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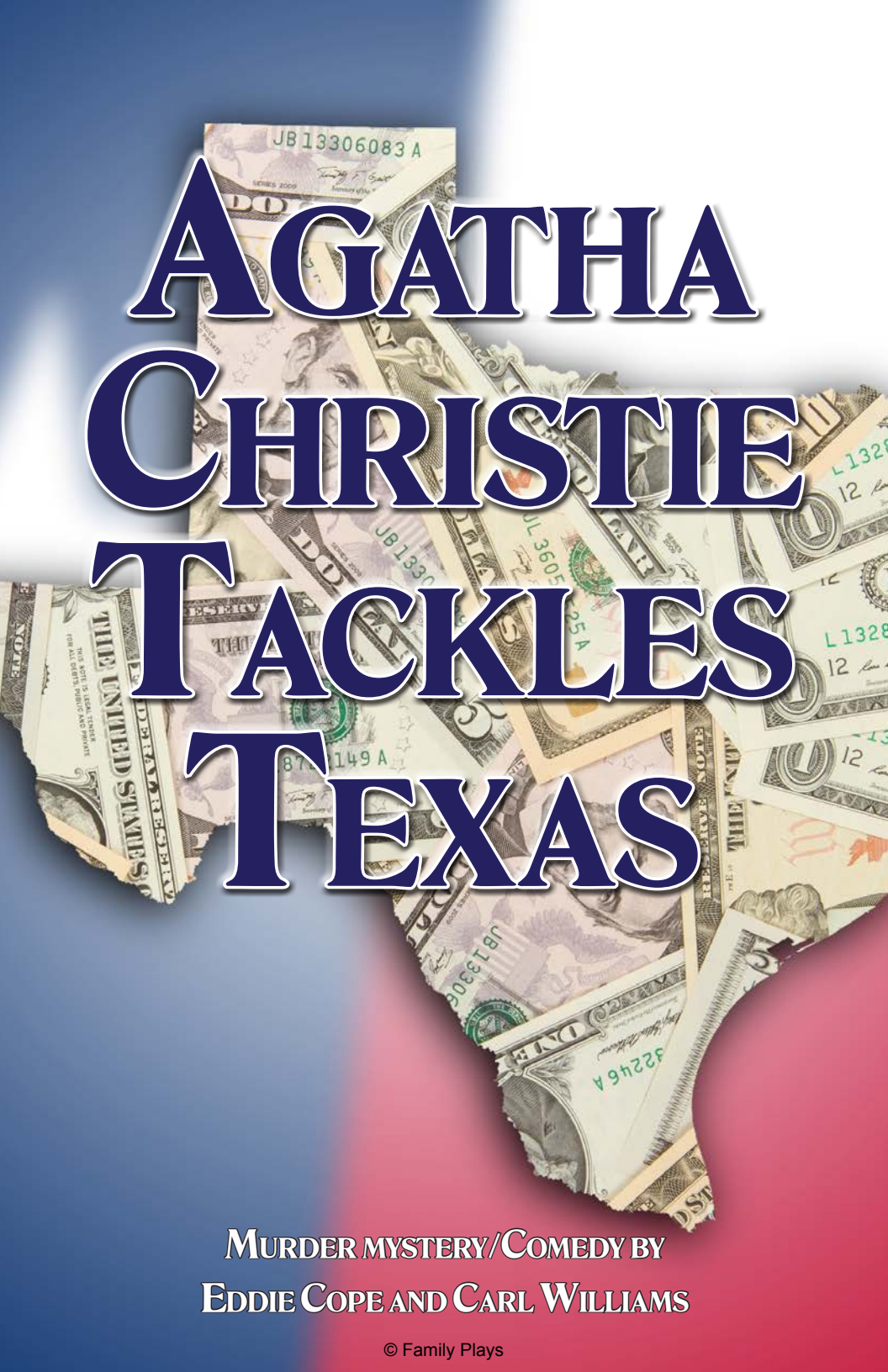
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Family Plays



AGATHA CHRISTIE TACKLES TEXAS

MURDER MYSTERY/COMEDY BY
EDDIE COPE AND CARL WILLIAMS

AGATHA CHRISTIE TACKLES TEXAS

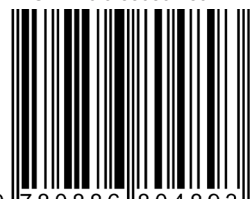
Murder mystery/Comedy. By Eddie Cope and Carl Williams. Cast: 4m., 4w. In response to the tremendous success of *Agatha Christie Made Me Do It*, Houstonians Eddie Cope and Carl Williams concocted a zany plot about murder near “Big D,” Dallas to non-Texans. The two-act, tongue-in-cheek humor generated by the odd assortment of exaggerated characters results in Texans poking fun at themselves, a selling point for out-of-staters to join the crowd. It seems as though Agatha Christie just can’t escape murder and mayhem, even thousands of miles from her native England. In this spell-binding tale of intrigue, our heroine travels to distant Texas to assemble notes for her latest novel. She comes face to face with far worse than armadillos and rattlesnakes when the scream of her maid alerts the household to a brutal murder. In this countryside manor well away from the bustle of the city crowds, Christie comes to a chilling conclusion—the killer has to be one of the guests. In a home full of visitors, each with more than his share of skeletons in the closet, there is only one certainty—this time the butler didn’t do it. *The action takes place in the living room of a large country estate. Costumes: modern clothes. Approximate running time: 75 to 90 minutes. Code: AG6.*

Family Plays

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(AGATHA CHRISTIE TACKLES TEXAS)

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PRODUCTION NOTES

Properties

<i>Addison</i>	hardback Agatha Christie novels, card table, 2 straight chairs
<i>Bridey</i>	carving & dinner knives wrapped in a dishcloth, cake & serving tray, handkerchief
<i>Agatha Christie</i>	wheelchair, cash, diamond brooch, revolver, glasses, basket of knitting, cane, watch, life insurance policy
<i>Liz</i>	cashbox, phone cord
<i>Phyllis</i>	2 suitcases, overnight case, cowboy hat for Agatha
<i>Ace</i>	overnight bag, handful of envelopes, letter opener, bloody knife, handkerchief
<i>Sebastian</i>	overnight bag, pint of whiskey
<i>Carlos</i>	overnight bag, towel, machete

Costumes

<i>Addison</i>	typical butler attire, perhaps a suit.
<i>Bridey</i>	typical maid attire
<i>Agatha Christie</i>	conventional attire appropriate to a woman of Agatha's age and position, perhaps a tasteful dress or pants suit; ankle is taped.
<i>Liz</i>	Modern clothing appropriate to a woman of 25, perhaps with Texas flair; blouse with buttons down the front.
<i>Phyllis</i>	Mini-skirt and low-cut blouse.
<i>Ace</i>	Modern clothing. Wig, long black dress, and earrings for the act.
<i>Sebastian</i>	Modern clothing. Wig, long black dress, and earrings for the act.
<i>Carlos</i>	Modern clothing. Wig, long black dress, and earrings for the act.

Sound Effects

Telephone ringing, car approaching, car horn, car door slamming, car driving away

ABOUT THE PLAY

It seems as though Agatha Christie just can't escape murder and mayhem, even thousands of miles from her native England. In this spell-binding tale of intrigue from veteran playwrights Eddie Cope and Carl Williams, our heroine travels to distant Texas to assemble notes for her latest novel, but she comes face to face with far worse than armadillos and rattlesnakes when the scream of her maid alerts the household to a brutal murder. In this countryside manor well away from the bustle of the city crowds, Agatha comes to a chilling conclusion—the killer has to be one of the guests. In a home full of visitors, each with more than their share of skeletons in the closet, there is only one certainty—this time the butler didn't do it.

The play had its world premiere at the Country Playhouse Black Box Theatre, of Houston, TX, during the summer of 2001; Penny Corden, coordinator, and Herb Wells, director, with this cast:

Addison	Jeff Luchsinger
Bridey	Marge Prus
Agatha Christie	Jan Steinway
Liz	Elizabeth Seabolt
Phylis	Debra Powell
Ace	Keith Fraase
Sebastian	Steven Leyva
Carlos	Alex Lemuz

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Addison Dame Agatha's butler, a handsome charmer with a prison record. Age: 40.

Bridey Addison's mentally unstable daughter, a housemaid with an obsession for knives. Age: 18.

Agatha Christie Mystery writer, a strong-willed old lady with a sharp eye, a sharp mind, and sometimes sharp tongue. She wears distinctive glasses and a somewhat old-fashioned hairstyle. Age: 60-70.

Liz Dame Agatha's sweet-natured secretary, an attractive young woman with a distinct Texas accent. Age: 25

Phyllis Tough manager of the college boys' act, a brassy mantrap who dresses like an invitation. Age: 35-40.

Ace Cousin of Liz and one third of a comedy act, a likeable "all-American boy" with a wild sense of humor. College age.

Sebastian Medical school dropout, a brooding type who wants to quit the act. College age.

Carlos Sexy-looking Latin with a jealous streak, presently having an affair with Phyllis. College age.

Synopsis of Scenes

Act I, Scene One, Living room of a large country estate near Dallas, late Saturday afternoon.

Act I, Scene Two, The same, a short time later.

Act II, The same, a short time later.

Time: The Present.

Setting: Living room comfortably furnished with sofa, coffee table, chairs, a bureau, and a small writing desk with a telephone. Entry hallway is upstage center. Stage left is doorway to the kitchen and servants' quarters. Stage right is doorway to the interior of the house.

AGATHA CHRISTIE TACKLES TEXAS

by EDDIE COPE & CARL WILLIAMS

ACT I, Scene One

[The setting is the living room of a large country estate near Dallas.

AT RISE: ADDISON, in butler attire, arranges hardback copies of Agatha Christie novels on top of a bureau. BRIDEY, in maid's outfit, enters from the kitchen hallway with something wrapped in a dish-cloth. She sees Addison, turns to leave.]

ADDISON. Just a moment.

BRIDEY. *[stops, looks back hesitantly]* Yes, Father?

ADDISON. What do you have there?

BRIDEY. Nothing.

ADDISON. Bridey.

BRIDEY. Just some silver I was going to polish.

ADDISON. Let me see it. *[He takes the bundle and opens it, revealing a handful of carving knives and dinner knives.]* Knives. All knives. How many times have I warned you?

BRIDEY. I wasn't doing anything with them. Nothing bad. I just like to look at them.

ADDISON. I doubt if the asylums in America are any more pleasant than those in England. You wouldn't want to find out, would you?

BRIDEY. Oh no, Father. No. Please don't send me there again!

ADDISON. Then take these back to the kitchen.

BRIDEY. I will. I will.

[ADDISON hands Bridey the knives then both are distracted as LIZ pushes Agatha into the room in a wheelchair, entering from the interior hallway. AGATHA has one ankle taped.]

LIZ. *[Texas accent]* I just knew you'd like it here. Close enough to Dallas to enjoy the city life, but far enough away to feel the land.

AGATHA. I felt it, all right, when I tripped over that tree root. Any proper tree would keep its roots in the ground where they belong.

LIZ. Just a while longer, the doctor said, and your ankle will be good as new.

AGATHA. Then I should sprain the other one, as well. At my age, nothing is as good as new.

LIZ. In the meantime, you've got the library in town for your research and this big old house in the country where you can do your writing in peace and quiet.

ADDISON. Madam, I have arranged your books as you desired.

AGATHA. Thank you, Addison.

ADDISON. Is there anything I can get you?

AGATHA. Not at the present. But tell me, how are you and Bridey adjusting to life on the prairie?

LIZ. You mean, do they cotton to it. If you're going to set your novel in Texas, you have to pick up the lingo.

AGATHA. Very well. Addison, do you "cotton" to living here?

ADDISON. It's quite pleasing, I must admit, having so much space in which to move around.

AGATHA. And you, Bridey?

BRIDEY. Yes, mum, I like being in America.

ADDISON. Off you go, Bridey. Be about your chores.

[BRIDEY nods and turns away, but secretively pulls out a carving knife and smiles at it as She exits toward the kitchen.]

AGATHA. Have the guest rooms been prepared, Addison?

ADDISON. Certainly, madam. I'll go and make sure that everything is in order.

AGATHA. We wouldn't want the young gentlemen to find us in disorder when they arrive.

[ADDISON exits through interior hallway.]

LIZ. There's a man who's good at what he does.

AGATHA. His service with me has turned out remarkably well. Little wonder he enjoys these wide open spaces after...I may as well say it...after being confined. I probably should have mentioned that to you before.

LIZ. What? That he spent time in Pentville Prison back in England? He told me that weeks ago.

AGATHA. Did he? Why would he do that?

LIZ. One night he just opened up.

AGATHA. As my secretary, you must tell me everything. Especially while you're engaged as my guide through the wilds of Texas.

LIZ. These last couple of months have been unreal. Me, a girl from Plainview, Texas, working for the famous Agatha Christie.

AGATHA. My advertisement in the Dallas Morning News attracted several candidates and you have proved quite suitable.

LIZ. Just goes to show it was no mistake taking library science in college.

AGATHA. You never actually graduated, did you, my dear?

LIZ. I might've, but when Papa died I had to go to work. That's when I moved in with Aunt Pearline and Uncle Harry and my cousin Ace.

AGATHA. Ah, yes. Your cousin Ace.

LIZ. You'll love the act he and his buddies from UT have put together.

AGATHA. That remains to be seen. And seen only in self-defense, in case I wish to consider an injunction. "Agatha Christie meets Charley's Aunt"?

LIZ. Just the title makes you want to laugh, doesn't it?

AGATHA. What a questionable concept, even for a comedy.

LIZ. What makes the act so funny, all three of them are dressed like women.

AGATHA. Transvestism has a long history on the English stage, not to mention among certain members of Parliament.

LIZ. You wait and see. They're a hoot!

AGATHA. A hoot? When you have the opportunity, you really must assemble a lexicon for me of all such...such...Texanisms.

LIZ. Texanism? That's a new one on me.

AGATHA. So now we're even.

LIZ. Dame Agatha, you have a great sense of humor. No wonder your books are so popular.

AGATHA. I also have a great sense of structure and puzzlement, don't forget. Which reminds me, I need to retrieve something from the safe.

LIZ. Let me get it for you.

[LIZ goes to the wall safe, swings the picture out, and dials the combination.]

AGATHA. If I'm going to entertain, I may as well adorn myself.

LIZ. Around these parts we call it getting gussied up.

[LIZ pulls open the safe door.]

AGATHA. I wasn't sure if you remembered the combination.

LIZ. I'm good at numbers.

AGATHA. Just hand me the whole box.

[LIZ takes out a cash box, hands it to Agatha. AGATHA opens the box, pulls out a bundle of cash, which she sets aside, then a diamond brooch, which she pins on.]

LIZ. I didn't know diamonds were so heavy. That's a beautiful brooch.

AGATHA. Thank you. It's one of my favorite pieces. *[puts the cash back in the box]* You may return the box now. Except for this. *[pulls a revolver from the box]*

LIZ. Now you're getting in the Texas spirit. Planning to shoot someone?

AGATHA. It's merely for self-protection. I've been reading so much lately about all the crime in Dallas.

[LIZ returns the box, closes the safe, and replaces the picture.]

LIZ. Should I get you a holster for that?

AGATHA. I'll just put it in here, where I can have it handy. *[puts the gun in the bureau's top drawer]*

LIZ. Good idea. I wouldn't want you scaring away Ace and his friends.

[The TELEPHONE rings. LIZ answers it as BRIDEY rushes in from the kitchen hallway.]

LIZ. Hello?...Sure thing. Hold on. *[to Agatha]* It's your New York publisher. He wants to talk to you a minute.

AGATHA. He never lets me rest. Always a deadline,

LIZ. Did you want something, Bridey?

BRIDEY. I wanted to answer the phone. I like to answer the phone.

LIZ. Sorry.

AGATHA. I'll take the call in the study. I have a feeling a New York minute is going to turn into a Dallas hour.

LIZ. Bridey, will you help Dame Agatha into the study? I'll hold the line till you pick up.

AGATHA. Full speed ahead, Bridey.

[BRIDEY wheels Agatha out the interior hallway.]

LIZ. *[speaking into phone]* She'll be right with you...No, it won't be much longer...You know it is the weekend in Texas.

[ADDISON enters from the interior hallway, glancing behind him, and approaches Liz.]

ADDISON. *[suggestive]* May I be of assistance? I'm sure there must be something I could do for you.

[He straightens her shirt collar, then runs a finger down her throat to the top button.]

LIZ. *[covers receiver with hand]* Are you sure? Shhh! *[She listens a second, then hangs up phone]* She got it. *[He unbuttons the button]* Addie! *[He unbuttons the second button as LIZ rebuttons the first one. BRIDEY appears in interior hall doorway, stands there and watches. LIZ slaps Addison's hand and rebuttons the second button.]* Good thing this blouse doesn't have a zipper. *[He kisses her.]* I love it when you kiss me like that. *[He hugs her warmly. They hear the sound of a car driving up, then a horn. BRIDEY silently exits.]*

LIZ. That must be the boys.

[A CAR DOOR slams, followed by shouting,]

PHYLLIS. *[offstage]* Watch it with those bags! I'll carry them myself!

LIZ. That's Phyllis. She manages the act...or is going to, once they pull it together.

PHYLLIS. *[offstage]* It's bad enough you can't drive a taxi without getting us lost!

ADDISON. What a charming voice the lady has.

[LIZ opens the front door]

PHYLLIS. *[offstage, louder]* You're damn right that's all you're getting for a tip! But here's another one—go back to Pakistan!

[PHYLLIS, in miniskirt and low-cut blouse, enters with two suitcases and an overnight case as the CAR roars away.]

PHYLLIS. What a hassle! Hello, Liz.

LIZ. *[looking past her]* Phyllis...aren't the boys with you?

PHYLLIS. They're not here already? Oh, great! They were supposed to drive up from Austin. *[drops the suitcases]*

LIZ. At least *you* made it.

PHYLLIS. Barely! After that plane ride from hell and the bumpiest landing I ever had!

LIZ. So welcome to Dallas.

PHYLLIS. And what's with that airport? "Love Field"? With a name like that, I expected—*[spots Addison, mellows her tone]* something softer than cement to land on.

LIZ. Addison, would you please help her with her bags?

ADDISON. Certainly...mum.

[LIZ reacts to being called that.]

PHYLLIS. Isn't that the cutest thing? The way he calls you mum.

[PHYLLIS hands Addison the overnight case.]

PHYLLIS. Be careful with this one. It's got all my cosmetics in it.

[HE puts both his hands over her hand on the case's handle.]

ADDISON. I can't imagine you would have need of them, if I may say so.

PHYLLIS. You sure can. As often as you'd like.

LIZ. You may go, Addison.

ADDISON. As you wish, mum.

[ADDISON exits to interior hallway with the bags.]

PHYLLIS. Mmmm. Very debonair.

LIZ. *[diverting her]* How's the act coming along?

PHYLLIS. The act? Oh, the act! Fine, fine. The more they listen to me, the better they get. Where's the old lady?

LIZ. She'll be out soon. I'll let her know you're here.

[LIZ starts out, but is stopped by a sudden KNOCKING on the front door.]

ACE. *[offstage]* Hey, Liz! Open up!

PHYLLIS. There they are!

[PHYLLIS rushes to open the door. As ACE, SEBASTIAN, and CARLOS enter with their bags, She smacks each one on his fanny.]

PHYLLIS. All right, move it on in here. That's one—two—three! Gotta count all my chicks. *[PHYLLIS shares a look with Carlos.]*

ACE. Hello, Liz. *[hugs her]*

LIZ. Ace! Hi, Sebastian...Carlos. I'm so glad y'all could come.

ACE. Sort of a command performance for Dame Agatha...or cease and desist.

PHYLLIS. Now tell me why you're late.

CARLOS. Sebastian's car broke down, fifty miles back.

SEBASTIAN. We had to hitchhike the rest of the way.

LIZ. You poor things.

ACE. You should've seen us, bouncing around in the back of that cowboy's pickup as he drove eighty miles an hour down those dirt roads before he dumped us off at the gate.

PHYLLIS. There's a comedy routine for the act in there somewhere!

CARLOS. We weren't laughing.

SEBASTIAN. I don't see this act of ours going anywhere, anyway.

ACE. Always the optimist.

PHYLLIS. Listen, I knew the first time I saw you guys perform, you had the right chemistry. It's just a matter of working on the material and playing the college circuit till I get you a booking on the West Coast. All it takes is one talent scout from a network, and bam—the doors begin to open.

CARLOS. You're dreaming, but I like dreaming with you.

LIZ. Y'all need to listen to Phyllis. She thinks you're good, and so do I.

SEBASTIAN. I still don't know.

ACE. You're always changing your mind about things. Like medical school.

LIZ. You're going to be a doctor?

CARLOS. Not anymore. He dropped out.

SEBASTIAN. It was the idea of scalpels and surgery. I don't think I could ever bring myself to cut into someone's body.

CARLOS. The guy's asleep, and you've got on a mask...what's so hard?

PHYLLIS. Say Liz, when do we get to meet the dame?

ACE. *[singing]* "There is nothing like a dame—nothing in the world!"

LIZ. Her title is Dame, but you can't call her one. She's still on the phone.

SEBASTIAN. I hope she likes us.

ACE. As long as she feeds us.

LIZ. You won't be doing your act till after dinner.

CARLOS. Good. We'll have time for encores.

LIZ. You guys come along with me and I'll show you to your rooms.

[LIZ exits through interior hallway, followed by ACE and CARLOS with their bags.]

ACE. Right behind you, cousin.

[SEBASTIAN hangs back.]

CARLOS. You coming?

SEBASTIAN. I'll be along in a second.

[SEBASTIAN waits until they exit, then glances at Phyllis and hesitates.]

PHYLLIS. *[toying with him]* I get the feeling you want to talk to me, Sebastian. Or is there something else you want?

SEBASTIAN. I want out.

PHYLLIS. You mean out of the contract you signed?

SEBASTIAN. The contract was for you to manage the act. It didn't say I had to stay a part of it.

PHYLLIS. If you don't stay, there is no act. And you *are* staying.

SEBASTIAN. Why does it mean so much to you?

PHYLLIS. After years of managing two-bit standup comics and second-rate singers in third-rate lounges, I want a shot at the bigtime.

SEBASTIAN. With us? You've got to be kidding.

PHYLLIS. Personality is what plays. You're the woebegone one, Carlos the romantic charmer, and Ace the wise guy. It's going to work!

SEBASTIAN. It'll have to work without me.

PHYLLIS. I would think a trip to California might appeal to you, since you'd be getting so far away from, shall I say, your legal problems?

SEBASTIAN. What are you talking about?

PHYLLIS. I'm thinking of the night two months ago when you got drunk—again—and damaged your car driving back to the dorm. Funny thing about that night. A little girl on a bicycle was struck by a car and badly injured. They haven't found out who did it. Yet.

SEBASTIAN. You can't prove that.

PHYLLIS. There are others who could, if they knew where to look.

SEBASTIAN. Phyllis, listen...whatever may have happened, if there was any way I could change it, believe me—I would. I'd give anything if I could.

PHYLLIS. Very touching. But what I need is for you to be funny for Dame Agatha. You'll do that for me, won't you, Sebastian? Because she could do a lot for us. And who knows? Maybe at the end of the evening, there'll be a little something extra in it for you. *[She touches his hair. SEBASTIAN gives her a scornful look, turns to leave.]* Where are you going?

SEBASTIAN. I need a drink.

[BRIDEY enters from interior hallway and tries to speak to Sebastian.]

BRIDEY. Father said to tell everyone—

[SEBASTIAN is already past her, exiting to interior hallway, so BRIDEY turns to Phyllis.]

BRIDEY. Father said to tell everyone dinner will be served at seven.

PHYLLIS. Father? That sexy Englishman is your father?

BRIDEY. He isn't.

PHYLLIS. He isn't your father?

BRIDEY. He isn't what you said.

PHYLLIS. Sexy? I think he is. Very.

[ACE and CARLOS enter from interior hallway. CARLOS rubs a towel over a long object he carries.]

ACE. I can't believe you brought that thing with you.

CARLOS. I just want to try it out.

BRIDEY. *[to Ace]* Father said to tell everyone dinner will be served at seven. *[to Carlos]* Father said to tell everyone dinner will be—

[She stops as CARLOS pulls the towel away to reveal a machete. Her eyes widen, and She reaches out a hand, caressing the blade.]

PHYLLIS. I believe she's the maid, or the town crier. I'm not sure. And what is that monstrosity?

CARLOS. A gift from my father. He had a sugar cane plantation in Cuba before our family escaped, and I used to watch the men cut the cane with these.

ACE. Sorry to disappoint you, Carlos old buddy, but there's no sugar cane in north Texas.

CARLOS. No matter, as long as I have this. I was seven when we left, but I made my father promise he'd give me a machete of my own someday. He finally did.

ACE. I still don't know what you're going to use that on.

CARLOS. I'm sure I'll find something I can chop to pieces.

BRIDEY. Can I hold it?

CARLOS. Well, I don't know...*[looks her over with interest]* Maybe later.

BRIDEY. But don't tell Father.

CARLOS. I never tell the fathers.

[LIZ enters from interior hallway in time to overhear the following.]

PHYLLIS. Plotting a little skulduggery in the scullery? Then maybe I should do a few gymnastics with Jeeves.

CARLOS. *[in a warning tone]* I wouldn't do that.

PHYLLIS. I don't imagine he'd let you.

ACE. Let's relax, why don't we?

[CARLOS turns away toward the bookshelf on the bureau.]

LIZ. I take it everybody's making themselves right at home.

BRIDEY. *[to Liz]* Father said to tell everyone dinner will be served at seven.

LIZ. Sebastian's in his room, unpacking. Why don't you go tell *him*?

[BRIDEY exits through interior hallway. CARLOS runs the machete point along the row of books.]

CARLOS. *[muttering]* Agatha Christie...Agatha Christie...Agatha Christie...Agatha Christie...

ACE. Liz, before Carlos gets it in his head that we could do without so many Agatha Christie books, what's growing around here that he can hack with his new machete?

LIZ. There are some bushes and who knows what-all down by the spring.

PHYLLIS. I saw that as I came in. Is the water potable?

LIZ. Sho' honey, if you got a bucket.

PHYLLIS. No, I mean—can I drink it?

ACE. *[laughing]* She's teasing you, Phyllis.

[PHYLLIS is not amused.]

LIZ. Just a little Texas joke.

PHYLLIS. I'll be watching out for those.

ACE. And probably adding them to the act.

LIZ. Why don't we walk on down and see the spring?

CARLOS. You two go ahead. We'll be there in a few minutes.

ACE. Come on, Liz. *[lowers his voice]* We can talk a little business.

LIZ. Another loan?

ACE. You said you would.

LIZ. I said I might.

[As LIZ and ACE exit through the front door, PHYLLIS immediately embraces CARLOS, who is not enthusiastic.]

PHYLLIS. Something wrong, dear?

CARLOS. This butler you talk about—

PHYLLIS. Addison?

CARLOS. Better that you don't.

LIZ. Talk about him?

CARLOS. Do anything more.

PHYLLIS. You know you're the only one I care for...and how good I am at caring.

CARLOS. You drive me half crazy.

PHYLLIS. Let me drive you a little farther.

[As PHYLLIS kisses him, BRIDEY enters unseen from the interior hallway and stops.]

CARLOS. No time for that now. Come watch me work my new machete.

PHYLLIS. I'll be out later. Right now there's someone I want to see.

CARLOS. Addison?

PHYLLIS. Will you stop it? No, it's Sebastian. He needs me.

CARLOS. *I* need you.

PHYLLIS. Later, I said. Go on. *[PHYLLIS waves CARLOS out the front door; then laughs. She sees Bridey.]* Hello, little strange one. Men are such children, aren't they?

BRIDEY. Yes, mum.

PHYLLIS. Tell me, where did your father get away to?

BRIDEY. I don't know.

PHYLLIS. He was taking my bags to my room. How convenient if he's still there.

BRIDEY. He's not there.

PHYLLIS. How do you know, if you don't know where he is?

BRIDEY. *[considers a second]* Father said to tell everyone—

PHYLLIS. Dinner will be served at seven. I know.

[PHYLLIS exits through interior hallway. BRIDEY looks around, dazed.]