreed that you killed her.
- Denise** With that gun.
- Sue** You're dreaming. Cops can pinpoint the time of death to minutes.
- Gary** But you've held us hostage.
- Sue** I told you this is not funny.
- Denise** Who's laughing?
- Sue** *(Pause. Tension builds)* Okay, she had an accident. But I didn't kill her.
- Colin** But you wanted too.
- Denise** *(Mimics SUE)* She wrecked my life. And I'd have no worries killing Lena.
- Colin** And we've got that bit on tape.
- Sue** You bastards. *(Louder)* You can't do this.
- Shirley** *(Taking control)* Can and will, sweetie.
- Sue** No!
- Shirley** Confess and we'll back you. Lena attacked you, self-defence, accidental shooting, blah, blah, blah.
- Sue** I won't do it. You can't make me.
- Colin** You've made yourself guilty by coming here and handling that gun. Everyone knows you've made threats against her.
(Pause. OTHERS stare at SUE, the now-desperate visitor. SUE suddenly snaps into action. She's not going to go down without a fight)
- Sue** *(Suddenly raising gun and backing DL)* No! You won't get away with it!
- Colin** *(Suddenly afraid)* Hey, take it easy!
- Shirley** *(Ever calm)* Let her go. If she runs, it'll prove her guilt. *(Gives headlines)*
Murder Suspect Shot By Police!
(Tense moment. OTHERS stare at SUE who is under strong pressure. SHIRLEY is calm, OTHERS not sure. SUE edges her way LC to the desk keeping her back to the wall and pointing the gun at the others. GARY moves C and this time uses SHIRLEY as a shield)
- Sue** *(Threatens as she moves)* Stay back!

REMAIN SEATED 29

- Shirley** (*Gloating, inciting. Indicates LENA*) Mind the body! (*SUE looks down to avoid standing on LENA then suddenly looks up to make sure no-one has rushed her. SHIRLEY mocks/taunts SUE*)
- Shirley** Hey! Why don't you take a hostage!
- Colin** (*Dismayed, angry*) Shirley! She's got a loaded gun!
- Shirley** (*Jabbing GARY*) Gary'll go!
- Gary** (*Petrified, angry*) Mum! Drop it!
(*SUE continues to edge DL. OTHERS forced to face her*)
- Sue** (*Points gun*) There's no way you'll get away with this!
- Shirley** (*Taunts SUE*) What are you gonna do? Kill again!?
(*Pause. Tension. SHIRLEY ice cool, the OTHERS petrified*)
- Sue** (*Nervous but determined*) Yes. (*Pause. OTHERS freeze, even SHIRLEY*) Me!
(*SUE suddenly holds gun to her temple and is about to shoot herself*)
- Denise** (*Terrified, wants SUE to stop*) No!
(*In a split-second, DENISE starts towards SUE whose finger tightens on the trigger. Suddenly BURTON steps out from the wings and takes the gun from SUE*)
- Burton** Thank you. I'll take that.
(*What an anti-climax. The OTHERS step out of character. They are deflated and annoyed. ROGER can't believe the action of BURTON. DRAUF emerges but is not sure what to do. PETER and CARRIE return to settee. SHIRLEY sits DR with ROGER behind her*)
- Roger** (*Angry*) That's the dramatic tipping point of the whole play.
- Burton** I'm here to investigate a death in unusual circumstances.
- Denise** Terrific timing.
- Burton** There's nothing to be gained by continuing the play.
- Carrie** Then why make us do it?
- Burton** Tell me about the body in the cupboard. (*closet*)
- Peter** It's a dummy. As if that wasn't patently obvious.
- Burton** I know that. I'm interested in the *real* body. Where would Lena normally be at this time? (*Cast frustrated*)
- Roger** We've been over all this before.
- Terri** By this time in the play, sergeant, Katie has her feet up in the dressing-room.
(*Sudden pause as she realises what she's said. OTHERS look at her*) I'm sorry.
- Burton** (*OTHERS despair. To LOIS*) So when the gun was fired, how close were you to the deceased?
- Lois** (*Annoyed*) I told you. I showed you. I don't point it at her. We both *hate* guns. Why are you asking me this?
- Roger** Because he's trying to save face. He's bounced up here, taken centre-stage and discovered nothing! Oh dear. Smokescreen required.
(*ROGER makes "tch tch" sound with his tongue and shakes his head*)
- Lois** Can't you tell the difference between a play and real life? She wasn't shot. I didn't kill her!

REMAIN SEATED 30

- Burton** We have a young woman with no apparent illness who suddenly drops dead. That is suspicious.
- Peter** Can we go now?
(Pause. Tense moment)
- Burton** Yes. *(Relief from COMPANY)* Please leave your details with the constable.
- Lois** Thank god for that.
(COMPANY give details to the writing DRAUF who mimes writing)
- Burton** The investigation will continue once we hear from forensics. And thank you for your cooperation.
- Terri** What about the audience? Do I send them home? I mean we can't continue the play.
- Burton** Not yet. I need a brief word.
- Roger** *(Sotto voce, sarcastic)* "The show must go on".
(BURTON moves downstage to address the audience. DRAUF mimes taking the name and address of the actors who then exit. PETER and CARRIE move DR miming a dispute. TERRI moves to BURTON)
- Terri** You want the house I presume?
- Burton** Sorry?
- Terri** The house lights. The audience.
- Burton** Yes. Please. *(TERRI exits to wings)* I need to see the people.
(Slight pause. Suddenly light/s come up on auditorium wall - the pretend house lights - and BURTON turns to address the real audience who are still in darkness. TERRI re-enters upstage and joins LOIS and ROGER with DRAUF)
- Burton** Ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for your patience and I apologise for the delay. I know all this is a bit unreal but we've had a tragic death. I need to know if anyone in the audience saw anything unusual. Perhaps some scenery seemed in a dangerous position. Perhaps you saw an actor slip. Anything no matter how trivial could be important. I need your assistance. Without the public's help, the police are often unable to solve or unravel many events.
(Pause) Anyone? *(Imaginary person in pretend audience raises their hand)* Yes sir. Go ahead. *(Pause as imaginary person speaks)* I agree, it is difficult. But we need to distinguish between the play where she was murdered and real life where she may well have died from natural causes. But thanks for your comments. Anyone else? *(He responds to another imaginary member of the pretend audience)* Yes madam? *(Pause as response is heard. BURTON removes note-pad and takes notes)* I see. And you're sure of that? *(Pause)* I take it you've seen the play before? *(Slight pause)* And you're certain it was the settee? *(Slight pause)* No, it is important. Thank you. *(Looks out)* Anyone else? Sir? *(Pause)* Well the autopsy should tell us that. But thanks anyway. Anyone else? *(Slight pause)* Right then.

REMAIN SEATED 31

Thank you for your co-operation. No doubt they'll be something in the press. I guess the company will make an announcement but for the time being, please remain seated.

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

Terri *(Addressing darkened audience)* Ladies and gentlemen, as you've seen, the terrible accident has stopped our performance. Unfortunately there's nothing we can do to continue. And I'm sure you understand. We're pretty shocked to say the least and in no mood to finish even if we could. I think the best thing is for you to contact the box-office tomorrow or later this week.

There'll be a refund or new tickets or something. I'm sorry. This is hardly an everyday event. Please give the company time to sort things out. I suggest you adjourn to the foyer now for a drink. *(Weak joke)* We certainly need one.

Carrie *(Loud)* Peter, I have to! *(She runs to UR door)* I'm going to. *(She exits)*

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

Burton What's going on?

Roger *(Calling)* Leave her, Peter.

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

Burton Hey! Stop!

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

Burton *(Moving to ROGER)* I need to know that young woman is okay.

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

Lois Roger!

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

Roger Back off!

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

Roger Peter! *(He exits)* Wait!

Burton Get after them.

Drauf Yes sir. *(Exits UR)*

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

Terri *(To BURTON)* Are you okay?

Burton *(Repairing himself)* No. I've got acute embarrassment. What was that about?

Terri Nothing.

Burton Not *another* part of the play?

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

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

REMAIN SEATED 32

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

INTERVAL

ACT TWO

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

Peter *(To no-one in particular)* I say we go home. We've told him everything.

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

Carrie It's too late now.

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

Carrie Peter, I'm going to tell him.

Peter Why? Give me one good reason.

Carrie Because it's the truth.

Peter But irrelevant. However Katie died, we had absolutely nothing to do with it.

Lois Could you two argue somewhere else?

Carrie Could you mind your own business?

Peter Caz, the police don't need to know.

Roger If I may offer a suggestion. *[OTHERS look at him]* Cool it.

Peter Cool it! It's your smart-arse comments that turned the cop against us.

Roger Wimp.

(ROGER moves towards PETER in threatening manner. DRAUF and BURTON enter)

Drauf Gentlemen?

(The protagonists separate but the ill-feeling continues. BURTON enters UR drying his hands on a handkerchief. He stops when he surveys the scene)

Burton What's this? Another domestic?

Terri We were rehearsing a scene from the play.

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

Drauf My colleague spoke with the doctor. The actress was pronounced dead on arrival.

Burton And the cause?

Drauf Nothing proven but they suspect a pretty rare poison.

Burton We'll see. *(Turns back to COMPANY)* Okay, if I can have your attention. *(They settle)* The preliminary report suggests your colleague was poisoned.

REMAIN SEATED 33

Others *(Shocked)* Poisoned!?

Lois *(Shocked)* There's got to be a mistake.

Peter But you're not certain.

Burton Forensics never lie. We'll discover the exact cause of death and then someone here might have some explaining to do. *(Angry response from COMPANY)* Well let's clear the air now that we're alone. *(Looks around at the despairing actors. BURTON means business)* Who's first?

Peter We've told you everything. We even demonstrated what happened. *(OTHERS agree)*

Burton But now the audience has gone, let's start again. Only this time, just the truth.

Terri Can I have a solicitor?

Burton You can have who you like. In fact we can all go down to the station where proceedings will take half the night.

Roger Get on with it.

Burton Any objections?

Lois Terri, forget it.

Terri *(Pause)* Okay.

Burton Now one of you has asked to make a statement. *(Buzz from OTHERS)* This person wants to add to their previous comments. So if anyone else cares to do likewise, now's the time.

Peter I've got nothing to say.

Burton Anyone may speak and, if you wish, may do so in private.

Roger It's a bit late for privacy.

Carrie I don't require privacy.

Peter *(Distressed)* Carrie! Don't do this! *(Begs)* Please.

Burton Right madam. In your own time.

Peter Can't we talk first; in private?

Lois Come off it, Peter. We all know about you and Carrie.

Peter *(Aghast)* What?

Roger Listen mate, there's no such thing as anonymous adultery.

Peter *(Distressed)* Oh dear god!
(CARRIE moves to settee and holds Peter's hand. She speaks calmly but with force. The OTHERS are interested. PETER drops his head in dismay)

Carrie Peter and I are lovers. We're married but not to each other. We kept our relationship secret till last month. Katie saw us one weekend and threatened to tell my husband. I confronted her, we argued and I threatened to kill her.

Peter She didn't mean it. It was just something you say in a fit of anger.

Burton What exactly did you say?

Carrie I said, "If you tell my husband about me and Peter, I'll kill you".

Peter It was nothing, an empty threat. *(PETER is led away by TERRI)*

Burton Those were your exact words?

REMAIN SEATED 34

Carrie I was frightened. I didn't want to harm my marriage.

Burton Did you fight?

Carrie No, we just ignored one another.

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

Roger *(Sarcastic)* Sergeant; a euphemism.

Peter The threat was nothing. I know Carrie. *(Emphatic)* She didn't kill Katie.

Burton I'm only interested in facts.

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

Lois Peter, we all knew.

Peter Yes because Katie told you.

Terri Katie knew about you and Carrie before she sprung your dirty weekend.

Carrie *(Angry)* And I wonder how she knew. I wonder who told her.

Roger No-one told her. You two were like randy teenagers.

Carrie It was someone with a big mouth.

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

Carrie Like good old *Lois Loose-Lips*.

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

Carrie You slag! *(etc)*

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

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

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

Burton Any more of that and you'll both be arrested for assault.

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

Carrie *(Equally angry)* Well so much for the *secret* affair.

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

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

Burton Meaning?

Carrie Meaning I don't grass on people.

Lois Oh so you've told your secret, why don't we tell ours?

Burton If anyone has anything relevant to say, now's the time. *(Pause. Silence)*

Roger I think we should, Lois.

Lois Shut up, Roger.

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

Lois Ignore the fool.

Burton He'll soon be a locked-up fool.

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

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

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

Peter (*At ROGER*) Not so pleasant being on the other end hey, *sunshine*?

Lois You sure you want to hear this?

Burton It's my job.

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

Burton How much?

Terri Nearly sixty grand.

Roger But split six ways.

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

Burton So you missed out on the money?

Lois No way. It was put to a vote and everyone except Katie voted for me to get my share.

Burton So Katie wasn't Miss Popular?

Roger Bingo.

Carrie But none of us wanted to actually kill her.

Lois The lottery thing was a storm in a tea-cup. I told her to stick it in her bank vault.

Burton You didn't accept the money?

Lois I wouldn't give her the satisfaction. She was a sanctimonious bitch and I'm glad she's dead.

Burton That wasn't the impression you gave before.

Roger Ah you see the actor's role is to impress. And she ain't bad for an amateur.

Burton So the actor you hate and try to kill in the play, in reality robbed you of thousands of dollars? (*OTHERS scoff at this remark*)

Lois She ripped me off so I killed her on stage under cover of the play. Is that what you're saying?

Burton Somebody poisoned her.

Roger So where's your bloody proof?

Terri Is this really how the police operate?

Carrie (*To DRAUF*) You don't say much. Are you allowed to speak?

Drauf Just answer the officer's questions.

Burton I'm interested in forensic evidence and the motives of people who knew the deceased.

REMAIN SEATED 36

- Roger** If someone you hate falls under a bus, it doesn't mean I pushed them.
- Peter** I wanna leave. This whole business is obscene. *(At BURTON)* You're just playing a game. Guess whodunit.
- Burton** It's not a game. It's real life. Real death. And maybe, just maybe, Katie died because someone on this stage killed her!
(Slight pause. Everyone takes in the possible truth of BURTON'S last statement)
- Peter** All right, I confess. I'm your man. *(Holds out hands to be handcuffed)* Get it over with.
- Carrie** Peter!
- Peter** I hated her. She taunted me about Carrie, made my life a misery. She drove me to hating her so much I just had to kill her. *(OTHERS shocked)*
- Burton** What happened?
- Peter** You want motive, I'm got one in spades. Arrest me.
- Burton** If you killed her you'll be arrested. If you're lying, I'll have you for wasting police time.
- Peter** You said you wanted a motive. *(To OTHERS)* Didn't he say that? *(They agree. To BURTON)* Well I've got the best.
- Burton** We know about Katie threatening to blackmail you and Carrie. *(Threatening)* Now don't waste my time.
- Peter** You don't understand. This is not your average murder. This is sororicide!
(EVERYONE stunned. Even BURTON is thrown)
- Burton** What?
- Terri** I don't understand.
- Roger** Sororicide is the killing of one's sister. *(More shock)*
- Burton** I'm now warning you officially. Making a false statement is a serious offence. You could do time for this.
- Peter** Katie is ... was my sister.
(Stunned reaction)
- Carrie** *(Shocked, concerned)* Peter, I didn't know.
- Peter** No-one knew. *(Moving away, not looking at them as he speaks)* Our parents divorced when we were kids. Katie and I lived with our mother. Then I found out Katie was seeing the old man on the sly, spending his money but bad-mouthing him at home to our mother. I argued with Katie then split and never spoke to her again until years later we both got parts in this play. We pretended we'd never met. *(Back to BURTON)* I didn't hate her because she hounded me about Carrie, I've hated her for years. I'm the one with the motive.
(Stunned silence. No-one was expecting this)
- Roger** You devious bugger.
- Burton** This can be verified?
- Peter** What do you want? Family snaps? Birth certificate? Blood? *(Extends wrist)* Here, I'll slash, you get the DNA.

REMAIN SEATED 37

- Drauf** *(Taking PETER upstage)* That won't be necessary, sir.
(CARRIE moves to comfort PETER who brushes others aside and sulks upstage)
- Burton** You should add this stuff to your play.
- Roger** And you should stop this nonsense. Here's a cop in the audience. A strange death occurs right under his nose. Naturally he investigates. What a break. He uncovers a bunch of weirdos who knew the deceased and all he needs do is crack the case on his own to zoom up the promotional ladder.
- Burton** I'd stick to the acting, sir.
- Roger** He's well into the investigation, has an unofficial medical report of poisoning when suddenly the penny drops. It may not be homicide, it may just be suicide.
- Others** *(Not the police)* Suicide!
- Roger** What a bummer. She done herself in so no arrest. Oh dear. No case to crack and no career boost.
- Lois** Roger. *(ROGER keeps stirring)*
- Roger** I love seeing moronic cops take a fall. What a shame you sent the audience home. They'd adore your dumb detective.
- Burton** *(Soft but definite threat)* Shut it or all bets are off.
- Roger** No, come on, be fair. You reckon Katie was poisoned. Only two possibilities. One of us did it or she topped herself. Now if it's us, prove it. Show us how.
- Terri** Roger, we were winning until you started this.
- Burton** No, don't knock the man. He's clever. It's one of the oldest tricks in the book and it might just work.
- Peter** Either charge us or let us go.
- Burton** Friend Roger is trying to create a diversion. By getting me to concentrate on the drinks Katie took on stage, the spotlight switches to everyone and not just him. I wonder why.
- Lois** I don't. I just want to go home.
- Burton** Just one more thing. I want exact details of who prepared and who served a drink to Katie. *(COMPANY frustrated)*
- Terri** You saw what happened. Roger, Peter and Carrie mix her a drink. Lois fiddles with the drinks at the opening and I prepare the stuff before the play begins.
- Lois** Perhaps we all slipped her a pill. Maybe we all done her in.
- Peter** Would five fit in the dock, sergeant?
- Roger** Go Miss Christie!
(BURTON moves upstage to bar. The others open up and move aside to watch)
- Carrie** The farce continues.
- Burton** What's in these bottles?
- Terri** Stale lemonade and tap water.

REMAIN SEATED 38

- Roger** I'd go for the tap water. Arrest the *Water Board* and become Chief Commissioner.
- Burton** Why do you turn your back to the audience when you're at the bar?
- Peter** Because it's in the script. Because the director told us to. What does it matter?
- Terri** (*Moving to the bar*) Look it's all pretend. There's no grog in the bottles, the actors pretend to mix drinks, it's make believe.
(*TERRI holds out glass to BURTON. He hesitates. ROGER steps in and takes it*)
- Roger** Ah, the cup of poison. The mystery substance that slid down the lovely Lena's throat and did the poor damsel in. (*COMPANY upset*)
- Lois** (*Annoyed*) Oh for god's sake, Roger, show some respect.
- Roger** (*Taking centre-stage and enjoying his thespian status*) Now, where is my true love? (*Spies DRAUF and approaches her*) Ah! (*He drops on one knee and plays Romeo*) Here's to my love. (*Drinks*) O true apothecary! Thy drugs are quick. Thus with a kiss I die.
(*ROGER collapses on floor and feigns death. DRAUF suddenly becomes Juliet and kneels beside her dead true love and cradles Romeo in her arms*)
- Drauf** (*As Juliet*) What's here? a cup, clos'd in my true love's hand?
- Burton** (*Angry*) Constable!
- Drauf** (*Continues seamlessly*) Poison, I see, hath been his timeless end:- ... I will kiss thy lips; Haply some poison yet doth hang on them ... (*DRAUF bends and kisses ROGER*) Thy lips are warm!
- Roger** (*As himself*) Too bloody right. (*Grabs DRAUF*) Give us another!
(*The startled DRAUF is drawn into a brief romantic grapple with ROGER who is the aggressor. BURTON is furious*)
- Burton** Stop it! (*ROGER persists. BURTON intervenes*) Knock it off!
(*The couple separate. DRAUF is embarrassed, ROGER is glowing*)
- Roger** What? Here on stage?
- Drauf** I'm sorry, sir. We did that at college. The play I mean.
- Roger** (*Excited*) Hey lady, you've got it. Forget the force. You belong here, darling, centre-stage.
- Burton** I think it's time we dropped the acting. In fact, let's bring *everything* into the open.
(*Pause. Tension. ROGER changes instantly to a softer very serious character*)
- Roger** You don't mean that.
- Burton** Ladies and gentlemen, I think you'll agree I've endured a torrent of sarcasm from your colleague, Roger. I've been mocked and ridiculed which all begs the question of why.
- Roger** (*Not happy*) You promised, Burton. You gave your word.
- Burton** Only if you drop the cop-baiting.
- Peter** Roger, just apologise; he'll let us go.
- Roger** No he won't. Once a bastard always a bastard.

REMAIN SEATED 39

Lois Is it too much to ask for an explanation?

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

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

Roger I hate you, Burton because you're actually *enjoying* this. You get your kicks humiliating people. You've got no right to bring that up. (*Angry, loud*) Did'ja hear me? No right!
(*ROGER storms DR. Pause. OTHERS are stunned*)

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

Roger (*Snaps without turning*) Get lost!

Carrie Are you saying Roger's a criminal?

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

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

Burton Circumstances change. (*OTHERS scoff*) Look you saw me speak to him privately. I told him I'd question him privately if he co-operated.

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

Burton But I would have ignored all his taunts if it wasn't for this letter.
(*Produces envelope from jacket*)

Roger No!

Burton Sorry Chummy but this is dynamite. This requires a please explain.

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

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

Roger As usual you know nothing.

Burton You've done time for one mercy killing and here's your letter, the proof you've organised another. (*OTHERS distressed*)

Lois Roger, tell him it's wrong. (*Pause*) Roger?

Peter Tell him nothing. This is harassment. This ... (*Sudden change as he thinks he sees the truth*) Jesus Roger, you killed my sister!

Carrie Peter!

Roger Katie was sick. She had a fatal disease. (*Silence. OTHERS stunned*)

Burton What disease? Which doctor did she see?

Roger Witch doctor's right. This is a *witch* hunt.

Burton Come on, Roger. You know the drill. Give me the facts.

Roger They're in her dressing room where you obviously found that letter.

Terri Katie wasn't sick.

Roger She knew I was interested in euthanasia. She confided in me. She had no hope not even with an operation. All I did was give her some information.

REMAIN SEATED 40

- Terri** Roger, I knew Katie. We even lived together for a while. I'm telling you, she wasn't sick.
- Roger** You're wrong. I saw the medical reports. She was dying.
- Peter** (*Attacking ROGER*) I've always suspected you of being devious. You've killed before and you've done it again.
- Roger** I've never killed anyone but if you keep that up, I'll re-think my policy.
- Burton** This is warning time, Roger. You're not obliged to say anything.
- Roger** I'll say what I like. I've got nothing to hide. I didn't kill Katie.
- Burton** Right, sir, you and I have unfinished business but the rest of you can go.
- Carrie** Meaning you're going to frame Roger because years ago he served time for something trivial and unproven.
- Burton** I suggest you say no more and leave now.
- Terri** Do what he says, Carrie. He's only doing his duty.
- Lois** Terri! Since when have you been an apologist for the police? Roger's our friend, *your* friend, remember?
- Terri** I'm trying to be helpful.
- Peter** Too helpful. I've just twigged. Terri's the only one without a motive for killing Katie.
- Burton** They're not compulsory.
- Peter** Carrie's being blackmailed, I've got a family vendetta, Lois was screwed out of her money and Roger's a former villain. But not Ms Squeaky-Clean.
- Terri** (*At PETER*) You creep.
- Peter** (*To BURTON*) You've missed the one genuine suspect.
- Terri** You're all jealous because I was her only real friend. (*OTHERS laugh. To BURTON*) They're telling lies to spite me.
- Lois** We told the truth, Terri. Pity you can't face facts.
- Terri** The truth, Lois, is that I did something you're incapable of. I loved Katie.
- Peter** Terri, infatuation is not love.
- Terri** Well you'd know. Between your wife and Carrie you must have picked up something.
- Carrie** Drop it, Terri.
- Peter** (*At TERRI*) You thought Katie was some goddess, that the sun shone out of her upstage corner. Well here's the truth, darling. She thought you were a jumped up stage-manager with body odour.
- Terri** (*Furious*) Liar!
- Roger** She said you were a joke.
- Terri** (*Starting to crack*) It's not true. Katie loved me. She told me. She told me!
- Carrie** You've had professional experience with unrequited love, sergeant. How many homicides involve a frustrated lover?
- Lois** (*To BURTON*) If you're serious about motive, sergeant, check her story.
- Terri** (*Pleading with BURTON*) Tell them to stop. Stop them!

REMAIN SEATED 41

Peter More like unrequited puppy love.

Terri *(Screaming)* Tell them to stop!

Burton All right, that's enough! *(Pause)* I want everyone to move apart. *(Pause. Uncertainty)* Come on. Get by yourself. *(Loud)* Move!
(Slowly the COMPANY move to separate places around the set. BURTON waits until they've settled) Now I'm going to contact forensics for any new developments. Then I'll take a statement from anyone who feels so inclined.

Roger You mean our intimate secrets were informal? This was off the record?

Burton I'm trying to help you. I got rid of the audience and gave you every chance to sort this.

Peter Are you saying we can go?

Burton Unless you wish to make a formal statement.

Carrie You mean unless we want to incriminate our colleagues and ourselves?

Roger Say nothing. And if he charges you, get a solicitor.
(Pause. BURTON surveys the staring faces)

Burton Right, I need to confer with my colleague. When I return, you'll all get the chance to make a statement. In the meantime, no-one leaves. Understood.
(BURTON exiting DL) Constable.
(DRAUF follows, police exit. Pause. PETER moves quietly DL, looks into wings)
(Now the actors change character again this time working co-operatively)

Peter They're in the office.

Roger *(To PETER)* Keep an eye on them. *(OTHERS C, worried)*

Lois He said he was going to contact the hospital.

Roger Don't panic, stay calm.

Carrie I'm sure he knows.

Terri He suspects me.

Roger I know cops. He'll try and wear us down.

Lois I've got a gut feeling he knows.

Terri How about we jump him when they come back?

Carrie This is not a play. He's a real cop.

Lois Has he got a gun. I couldn't see anything.

Roger They've all got guns.

Carrie But he's supposed to be off-duty.

Terri Let's get out before they come back.

Peter *(Looking offstage)* Here they come. *(Slight panic)*

Roger Go back where we were.
(They resume their separated positions. The police re-enter DL)

Carrie Any news from the hospital?

Burton Yes and no. She definitely ingested drugs but it could be days before the post mortem gives an accurate reading.

Peter Oh terrific. We sit around all night.

Burton No, you're free to go.

REMAIN SEATED 42

Others What?!

Roger You can't mean little ol' ex-con Roger?

Burton I do indeed. Give us your details but don't leave town.

Roger This is another joke.

Peter I think he means it.

Burton What happens about locking up around here?

Terri The caretaker comes in at midnight.

Burton Good. I'll wait till he turns up. (*OTHERS not happy about this*)

Lois Why? What do you want?

Roger Come on, Lois. The police want to play detective. It's called snooping around. They'll look for clues. Maybe *plant* some.

Peter (*Angry*) Have you got a warrant for this?

Carrie Peter, he said we can go. (*She starts to exit*) Come on.

Peter I'm staying till he proves he has the right to invade our theatre.

Burton I think you're in the wrong play, sir. This is a murder, not a melodrama.

Roger (*Starts to exit*) You'll never win, dear boy.
(*TERRI and LOIS exit. ROGER exits after CARRIE*)

Lois (*At exit*) Peter, come on.
(*PETER won't budge. Pause. He looks around and sees he's alone with the police. He stares at BURTON then points a threatening finger*)

Peter (*Exiting*) I'm going to report you! (*At exit*) Both of you! (*Exits*)

Burton (*Calling*) And don't leave town without permission. (*Softer*) Idiot!
(*Pause. Silence. Atmosphere changes. Fewer actors, less conflict. BURTON wanders up to bar looking for a drink. Gradual lighting change. Take your time. Things look more sinister, more shadows*)

Drauf Are you sure that was right, sir? Letting them go I mean.

Burton Don't question a senior officer, constable. Now where's my coffee?

Drauf (*Exiting DL*) I saw some over here. (*She exits DL*)

Burton One with the lot. (*He examines drinks, glasses, etc*)

Drauf (*Calls from offstage*) Can't find any milk.

Burton Typical.

Drauf (*Calls from offstage*) Or sugar. (*He is looking. DRAUF enters*) Sorry about that.

Burton (*Indicates settee*) Grab a seat.
(*DRAUF sits. BURTON wanders back RC and continues snooping as he speaks*)

Burton So comrade, what's your verdict? Who, as they say, has done her in?

Drauf Well possibly no-one, sir. The autopsy's incomplete.

Burton Yes, yes, we know all that. But your mate at the hospital said there was a definite reading of poison. Now the quacks never say anything unless there's a possibility so, who's our man?

Drauf Or woman. Or more than one.

Burton (*Speaking directly to her*) Constable, women don't murder women. They're not like that. Women are gentle, loving creatures. Surely you know that.

REMAIN SEATED 43

- Drauf** Well, yes, but ...
- Burton** No buts, constable, although yours is more than acceptable.
- Drauf** *(Pause)* So you're convinced it was a man?
- Burton** Been a copper long, have we? Six months? I'll bet less than a year?
- Drauf** *(A touch uneasy)* Nine months. Does it show?
- Burton** Have you chosen the right career?
- Drauf** With respect, sir, I don't think that's relevant to this case.
- Burton** I'll decide what's relevant. Now here's a chance to learn some detective skills. Come on. Who committed the crime?
- Drauf** No-one if it's suicide.
- Burton** Listen, the woman was poisoned. Take my word for it.
- Drauf** Well I do respect your experience, sir, but I'm afraid I'd only be guessing.
- Burton** Listen, girlie, I'm certain of two things. Katie met with foul play and the person who killed her was on this stage tonight.
(DRAUF spins around nervously. How can BURTON be so sure)
- Drauf** If you know that why didn't you make an arrest?
- Burton** No proof, constable. Bloody nuisance but that's how it is.
- Drauf** Can you tell me the suspect?
- Burton** Not suspect, killer. But come on. Use your training and eliminate those who don't measure up. Women make great detectives. *(Pause. DRAUF uncertain)* So, whodunit?
- Drauf** I think I know but I'm scared to say.
- Burton** Scared? Why? We're alone. *(Moves closer)* Look, I can give your career a real boost. *(Closer still)* I scratch your back, constable, carefully, and you *(She moves suddenly)* Hey, I don't bite. Well, in a nice way. So, give me a name.
- Drauf** If I'm wrong, will you promise not to laugh?
- Burton** I never laugh at a beautiful woman.
(Pause. DRAUF seems to flinch. She's trying to remain cool)
- Drauf** Sir, I really should get back to the station.
- Burton** *(A touch angry)* Just tell me which evil, wicked man, on this stage tonight, planned and executed a murder.
- Drauf** *(Pause)* Well, to tell the truth ...
- Burton** Oh please. There's no point to life if we can't have the truth.
- Drauf** It was Terri the stage manager.
- Burton** *(Almost angry, certainly upset)* No! I told you it's a man. Look, I'm trying to help. Trust me. It could not have been a woman.
- Drauf** Sorry, I'm confused.
- Burton** *(Switches to concerned)* Don't be. You're doing fine. Women aren't killers. Women are full of grace and beauty and love. It's men who destroy. *(Puts hand on her shoulder from behind. DRAUF stares straight ahead)* Women are angels.

REMAIN SEATED 44

- Drauf** (Pause) More coffee, sir?
- Burton** You seem a little nervous. Can I help?
- Drauf** No, I'm fine. (Starts to move away) But I think I'll contact the station.
- Burton** (Going after her and bringing her back to settee) Not yet. Not when we're so close to solving the murder. Believe me, you're doing a fantastic job.
- Drauf** Thank you, sir. (Pause) I'll just check with the station.
- Burton** (Angry. DRAUF is stopped by his sharp tone) Constable, I'm trying to help, trying to make you a better police officer. You do want that?
- Drauf** Yes sir. But ...
- Burton** Then sit! (Pause. DRAUF is uncertain but slowly moves to settee and sits) Much better. Now first, how does the killer think? (Pause) Well?
- Drauf** I did some psychology in college but ...
- Burton** Not that theory crap. I'm talking life at the blood-stained coal-face. Take those recent murders of single women.
- Drauf** The riverbank killings?
- Burton** (Wandering behind an uncertain DRAUF) Nasty business. You've got three victims all young, beautiful females. Gorgeous. (Pause) Just like you. (Pause) And what have the police got? Nothing.
- Drauf** Someone was arrested last week.
- Burton** (Scoffs) Fools! Some of my colleagues are morons.
- Drauf** Do you know the killer?
- Burton** Of course.
- Drauf** How do you know the killer?
- Burton** (Suddenly in close) You'd be surprised at what I know. You'd be surprised at what I like. (Tense pause. He touches her hair) You hair is beautiful.
- Drauf** (Pause. Then slowly rises) I'll just contact the ...
- Burton** (Roars) Freeze! (DRAUF freezes then slowly sits. She can't look at BURTON who is furious) You move when I say. Understood? (DRAUF nods slowly and discreetly feels for her revolver) Don't. (DRAUF freezes) Give it. Slowly. (DRAUF slowly withdraws her revolver) Don't turn. Butt first. (DRAUF passes it back) Good girl. (BURTON hasn't withdrawn his gun but DRAUF doesn't know this. BURTON takes her gun and pushes it under the settee) We can't have you doing anything silly now. (Pause. Loud) Can we?
- Drauf** No sir.
- Burton** Yes sir, no sir. Lovely.
- Drauf** (Pause Plucks up courage) Did you kill those three women?
- Burton** (Amused) Me? A killer? A highly-respected police officer with twenty years' service and a commendation for bravery. How could you even think such a thing? Besides women aren't meant to be killed. They should be caressed, worshipped.

REMAIN SEATED 45

- Drauf** The police can't solve the riverbank murders because the evidence has been tampered with or destroyed.
- Burton** You can't destroy evidence that doesn't exist.
- Drauf** And here tonight, you know who killed the woman in the play.
- Burton** I do.
- Drauf** You know because it was you.
- Burton** Careful. Wild accusations without a shred of evidence
- Drauf** But it *was* you?
- Burton** What can I say? It's a fair cop, guv. *(Moves in close behind her and turns nasty)* Just rotten luck you had to follow the bloody ambulance tonight. If you'd been a bloke, none of this would have happened.
- Drauf** You won't get away.
- Burton** Get away? I'm not being pursued. Besides, pros don't leave clues. And of course you won't tell. You won't be able to.
- Drauf** Did you know Katie?
- Burton** Ah the delectable Katie. Yes, I knew her once, biblically speaking.
- Drauf** And she discovered you'd killed the other women?
- Burton** Perhaps and I couldn't risk her blabbing hence her sad demise.
- Drauf** You found out about the other actors having a motive for killing Katie.
- Burton** Elementary.
- Drauf** Any one of the actors could be guilty especially Roger.
- Burton** Ah, pure genius. Once I knew Katie was mates with Roger, I was hot. He'd already put away one female, why not another?
- Drauf** But if Katie was dying, why bother killing her?
- Burton** She wasn't sick. I paid a quack to find some exotic disease.
- Drauf** So did she actually die from poison?
- Burton** Very nasty and untraceable. I just put it in her bag and told her to take some before she went on stage. She thought they were pain-killers. She thought they'd get her through the show without a worry. Oops.
- Drauf** You're going to kill me too, aren't you?
- Burton** I think Roger's too obvious to be the killer. I fancy Peter. He's a prat.
- Drauf** *How will you kill me?*
- Burton** *(Suddenly back to her questioning)* What?! Kill you? *(Moves in close)* Whatever gave you that idea? *(Gently touches her throat)* God, your skin is divine. *(He strokes her hair and throat in silence. She is terrified but remains calm. She endures this treatment not knowing how to react. His hand moves to her face. Suddenly she bites his hand. He screams in pain, leaps back and nurses his hand. She races off DL. He races after her. They both exit)*
- Burton** Come here!

REMAIN SEATED 46

(We see none of the chase. We hear it. Chairs are thrown around. Footsteps on wooden stairs. Someone screams. A slap. Then silence. Pause. The UR door opens slowly. ROGER looks in. He enters followed by TERRI. They move to C looking around. It's clear. They beckon to others. PETER, CARRIE and LOIS enter and gather DC/C. LOIS carries a portable tape recorder/mini disc player)

Roger

Get ready.

(LOIS re-enters her cupboard. PETER closes the door for LOIS then he and CARRIE hide behind the bar. ROGER and TERRI move quietly towards the DL wings. Suddenly they panic, turn around and dive back behind the settee. We can't see anyone. Pause. BURTON enters with DRAUF being held in a headlock)

Burton

Nice and easy. That's a good girl. Now sit. *(He releases DRAUF who gingerly sits)* Lie down. *(She looks at him then stretches out on her back)* Other way. *(She turns over. BURTON moves in and places cushion on the back of DRAUF's head. He kneels on the settee with one knee and places his hands on the cushion)*

Drauf

Please don't do this.

Burton

Say 'bye-bye', doll.

(BURTON puts pressure on the cushion when there's the click of the recorder/notepad from cupboard. He freezes. He stands. DRAUF is frozen thinking she's about to be shot)

Drauf

Someone's there! Let me go and I'll say nothing.

Burton

(Moving to the wings) Gotta be the caretaker. *(Snaps back at her)* Don't move! *(He continues looking)* He's ninety and half-blind.

Drauf

(Begging) Please let me go. I swear I won't talk.

(BURTON draws his gun and moves to the cupboard)

Burton

Tell? Tell what? We were just playing games. A couple of kinky cops.

(With gun drawn he stands upstage of the cupboard and slowly reaches for the handle. Suddenly he rips open the door and points the gun into the cupboard)

Burton

(Almost fanatical) Freeze! Police!

Lois

(In between heart attack) No! It's me! Don't shoot! Please! *(Babbles away)*

(BURTON is relieved but still very jumpy)

Burton

Out! *(LOIS hesitates)* I said out! *(He grabs LOIS and drags her out)* What the hell are you're doing?

Lois

I'm sorry. I ... ah, I came back for this. *(Holds up tape recorder/notepad)*

Burton

What is it? *(Grabs recorder)*

Lois

Nothing. Just some gear I left in the dressing-room.

(BURTON pushes machine back at LOIS)

Burton

You gave us a fright. We were discussing the death of your colleague and you very nearly became number two.

Roger

(Rises from behind settee) Really?

(BURTON swings round, levels gun at ROGER. TERRI slowly rises beside ROGER)

Burton

(Startled) Freeze! Police! *(TERRI is worried. ROGER is calm)*

Roger

(Raising his hands to his sides) Nothing up the sleeves, officer.

Burton

This is not funny, you idiot.

Terri

We're not armed.

REMAIN SEATED 47

- Burton** *(Lowering the gun a little)* I could have shot both of you.
- Peter** *(Rising, nervous. CARRIE follows)* We're here too.
(BURTON steps back, again raises his gun. PETER and CARRIE are terrified)
- Carrie** No. Please.
- Burton** *(Moves aside)* Are you people mad? What do you think you're playing at?
- Lois** Please put down the gun.
- Burton** No way. Stand still. All of you. I'll shoot the next person who moves.
- Roger** Come on, Burton, leave the melodrama to the actors.
- Burton** *(At ROGER)* You first.
- Lois** We came back to see if you'd been able to solve the murder.
- Burton** That's police business. It's got nothing to do with you. Now get out!
- Terri** Why is the constable lying like that?
- Carrie** Have we interrupted something?
- Burton** *(Pause. Looks at them. Lowers gun)* All right, we're sprung. Two cops having some fun. Now joke's over, time to leave. Move.
- Drauf** Sir? *(She turns her head front but remains on the settee)*
- Terri** I think your colleague wants a word.
- Burton** *(To DRAUF)* Get up, constable. Game over.
(DRAUF slowly sits up, replacing the cushion)
- Roger** Can anyone play?
- Burton** *(Angry at ROGER)* I've had it with you. Move or I'll wipe the grin off your poxy face.
- Roger** *(Calm, defiant)* Won't wash, sergeant. The game's up. The fat lady is gargling as we speak.
(Pause. BURTON is not sure. He looks around. The OTHERS stare back)
- Carrie** We heard everything.
- Peter** We know everything.
- Lois** We recorded everything.
- Burton** You're bluffing. You're guessing.
- Terri** Katie told us about the nasty cop.
- Roger** She knew you killed those women.
- Burton** What is this? Part of another play?
- Lois** Katie knew you were trying to kill her but couldn't prove it.
- Burton** You can't prove what isn't true.
- Carrie** We *have* proved it.
- Burton** *(Scoffs)* Ha. I'm a pro. You're amateurs. And guess who's got the motive?
- Roger** You just don't get it. You can't see the obvious.
- Burton** Okay, so you've cooked up some scam. Big deal. *(Pointing at ROGER)* But he's a *real* convicted killer. And I've got his letter with mercy killing instructions all over it. Any jury'll love that.
- Terri** What about your colleague? What's she got to say?

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- Burton** Nothing. She's in trouble for messing round with a fellow-officer. But good coppers take care of their own. *(To DRAUF)* Right, constable? *(Pause. DRAUF silent)* Right, constable?
- Roger** Oh dear. An honest cop.
- Burton** Listen sister, back me or your career's dead.
- Drauf** I'm only interested in the truth.
- Burton** *(Worried. Raises gun)* Don't be a bloody idiot.
- Drauf** I think it's time we stopped the killing, don't you, sir?
- Burton** *(Almost panic)* Don't push me or so help me, I'll use this.
- Roger** Just like you killed the others?
- Burton** Shut your mouth, killer! *(The others are worried)*
- Terri** You should be glad it's over. Isn't three enough?
- Burton** Three! Three by the river and one on stage is four.
- Roger** Sorry but the one on stage doesn't count.
- Burton** What?
- Carrie** You didn't kill Katie.
- Burton** I saw her collapse. I heard the ambulance. The hospital told us she was dead.
- Roger** *(Pause. Calm)* It's all part of the play, Burton. You took it hook, line and sinker.
- Burton** What is this?
- Lois** Just a bunch of amateur actors.
(Pause. BURTON looks around then suddenly confronts DRAUF)
- Burton** You told me you had a mate at the hospital. You said Katie was poisoned. You said she was dead.
- Drauf** I lied. *(Pause)* Bobbie.
- Burton** *(Furious whispers)* Bobbie?
(Pause. Everyone stares. DRAUF removes her police hat and wig. Her long hair falls free. OTHERS fascinated)
- Burton** *(Whispers)* No!
(She unbuttons her police jacket, removes and tosses it aside revealing the same eye-catching blouse worn by LENA. BURTON stunned)
- Drauf** *(Produces spectacles from pocket and places them on face)* Hi, Bobby!
(DRAUF's disguise is unmasked. DRAUF is KATIE. The OTHERS stare at the speechless BURTON who suddenly aims at DRAUF)
- Roger** It's over, Burton. Drop the gun.
- Burton** You're dead. I gave you those pills.
- Katie** We know. And they'll be used as evidence against you.
- Lois** *(Indicating)* Along with this. We've recorded everything.
- Burton** But the doctor's letter. *(Indicating cast)* The motives from these idiots.
- Roger** All a scam. Now *(Holds out hand)* give me the gun.
(Pause. BURTON thinking. Suddenly he swivels and aims at a scared ROGER. BURTON is about to shoot)

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Peter No!
(He launches himself at BURTON who turns at the last moment. PETER and BURTON grapple. The OTHERS rush in and BURTON is overpowered)

Roger Get the gun! The gun!
(Gun is taken and BURTON slumps on floor, a pathetic sight. LOIS hides the gun in the writing desk. BURTON is dismayed. The others are shaken but relieved)

Carrie *(Helping PETER)* Peter. Are you okay?

Peter I'm fine. It's over.

Lois Call the police.

Roger Yes. Peter, Carrie, use the phone in the office. *(PETER and CARRIE exit DL. ROGER calls)* The number I gave you.

Carrie *(Exiting)* Right.

Terri I can't believe we did it.

Roger *(Watching the cowering BURTON)* It's not over yet.

Terri Katie, you were fabulous. He nearly killed you. *(The women embrace)*

Katie I'm still shaking. I could murder a brandy.

Terri I'll get it. *(Exits)*

Katie Make it a double.

Lois The gun's safe. Shouldn't we tie him up?

Roger I almost feel sorry for him.

Lois I don't.

Roger You're right. Check we got his confession. *(LOIS takes machine to bar. She faces upstage and uses headphones)* Katie, sit down. Relax. *(KATIE sits DR)* You were bloody marvellous.

Katie I was sure he recognized me.

Roger The greatest performance of your career. *(They both laugh)*

Katie When I was lying there I got this terrible pain in my chest. It was just like
(She suffers the same pain) Oh God! I've got it again!
(She pitches forward clutching her chest. ROGER races and kneels to help)

Roger Katie! What is it?
(In a flash BURTON is up, crosses to the desk and searches for the gun. TERRI enters with a glass or two. Sees KATIE and quickly crosses to KATIE and ROGER)

Terri Katie! What's happened?

Roger She just collapsed.
(CARRIE and PETER return and they too rush over. Dialogue could overlap)

Carrie What's wrong?

Peter Is she okay?

PREVIEW ENDS

Important Program Notes

It's vital that your program does NOT reveal the plot. Not only should your synopsis [if one is provided] be as brief and deceptive as possible [refer to the synopsis] but you must invent another name for one of your players. If you give the correct name of the actor who plays LENA and DRAUF, you will have killed the suspense before the play begins. There are several choices. Invent a new name altogether for the actor. She could use her maiden name, her mother's name, her grandmother's name, her married name but certainly not the same name for both roles. All the best costumes, wigs, make-up and acting skills might trick the audience but if the program tells them it's the same actor, you're wasting your time. Don't use the gun to shoot yourself in the foot!

BURTON needs a seat in the audience. This should be at the back and he enters once the house-lights dim, just prior to the show beginning. He wears minimum make-up and tries not to "disturb" real patrons.

The house lights never come up on the audience during the play. The spotlight on the side wall of the auditorium represents the house lights being turned on during the play.

One production used real ambulance officers who arrived on cue. Two members of the audience who were doctors came forward offering to help. You are not encouraged to try this at your theatre.

Properties

Several props are required in this play including the following:

glasses, cocktail mixers, bottles of drink
telephone
purse or handbag [for LENA?]
pencils and note-pads for the police

imitation pistol, box of blank bullets
statue or similar small object
rug and shop-dummy [the body]
folded documents [from BURTON]

Sound Effects (main FX)

pistol shots several times
ambulance siren

telephone ringing
front-door bell

Rehearsal Material and Performing Rights

If you wish to stage *Remain Seated* or any FOX PLAYS play or musical, you must first obtain written permission.

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Death by *Eating*

A four-hander, male or female. *Death by Eating* is about how Big Food has manufactured, promoted and sold their products despite loud and louder warnings from experts that millions of people are suffering health issues and will continue to suffer in the future as a result of bad diets and overeating. The play begins in the boardroom of Big Tobacco and morphs into the boardroom of Big Food. The issues both industries faced/face and the tactics each company used/use may be similar if not identical.

Preview script from Fox Plays
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