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Family Plays

MUCH ADO ABOUT MURDER

Audience-participation murder mystery

by

PAT COOK



MUCH ADO ABOUT MURDER

“What made this gimmick fun was watching the actors try to stay in character as they improvised answers to questions thrown at them ... light-hearted fun [that] will be staged by community, college, amateur and perhaps even professional theatres from here to Kokomo.

(A newspaper review of the University of St. Thomas production in Houston, Texas)

“The show has been a tremendous success.”

(Kathleen Dawson, Center Stage Players, Copenhagen, N.Y.)

Audience-participation murder mystery. By Pat Cook. Cast: 5m., 5w. Rich but rotten Carlton Larraby enjoyed punctuating the lives of his family with macabre little surprises. His latest joke is a Halloween party with everybody dressed as a character from Shakespeare. When the play begins, the bored guests have arrived and wait impatiently for their host to show up, unaware that he has been gruesomely bludgeoned to death in his study. Since this is an audience-participation play, the murder is revealed to the audience before the characters of the play know about it. A sinister master of ceremonies named Mr. Hawker tells the audience what has happened in a series of flashbacks as he lets them see the events surrounding the murder. Little by little, as the audience gets to know the people of the drama, they begin suspecting who the murderer might be ... only to discover that they're wrong. To help them further, Mr. Hawker invites them to view the clue-rich scene of the crime during intermission. Finally, near the end of Act II, he gives the audience the opportunity to question the characters. All the ingredients of a deliciously frightening murder mystery are here—lightning, thunder, weird sounds, screams in the dark—plus the fun of letting the audience participate in solving the crime. As a critic pointed out, *Much Ado About Murder* provides a “whimsically entertaining night.” *Set: Carlton Larraby's living room. Time: a Sunday afternoon. Approximate running time: 120 minutes. Sound effects CD available. Video available. Code: MN1.*

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Much Ado About Murder

MUCH ADO ABOUT MURDER

A 2-Act Audience-Participation
Murder Mystery

By

PAT COOK

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311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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PAT COOK

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(MUCH ADO ABOUT MURDER)

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“Produced by special arrangement with
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**Dedicated to Sam,
who always comes to my parties.**

MUCH ADO ABOUT MURDER

Cast of Characters

MR. (or MS.) HAWKER, a sinister Master of Ceremonies

JOLENE LARRABY, Blanche and Carlton's adopted daughter, age 24

BLANCHE LARRABY, Carlton's wife, in her forties

STEVEN MacDONALD, a 28-year-old former teacher, now a handyman
in Carlton Larraby's household

*LESLIE a 22-year-old twin to . . .

*WESLEY LARRABY, Leslie and Wesley are Malcolm's sons

LILLIAN DeMONDE, Malcolm and Carlton's sister, a dowager in her
sixties, very much the Grande Dame

MALCOLM LARRABY, Carlton Larraby's brother

KIMBERLY TRENT, Carlton Larraby's secretary, age 25

**See Production Notes, p. 54, for suggestions for making unrelated actors look like twins.*

Setting

Time: October 27, a Sunday afternoon of this or a recent year

Place: The Living Room of Carlton Larraby



Much Ado About Murder was first presented by the Drama Department of Saint University at the Jones Theatre, Houston, Texas, April–May, 1986, under the direction of Sam Havens with the following cast:

Mr. Hawker	Christopher Jones
Jolene	Kim Little
Blanche	Kathryn Rutherford
Steven	Sean Flannery
Leslie	G. Ballard Ginther
Wesley	Benjamin Quiroz
Lillian	Sheila Gillmore
Malcolm	Ruben Rojas
Kimberly	Patricia Salvo

ABOUT THE PLAY

"A disarmingly delightful evening of silly, light-hearted fun" is Houston Post critic William Albright's description of *Much Ado About Murder*. In his review of the world premiere, Albright wrote:

"Art smart. Local theaters can have all the contests and festivals they want, looking for 'serious' plays about the world after the bomb drops and who knows what all. It's frothy audience-pleasing frippery like *Much Ado About Murder* that has 'legs' and will be staged by community, college, amateur, and perhaps even professional theaters from here to Kokomo. After all, Larry Shue's *The Foreigner* is every bit as silly, and has been an off-Broadway hit for . . . years."

The plot: Rich but rotten Carlton Larraby, who enjoyed punctuating the lives of his family and associates with macabre little surprises, has invited them to a Halloween party with everybody dressed as a character from Shakespeare.

When the play begins, the bored guests have arrived and wait impatiently for their host to show up, unaware that he has been gruesomely bludgeoned to death in his study.

Since this is an audience-participation play, the murder is revealed to the audience before the characters of the play know about it. A sinister master of ceremonies named Mr. Hawker tells us—the audience—what has happened as, in a series of flashbacks, he lets us see the events surrounding the murder.

Little by little, as we get to know the people of the drama, we begin suspecting who the murderer might be . . . only to discover that we're wrong. To help us further, Mr. Hawker invites us to view the clue-rich scene of the crime during intermission. And finally, near the end of Act II, he gives us the opportunity to question the characters.

"What made this gimmick fun," Albright commented, was watching the actors try to stay in character as they improvised answers to questions thrown at them by the audience.

All the ingredients of a deliciously frightening murder mystery are here—lightning, thunder, weird sounds, screams in the dark . . . plus the fun of letting the audience participate in solving the crime.

As the critic pointed out, *Much Ado About Murder* provides a "whimsically entertaining night."

PRODUCTION NOTES

Properties

On "Olio stage":

Title cards: "Much Ado About Murder," "Mr. Steven MacDonald," "Mr. Leslie Larraby," "Mrs. Blanche Larraby," "Miss Kimberly Trent," "Lillian De-Monde," "Mr. Malcolm Larraby," "Mr. Wesley Larraby," "Miss Jolene Larraby," "Three Hours Later," "Intermission," "Interrogation by the Detectives," "The Solution"

35 mm. slides: 1—den fireplace and fire tools; 2—den hat rack with clubs and a cane; 3—pair of woman's glasses; 4—pair of gardening shears; 5—note pad, complete with writings/drawings (see Fig. A below); 6—an I. O. U. with Malcolm's name on it; 7—office calculator with 317537 on it; 8—mathematics book on floor; 9—office telephone off the hook; 10—overall picture of taped body with pens and pencils lying around it; 11—same as 10; 12—left hand with black felt-tip pen lying in the crevice of the thumb and forefinger; 13—note pad, closer shot, showing everything is written in ink or pencil, while the line "7 8 9 1 0 J" is written with a felt-tip pen; 14—office clock with mirror; 15—calculator number 317537; 16—calculator number turned upside down to read LESLIE

Slide projector and screen (in Act II only)

Hand Props:

ACT I

Folded piece of paper—Hawker
 Fireplace shovel—Malcolm
 Cane—Lillian
 Golf club—Steven, Leslie
 Human skull—on fireplace mantle
 Glass of punch—Jolene
 Tray of chips, snacks—Steven
 Large cardboard box containing costumes, monk's robe, props, wigs, smaller box of beards, etc.—Lillian
 Book, "The Complete Works of Shakespeare"—Leslie
 Deck of cards—Hawker

INTERMISSION—see pp. 29 and 55 for detailed description of Carlton Larraby's study and necessary props

"Clues" in Carlton Larraby's study:

Fireplace tools
 Hatrack with two golf clubs and a brass-headed cane
 Open book on floor beside desk
 Office clock (set one hour fast) with mirror
 for face—on wall above desk

On desk:

Taped outline of murder victim
 Felt-tipped pen in taped figure's left hand
 Phone with receiver off cradle
 Note pad, scribbled on like Fig. A
 Calculator which reads 317537
 I. O. U. for \$5000 signed by Malcolm Larraby
 Several books held upright by bookends
 Gardening shears

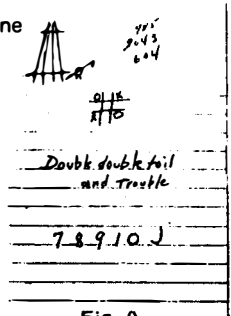


Fig. A

Woman's eyeglasses

Wind-up music box (one that plays "Old MacDonald Had a Farm" if possible)

ACT II

Halloween mask—Hawker

Matchbox, candles—Hawker

Fireplace poker—Wesley

Watches—Steven and Lillian

Compress—on Blanche's head

Monk's robe, belt—Murderer

Monk's robe, false beard—Lillian

Piece of paper—Lillian

Whistle—Hawker

Costumes and Characterizations

Mr. Hawker wore white tie and tails in the premiere. He spoke "with the marvelously mellifluous menace of the *Inner Sanctum* announcer in the golden days of radio" [Albright] and served as a sort of stage manager.

Steven may wear informal "handyman" clothes—perhaps a work shirt, jeans, and jacket.

Jolene and **Kimberly** arrive at the party in street clothes, adding Shakespearean costume pieces later—**Jolene** as Friar Lawrence from *Romeo and Juliet*.

The rest of the characters wear Shakespearean costumes throughout the play:

Blanche as Lady Macbeth, **Malcolm** as Prospero from *The Tempest*, **Lillian** as Katharina from *The Taming of the Shrew*, and **Leslie** and **Wesley** as the twin Dromios from *The Comedy of Errors*.

Leslie and **Wesley** are supposed to be identical twins. Since both wear beards, unrelated actors of similar size can be made almost identical by giving them identical beards, mustaches, heavy eyebrows, and haircuts (or wigs). The only noticeable difference is the way they part their hair—one parts his on the right side, the other on the left. Their identical Dromio costumes also help give the illusion that they are identical twins. In the premiere production, one wore an Elizabethan cape draped over the right shoulder while the other wore his cape draped over the left shoulder (see photo on p. 57, taken before Leslie and Wesley added beards).

Another difference in the twins is in personality: Leslie's coolness, poise, and sarcastic wit contrast with Wesley's nervous, fearful sensitivity. Each of the other characters has an identifying "schtick"—Jolene's emotionalism, Blanche's vanity, Steven's sophistication (in spite of his servile position), Lillian's "grande dame of the theatre" facade, Malcolm's staid, down-to-earth logic, and Kimberly's businesslike demeanor.

Music, Sound, Lights, and Special Effects

A music box-like rendition of "Old MacDonald Had a Farm" is the only necessary music. If nothing else is available, a tape of someone playing the tune on a xylophone, vibraharp, zither, or some similar instrument will give the proper impression.

Thunder and **lightning** are the main essential special effects—after all, what would a murder mystery be without a thunderstorm! Other sound effects include a **clock ticking**, a **doorbell**, a **whistling teakettle**, offstage **screams** and assorted scary noises.

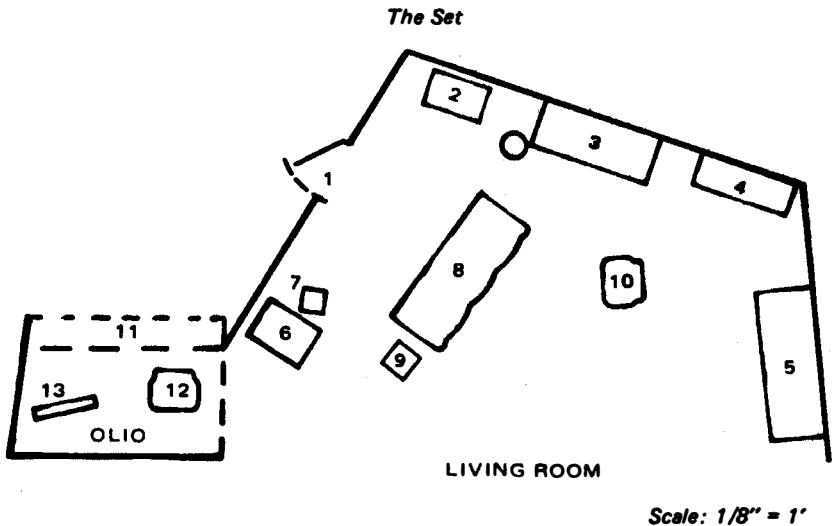
Isolating the "Olio stage" or "confessional area" and various areas of the Liv-

ing Room with lights is desirable, but not essential. The Olio Stage may be delineated by using a platform at the edge of the main stage. Focusing attention on each vignette at the beginning of the play may be achieved without special lighting by having all actors freeze in tableau except the actor in action.

In most of the scenes supposedly lighted only by candles, it is desirable to add enough stage lighting so that the audience can see easily; however, in a few scenes—e.g., when the murderer takes Blanche into the wardrobe and when the murderer hides in the window seat—it is best to blackout the stage completely. The audience would be cheated of the fun of surprise if they can see what's going on.

Curtain Calls

One suggestion for the curtain calls is a traditional line-up of the characters with **Mr. Hawker** standing in the middle. Before they bow, Hawker gets a curious look on his face and falls over, exposing a knife in his back. The rest then take their bows.



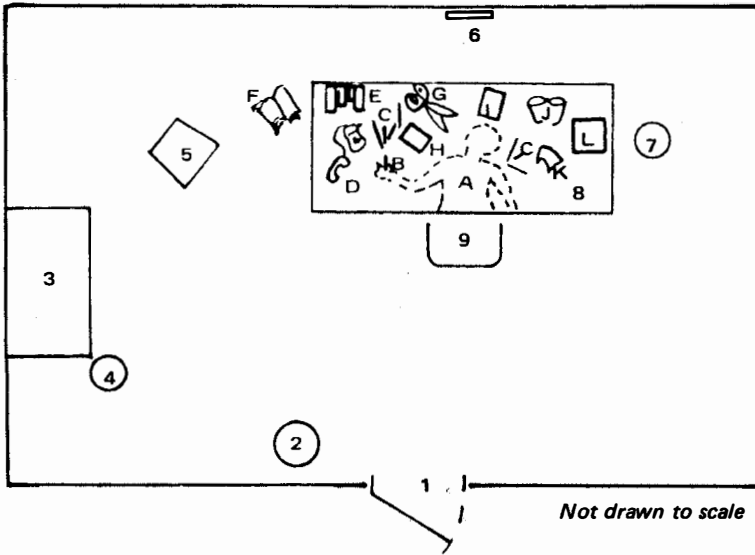
Living Room

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| 1—Door | 6—Writing table |
| 2—Bookshelves | 7—Chair |
| 3—Fireplace and tools | 8—Sofa |
| 4—Wardrobe (or closet door) | 9—End table |
| 5—Window and window seat | 10—Easy chair |

Olio Stage—the “confessional”—on a platform

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 11—Steps up to the platform | 13—Easel for cards (may become the projection screen at denouement) |
| 12—Armchair | |

Add other furniture and trim props as desired.



CARLTON LARRABY'S STUDY

(May be in the lobby, another room, or basement of your theatre, or in a corner of the auditorium hidden by screens, curtains, or flats until time to invite the audience to come in. If in the lobby, it can be set up while Act I is in progress.)

Set props

- 1—Door
- 2—Hatrack, with brass-headed cane and 2 golf clubs
- 3—Fireplace
- 4—Fire tools
- 5—Straight chair
- 6—Clock with mirror face
- 7—Wastebasket
- 8—Carlton Larraby's desk
- 9—Desk chair

Items on desk

- A—Taped outline of victim's body
- B—Felt-tipped pen in victim's left hand
- C—Assorted pens and pencils
- D—Telephone off hook
- E—Books, in bookends
- F—Math book on floor
- G—Garden shears
- H—Notepad
- I—Calculator
- J—Woman's eyeglasses
- K—Malcolm's IOU
- L—Wind-up music box (playing, if possible:)

Old MacDonald had a farm, Ee-i, ee-i - o, And on this farm he had a duck,
 Ee-i, ee-i - o, With a quack,quack here and a quack,quack there, Here a quack, there a quack
 Here and there a quack,quack, Old MacDonald had a farm, Ee-i-ee-i - o.



St. Thomas University

MUCH ADO ABOUT MURDER.

ACT I

[Our little entertainment takes place on two stage areas. On our first, or Main, stage is a representation of the living room of Carlton Larraby. There is a couch, several chairs, two end tables, a writing desk and telephone, a wardrobe/closet, a window seat or chest, and a fireplace. On the second, or the Olio (perhaps a raised platform at the side of the main stage) sits a plush chair and an easel which holds title cards. The first title card reads, quite appropriately, "Much Ado About Murder."]

While the HOUSE LIGHTS are still up, MR. HAWKER enters and faces the audience]

HAWKER. Ladies and gentlemen, let me be the first to welcome you this evening. We are most happy ourselves to be here in this cushy theatre and would like to express our satisfaction to the management. Indeed, we would be permanently ecstatic with the situation were it not for . . . *[He pulls out a folded piece of paper and reads:]* . . . the men's bathroom sink being clogged, the noticeable absence of any coffee or refreshments backstage, the ongoing . . . *[He looks up at the audience, shrugs his shoulders, and returns the page to his pocket]* Well, maybe this isn't the time for all that. Tonight, we are proud to present a wonderful little piece, a musical operetta done entirely on ice skates. *[JOLENE enters quickly and crosses to Hawker]* This play is an adaptation of that old restoration epic, "She Stoops to Conquer." Our version is entitled, "She Stinks on Ice". . . *[He sees Jolene]* What? *[JOLENE whispers in his ear]* No, that's not tonight, it's . . . *[Again she whispers to him while pointing to the title cards on the easel]* You mean he's not here? *[Again JOLENE whispers]* Oh, the actor's disease. *[HAWKER now re-approaches the audience; JOLENE exits]*

Slight change of plans. Tonight we present for your enjoyment and amazement, "Much Ado About Murder," an enchanting entertainment which happens to contain a homicide. Our little drama will be acted out mostly here . . . *[indicating the Main stage]*, but the suspects will give their testimony there . . . *[He points to the Olio stage]* That's our confessional, as it were.

Our actors tonight include some very talented thespians, let me tell

you. First, may I present the extraordinary Salome Curtiss. [*BLANCHE enters, bows and begins to form the actors' line*] Known chiefly for her works in poetry, she is no stranger to the stage and has played in such diverse dramas as "Wind in the Willows" and "Contessa in Suspenders," in which she played a supporting role. She will be portraying the part of Blanche Larraby in our show this evening. Next, Harlegen Hall. [*STEVEN enters and bows. He then stands next to Blanche*] Many years a spear-carrier, Harlegen finally graduated to meatier roles two years ago and has essayed such parts as Launce in "Two Gentlemen of Verona," and in "Sweet Child of Fantasy" he played the duck. He is portraying Steven MacDonald. Next, Rosetta Lipscomb. [*JOLENE re-enters, bows, and takes her place in line*] She is our ingenue and has enjoyed several successes involving actors. Tonight she is playing the part of Jolene Larraby. Darryl Clovis and Murphy Clovis. [*WESLEY and LESLIE enter and take their places in line. WESLEY elbows LESLIE, they both step forward, bow, and resume their places*] These two brothers say they got their first taste of the theatre when their father was run over by a circus wagon. Tonight, they're playing the parts of the twins, Wesley and Leslie Larraby. They aren't really twins, but after all, this is theatre. Clare Mae Haversham. [*LILLIAN enters majestically, bows, and stands in line*] Our first lady of the theatre, she has been trodding the boards since she was five years old. She is our classical actress and knows her Shakespeare inside and out. [*As an aside to the audience*] We think they used to date. [*LILLIAN clears her throat and gives Hawker a vicious look*] Tonight she will be portraying Lillian DeMonde. Mr. Larry Durpole. [*MALCOLM enters, bows, and takes his place in line*] Larry has done a multitude of roles and will best be remembered for his one-man show, "Elias Howe, the Wit." Tonight, he plays Malcolm Larraby. And last, but certainly not least, Geraldine Puce. [*KIMBERLY enters and bows. She meekly edges her way in line*] Little Gerri used to be the third man in the Puce Family Tree, a tumbling act she used to do with two uncles. Tonight, she is playing the part of Kimberly Trent. [*He turns to the actors*] Okay, I did it. Now, please! [*He motions them to leave the stage. They each exit in character*]

Tonight, we have a multitude of surprises in store for you . . . I hope. Most importantly, we want you to play a part as well. You, my unsuspecting audience, get to be the detective. That's right. You get to figure out whodunit . . . with what . . . and why. See how good you are at the gentle art of deduction. Are you ready to begin? Pay very close atten-

tion. You have to watch everything. [*The LIGHTS start to dim*] But you also have to listen . . . you have to listen . . .

[LIGHTS full out. In the darkness, we hear the sound of a MUSIC BOX playing "Old MacDonald Had a Farm." The tune fades into the rhythmic TICKING of a clock. The ticking becomes louder until a loud CRUNCH causes it to cease. There is a beat, then the sound of a WOMAN's SCREAM. As the scream fades, the OVERTURE starts—a melodramatic piece of music to set the mood. During the overture, various isolated portions of the Living Room LIGHT up to reveal a series of mute vignettes, all taken from the play. The first mini-scene is MALCOLM, next to the fireplace. He mouths silently, then quickly reaches down, picks up the fireplace shovel and raises it over his head. The LIGHTS quickly blackout. The second vignette has LILLIAN in another part of the room, acting out a wordless scene; she reaches and grabs a cane, hoisting it high over her head. LIGHTS blackout. The third occurrence under the soundless solo light is STEVEN, obviously listening to someone. He raises a golf club and prepares to swing it downward as the LIGHTS quickly blackout. The fourth and final vignette is LESLIE, standing in front of the writing desk (it doesn't have to be seen in its later position at this time in the play). He raises a golf club and yells silently at someone. Again, the LIGHTS prevent us from seeing the rest due to the merciful blackout. The OVERTURE stops; LIGHTS up on the Olio stage. MR. HAWKER indicates the title cards and removes "Much Ado About Murder." The second card reads "Mr. Steven MacDonald." STEVEN enters and sits in the chair. He addresses the audience as if he were talking to a detective]

STEVEN. I hope you don't mind my going first. I'm sure you can understand that the rest of them are still pretty shaken up. Especially Jolene. I mean, here she just walked in and found him . . . like that. I know when I found out . . . Sorry, I'll try to just stick to the facts, okay? I'm sort of the handyman around here. Well, handyman, gopher, butler . . . uh—I guess since we're talking about a murder here, I shouldn't have told you I'm the butler. [*He forces a smile*] Odd how your mind works at a time like this. Anyway, Mr. Larraby hired me about a year ago. I was a teacher for a couple of years, English. But the world is overrun with English teachers, so after I successfully navigated my way to the unemployment office and back for six months, Jolene introduced me

to her father. He liked me. Mainly, I think, because I used to be a teacher. I think he had some idea of coaxing me back into the profession. He was a wonderful man. Now, I don't mean that in the sense of his being great or well liked because that was not the case. I mean it in the sense of "full of wonder." It was amazing what that man could do. Well, like this party this afternoon. It wasn't just your average Halloween party. No, everybody had to come as their favorite Shakespearean character. It was going to be wonderful!

[LIGHTS fade on the Olio stage and dim up on the Living Room. Around the room, sitting in silence, are some of the members of the family. BLANCHE, dressed as Lady Macbeth, sits in a chair, fidgeting with her nails. Near her, looking nervously around the room, stands WESLEY. He is dressed as Dromio. Across the room, also dressed as Dromio, is his twin, LESLIE. He, without touching it, studies a human skull on the fireplace mantle. MALCOLM, who is dressed half-heartedly as Prospero, sits contentedly on the couch, next to KIMBERLY, who is dressed in her usual drab but business-like fashion. JOLENE is also dressed in a contemporary outfit as she sips her punch and smiles. Contrary to Steven's last comment, the party is very dull. After a beat, LESLIE speaks:]

LESLIE. Damn, this is exciting.

MALCOLM. *[Fatherly reprimand]* Leslie.

JOLENE. Well, what IS Dad waiting for? *[Her demeanor becomes one of trying to uplift the party]* What do you think, Unc? Think he's planning some grand entrance, like . . . like the ghost of Hamlet's father?

MALCOLM. I don't pretend to be able to outguess Carlton. He has his own way. He'll come out when he's good and ready.

BLANCHE. I think he's just being rude.

JOLENE. *[Crossing to her]* He is! And let's go tell him.

BLANCHE. *[Smiles]* Ho ho, you go right ahead. You're the only one he listens to.

WESLEY. Leslie!

LESLIE. Hm?

WESLEY. Will you stop staring at that skull!

LESLIE. Why, does it bother you?

MALCOLM. Why ARE you staring at that thing?

LESLIE. I don't know. It reminds me of somebody I used to know. *[He repositions the skull]* How about it, Pop, anybody you know?

MALCOLM. That's enough of that.

LESLIE. Don't you wonder where he got it?

MALCOLM. We're not having any of your innuendos here. We all know how you feel about Carlton.

[LIGHTS out on the Living Room, up on the Olio stage. MR. HAWKER changes the cards to read "Mr. Leslie Larraby." He exits and LESLIE enters and sits]

LESLIE. Everybody's going to tell you I did it. I know what they're saying, I know what they always say. That's because they think I hated the old bastard. But you can believe this, I didn't hate him. No, it was more of a nurtured apathy, something I'd worked on over the years. Hate takes up too much time and I didn't want to give it to him. Old Uncle Moriarty. That's a little pet name I had for him. You know, Sherlock Holmes' nemesis? The embodiment of all that was evil. Well, there you have a picture of Carlton Larraby, a picture that grew more wrinkled and more sinister in his attic while he presented that splendid facade of good old Uncle Carl, ready to give you money for anything, anytime. Then, later, he'd call in his favors for whatever reasons, whatever suited him. Also, Moriarty was a math professor like him. The name just seemed to fit him. *[He thinks]* You know, it's interesting. You know why Sherlock Holmes was always so successful? Because his culprits always behaved so logically, did the rational thing when their backs were against the wall. He never had to deal with a madman.

[LIGHTS out on the Olio stage, up on the Living Room]

LESLIE. The skull bothers me, that's all. Think it's somebody Uncle Moriarty knocked off?

MALCOLM. *[Becoming stern]* I said that's enough.

WESLEY. And don't call him that. You know how much he hates it. *[STEVEN enters, carrying a dish of chips and snacks]*

LESLIE. What's the big deal, he's not is he? *[He talks to the*
Okay, where is he?

BLANCHE. I know what Carl's doing. He's sitting in his den, waiting for Aunt Lil to get here.

JOLENE. Don't tell me he's going to try to upstage her?

BLANCHE. No, it has something to do with some announcement or other.

MALCOLM. Oh, yes. He told me over the phone that he had some revelation he was going to uncork.

BLANCHE. Did he tell you what it was about?

MALCOLM. Does he ever? [*STEVEN is now near Leslie*]

LESLIE. I know who this reminds me of. [*He shoves the skull in Steven's face*] Our old Handyman! [*STEVEN stares at Leslie coolly, then holds out the tray*]

STEVEN. Dip?

LESLIE. [*With an edge*] That's Mr. Dip to you.

WESLEY. [*Moving around the room*] I overheard your phone call, Dad. Didn't Uncle Carl say something about the announcement, something about it concerning us?

JOLENE. Us? The whole family?

MALCOLM. I didn't get that impression.

WESLEY. [*Interrupting*] Not all of us—it seemed to have something to do with one or two of us, but . . . [*He stops and looks over at Malcolm*] Sorry, Dad.

MALCOLM. After all, it was MY phone call. [*To the rest*] He really didn't say. [*LESLIE moves to the window seat, carrying the skull*]

JOLENE. Kimberly, did he say anything to you about any announcement?

KIMBERLY. No. No, he didn't. I mean, he mentioned something to me about it but he didn't go into any detail. I think if it concerned the family he would probably keep it to himself.

BLANCHE. Him and his surprises.

[*LIGHTS out on the Living Room, up on the Olio stage. MR. HAWKER changes the cards to read "Mrs. Blanche Larraby." He exits and BLANCHE enters*]

BLANCHE. What've they been telling you? They talked about me, didn't they. They told you how I was always spending money and running up all the bills. I know, I know, you don't have to tell me anything. It was always like that. They'd be huddled in a group and the minute I entered the room, they'd change the subject or shut up altogether. But I knew. I always knew. I was being discussed again. But don't you see? That's my reason for not killing him. That's my alibi, or whatever you call it. If he always gave me the money, if he always paid the bills, why on earth would I want to kill him? I know who probably told you about me. It was Leslie, wasn't it. He hates Carlton and anything to do with him, including me. Anybody can tell you that. Why would I want to kill Carlton? He took care of me. Oh, and I loved him, too, of course. There's another reason.

[LIGHTS out on the Olio stage, up on the Living Room]

WESLEY. Maybe he's hired a private investigator and had us all investigated.

BLANCHE. Maybe he wanted to find out why you went to New York.

LESLIE. *[Not flinching]* I doubt it. I made sure none of the witnesses would talk. *[He holds up the skull]* Alas, New York, I knew it well.

MALCOLM. *[Uncharacteristically irate]* Will you put that thing away?! I don't want to have to tell you again!

LESLIE. *[Visibly surprised]* Yeah, sure, Dad. *[He opens the window seat, places the skull inside, closes the lid and sits on it, eyeing his father. The sound of THUNDER is heard]*

BLANCHE. Oh, rain. Of course. Steven?

STEVEN. I'll make sure all the windows are up in the cars. *[He exits. LESLIE watches him leave and speaks sarcastically]*

LESLIE. What a sweet man.

JOLENE. Why do you pick on him so much?

LESLIE. It's not just him, I pick on everybody. I'm an equal opportunity nag.

WESLEY. It's cold in here, isn't it? Is anybody else cold?

MALCOLM. You're always cold. *[Sound of a DOORBELL]*

KIMBERLY. I'll get it. *[She exits]*

BLANCHE. She seem a little moody to you?

[LIGHTS out on the Living Room, up on the Olio stage. MR. HAWKER changes the cards to read "Miss Kimberly Trent." He exits and she enters and sits]

KIMBERLY. I am . . . was . . . Mr. Larraby's secretary. I first met him when I was a student at the University and he was one of my professors. It was during that time when he posted a memo on the bulletin board for an office secretary. I applied and got the position. I worked for him at the University for two years. When he retired, he offered me the position of private secretary to work here at his home. I accepted the job and have worked here in that capacity for four years. He was a hard worker with a keen eye for detail. Although, at times, it didn't seem that he had much common sense. That may sound like something of a paradox, but that was the way he was. He could be very unorthodox in his dealings with people, but I think that was because they didn't really understand him. Maybe I've said too much. Oh, one other thing. My job here, working with him, took up a great deal of my time. Consequently, I never graduated from the University.

[LIGHTS out on the Olio stage, up on the Living Room]

JOLENE. I wasn't going to say anything but the day before yesterday I think I caught Kimberly crying.

BLANCHE. Crying?

JOLENE. I think.

BLANCHE. I didn't think she could cry.

JOLENE. Well, she said she had a cold.

BLANCHE. That could be. I HAVE seen her with a cold.

[LILLIAN enters, carrying a large cardboard box, which contains costumes, props, wigs, and other paraphernalia pertaining to theatre]

LILLIAN. Oyez, oyez, gather ye rosebuds while ye may.

MALCOLM. What now? *[WESLEY crosses to her to help with the box]*

WESLEY. Here, Aunt Lil, let me.

LILLIAN. That's quite all right. I have it. *[She eases the box to the floor]* I am still capable of a few things, you know.

WESLEY. That must've weighed a ton.

LILLIAN. A lifetime usually does. *[KIMBERLY re-enters]* Sorry I'm late for the Shakespearean soiree. I was in my attic putting together this theatrical care package for anyone who might have use for these things. *[She looks around]* Where's Carlton?

BLANCHE. He hasn't come out of his hole yet.

LILLIAN. Trying to upstage me, huh? Big ham. *[Everyone gathers around the box and starts pulling out articles for closer inspection]*

LESLIE. What IS all this stuff?

LILLIAN. *[Dryly]* Ah, such an analytical mind. This is theatre STUFF. Anyone who doesn't have a costume or a complete costume can feel free to rummage through here for anything you might need.

JOLENE. Aunt Lil, you are a lifesaver. My flight only got in three hours ago and I really didn't have time . . .

LILLIAN. Dig around in there, darling.

[LIGHTS out on the Living Room, up on the Olio stage. MR. HAWKER changes the cards to read "Lillian DeMonde." He exits and LILLIAN enters, haughtily, and sits]

LILLIAN. *[Dressed as Katharina]* You probably know me already, don't you, dear. I'm sure you've heard my name. Lillian DeMonde. Or, as the French say it, "Da-Moh." The actress, yes. Well, maybe that was

a tidge before your time. But I bet your father remembers me. Years ago, on Broadway. Not Shakespeare, no. You must not judge me in this costume, not as Katharina, the Shrew. No, no, Shakespeare was always a pariah on the Great White Way. I did once play Hamlet, though. No, I don't mean I was IN "Hamlet," I WAS Hamlet. And I astounded them, even if it wasn't Broadway. Of course we only played murders, I was never involved in one . . . till now. I was never any good with modern tragedy. There's no flair, no imagination. Oh, I'm not trying to take away from the heinous crime committed here, though I did not know my nephew all that well. He was a horrible man. An excellent dinner companion and a brilliant conversationalist, but a horrible man. I could have played him better.

[LIGHTS out on the Olio stage, up on the Living Room]

BLANCHE. Kimberly, you don't seem to have a costume.

KIMBERLY. I thought that part was just for the family.

BLANCHE. Nonsense, you were invited, weren't you?

KIMBERLY. Yes, but I . . .

LILLIAN. Then march yourself over here, young lady, and we'll fix you right up. Let's see. Size ten?

LESLIE. Can I measure her inseam?

MALCOLM. Leslie, if you're going to keep up this attitude the rest of the day then you might as well leave.

LESLIE. Oh no, I'll be good. I have a distinct feeling things are going to get interesting around here. *[JOLENE takes out a monk's robe, complete with hood]*

JOLENE. Here we are.

LILLIAN. No, no, bad casting. I see the fair Jolene as the naive and lovesick Juliet.

JOLENE. Right play, wrong part. Friar Lawrence. I played it in high school. *[She slips the robe on over her pants suit]*

LILLIAN. An obvious oversight by some high school director, I'm sure. *[Dripping with sarcasm]* Aren't they lovely people?

LESLIE. *[Holds up a smaller box]* Look at all this. Wigs, beards, moustaches . . .

BLANCHE. I'm giving Carlton five more minutes, then I'm going to get him.

LILLIAN. Braving the lion's den, are we?

BLANCHE. I don't care. He's been acting strange all weekend.

MALCOLM. How do you mean?

LESLIE. How can you tell?

MALCOLM. Shut up.

BLANCHE. *[To Jolene]* You know how he always goes into his den to work at ten o'clock? Today, he went in an hour early, around nine.

MALCOLM. Probably something to do with this ominous announcement he's got us all waiting to hear.

[LIGHTS out on the Living Room, up on the Olio stage. MR. HAWKER changes the title cards to read "Mr. Malcolm Larraby." He leaves and MALCOLM enters and sits]

MALCOLM. The Shakespeare thing, that's par for the course for Carlton. We both had a very liberal dose of the classics when we were growing up. Dad was an avid reader and Mother was what they used to call a Patron of the Arts. They may still call them that, I wouldn't know. Anyway, the Bard was read and acted out in several amateur productions in the Larraby living room. Carlton, of course, was always Romeo, Macbeth, Othello, and I was invariably Iago or Tybalt. I guess we were always trying to get Dad's attention—he was a man to be conjured with. I even took up magic, sleight of hand, stuff like that. Silverware was missing from the house for years. I got to be pretty good, if I do say so myself. But, with Dad, Carlton was always the center of attention. He had a way of delighting people where I could only satisfy.

[LIGHTS out on the Olio stage, up on the Living Room]

JOLENE. *[Now as Friar Lawrence]* "Saint Francis be my speed! How oft tonight have my old feet stumbled at graves! Who's who is it that consorts, so late, the dead?" *[She looks at Lillian for approval]*

LILLIAN. Maybe that director knew what he was doing. *[STEVEN enters]*

STEVEN. It's really starting to come down out there. *[Sound effect of rolling THUNDER. STEVEN almost laughs]* See?

LESLIE. Well, while we're waiting, how about a game?

BLANCHE. That's an idea. Let's DO something.

MALCOLM. I don't really feel up for any games.

LESLIE. Come on, Dad, this is a party. And what is the purpose of a party? To have fun. And how do we have fun?

WESLEY. You're really starting to get obnoxious, you know.

LESLIE. I'm pretending I'm you. Now. What kind of game can we

play? Something that should include everyone. Even the ever-silent Miss Trent.

JOLENE. Leslie's right. This sitting around is getting monotonous. And the weather's not helping any.

LESLIE. Thank you, Jojo, you were always my favorite.

JOLENE. Liar. You should never lie to a monk, my son. I forgive you for that.

LESLIE. You know, in that outfit, you look just like Pat O'Brien.

JOLENE. I forgive you for that, too. [*LESLIE starts to say something*] I wouldn't go for three.

STEVEN. Would anyone like some coffee?

JOLENE. No, Steven, don't leave. Stay and play. You're part of the family, too.

LESLIE. Yeah, the best part. The kind that's not related.

JOLENE. [*Pleading*] Really, stay. We all know that Leslie is a pain in the butt.

STEVEN. Oh, I get it. If you have to put up with him, so do I?

LESLIE. Exactly. [*Upper-class accent*] And good help is sooo hard to find these days.

LILLIAN. You really should've gone into the theatre, Leslie.

LESLIE. Really? Which one? [*JOLENE holds Steven's hand, keeping him from exiting*]

JOLENE. What kind of game, Les?

LESLIE. Well, let's think a minute.

BLANCHE. I love Charades.

LESLIE. Yes, we would all be good at THAT one, wouldn't we? Wait. [*An inspiration*] Wait, wait, wait. This just might be fun. Aunt Blanche, are you telling the truth?

BLANCHE. What?

WESLEY. You're NOT going to play the Truth game, are you? That would be the worst excuse . . .

LESLIE. [*Cutting him off*] No, no, wait. [*Back to Blanche*] Now, think, Aunt Blanche, IS Charades your favorite game of all?

BLANCHE. My favorite game? Yes, I guess.

JOLENE. I see what you're doing. Our favorite games!

LESLIE. A game of games.

BLANCHE. Charades is definitely my favorite game.

LESLIE. Why?

WESLEY. You sound like Dr. Jacobssen.