

CAFÉ MURDER

A Dinner Theatre Murder Mystery

for Young Performers

by

Nathan Hartswick

Copyright © 2004
by Nathan Hartswick

53 Pitkin Street
Burlington, VT 05401
(516) 351-5504
nathan@vermontwriter.com
www.vermontwriter.com

(A small bistro. UP STAGE, a long, rectangular dais style table is at the front of the restaurant with a vase of artificial flowers and five chairs. The audience is seated at round tables on the same level, as if they, too, are dining in the restaurant. With the exception of the table nearest the players, all audience tables have water glasses and a vase of artificial flowers. Action at the dais is clearly visible from all points in the room.)

Five women sit at the dais, facing the audience. ROSEMARY, an obnoxious hypochondriac, is celebrating her birthday. On her left sit MARJORIE and MELANIE, a banker and a hippie respectively, and both ROSEMARY'S sisters. On ROSEMARY'S right sit VALERIE, a complete airhead, and VOLLENY [VOLL-un-ee], a truck driver. They are also ROSEMARY'S sisters. A WAITER [male or female], wearing white gloves and traditional garb, serves the party appetizers.

OPTION 1 [DINNER]: Audience is served dinner prior to the beginning of the play, and non-acting "waitstaff" now serves coffee and dessert.

OPTION 2 [SNACKS]: Audience is not served a meal beforehand, and is now served an array of snacks [crackers & cheese, vegetables, etc.] and beverages by the non-acting "waitstaff."

A MAITRE'D [male or female] ENTERS UP RIGHT. This narrator, host, and restaurant manager welcomes everyone in the room.)

MAITRE'D: Ladies and gentlemen, may I be the first to welcome you to our fine restaurant this evening. You may have noticed the sign out front -- you have indeed ventured into the notorious... (ominously) ... Café Muurderrr. (Sound effect: female scream, evil male laugh, bell rings.) But not to fear! Did you know the word "murder" is also the name for a group of crows? Our chef is world-famous for his succulent blackbird pie -- vegetarian, of course. This was the simple origin of our humble eatery's menacing moniker, and so there is no reason whatsoever for you to feel uncomfortable here at... (ominously) Café Muurderrr. (Sound effect: Female scream, evil male laugh, bell rings.) Now then! Enjoy your appetizers. I will be your maitre'd for the evening, so please don't hesitate to let me know if there's anything --

ROSEMARY: HEY! (*WAITER has EXITED STAGE RIGHT. ROSEMARY is shouting at the MAITRE'D.*)

MAITRE'D: (*attempting to ignore her*) Anything at all I might --

ROSEMARY: Hey, PACO!

MAITRE'D: (*pointing to self*) Paco?

ROSEMARY: Yeah, get over here.

MAITRE'D: What seems to be the problem, Miss?

ROSEMARY: I asked for a *smidgen* of salt on my appetizer. This is quite clearly a *pinch*. I get gastrointestinal problems when I eat too much salt, you know.

MAITRE'D: I'm sorry to hear that, Madam --

ROSEMARY: Don't I get problems, girls?

VOLLENY: Oh, you got *problems* all right.

MARJORIE: How long do you think this will take, Rosemary? I've got a meeting at nine.

ROSEMARY: It's MY party! It'll go on as long as it HAS to!

MELANIE: Wow, you guys are real downers, you know that?

VALERIE: (*smacking her cell phone against the table*) My cell phone like, totally doesn't work in here.

MAITRE'D: (*taking the plate*) Let me get you another plate. Is there anything else I can get for you or your friends?

ROSEMARY: They're not my friends, they're my sisters. I'm Rosemary. This is Marjorie --

MARJORIE: Pleasure.

ROSEMARY: Melanie --

MELANIE: Peace.

ROSEMARY: Valerie --

VALERIE: Huh?

ROSEMARY: And Volleny.

VOLLENY: Hey.

ROSEMARY: We're here to celebrate my birthday.

MAITRE'D: Happy Birthd --

ROSEMARY: Shut up. Now listen carefully. I'm allergic to water, so tell your chef if he uses so much as a drop in my entree, I could die.

MAITRE'D: That'd be a shame.

ROSEMARY: What?

MAITRE'D: Nothing. Look, Miss, I don't know if it's possible to be allergic to water. There is a condition that means "fear of water," called "hydrophobia," but I doubt you have that.

ROSEMARY: Oh? And why is that?

MAITRE'D: Because the common name for it is rabies.

ROSEMARY: (*snapping*) LOOK, PACO --

MAITRE'D: (*aside to AUDIENCE*) Wow, maybe she does have rabie --

ROSEMARY: I want to speak to your Chef.

MAITRE'D: Very well. (*yells offstage*) [Franc / Francine]!
(*to ROSEMARY*) One moment, please. (*MAITRE'D EXITS STAGE LEFT.*)

ROSEMARY: (*shouting*) I can't wait around all night, you know!

MARJORIE: Rosemary, will you settle down? There are other people in the restaurant.

ROSEMARY: Yes, but I'm more important than they are.

MELANIE: Chill out, Ro. Open yourself up to the universe.

VOLLENY: Yeah. And shut your pie-hole, while you're at it.

ROSEMARY: You're all heartless! This is how you treat you own sister on her birthday?

VALERIE (*into cell phone*) Hello? Ray's Pizza? Do you still deliver?

(*MAITRE'D RE-ENTERS STAGE LEFT with a CHEF [male or female] who has a French accent, and is dressed in a frock and a chef's hat.*)

MAITRE'D: Everyone, may I introduce our Chef, [Franc / Francine].

MARJORIE, MELANIE, VOLLENY, VALERIE: (*Ad lib. "Hello [Franc / Francine]," "pleased to meet you," etc.*)

CHEF: A pleasure.

ROSEMARY: Yeah, hi. Tell [him / her] about my condition.

MAITRE'D: [Franc / Francine], this is Rosemary. She can't have any water. Understand?

CHEF: Oh yes, I understand.

MAITRE'D: Can you make her something without it?

CHEF: Oh, yes, zere are many things one can make wizout rosemary.

MAITRE'D: No no. This *is* Rosemary. No water for her.

CHEF: No water, no rosemary. Gotchya.

MAITRE'D: No, no water *for* Rosemary.

CHEF: Ah.

MAITRE'D: Understand?

CHEF: (*nods yes*) No.

ROSEMARY: (*shouting, deliberately*) I - can't -- have -- any
-- water. Je le no drinkay le water. Capeesh? Comprendes?

WAITER: (*ENTERING STAGE RIGHT with a tray full of water glasses*) Ok, waters all around, folks!

ROSEMARY: Ahhhh! Get it away! Get it away! (*She swoons.*)

WAITER: (*setting tray on the table*) What's her problem?

CHEF: She is allergic to rosemary.

MAITRE'D: Okay, calm down, now, calm down.

ROSEMARY: (*standing*) Just get your hands off me, Paco, and tell me where the restroom is.

MAITRE'D: Yes, Miss. Let me show you the way. It's pitch black in there -- the light is broken. And we wouldn't want you to *hurt* yourself. (*to AUDIENCE*) *Would* we, Rosemary.

MARJORIE: Actually, with all this talk about water, I think I need to go, too.

MELANIE: I'm comin' too.

VOLLENY: Me too. Valerie?

VALERIE: Huh? Oh yeah, totally.

MAITRE'D: Right this way, Miss Rosemary...

WAITER: Wait, let me show her, boss.

MAITRE'D: That's quite all right, I'll do it.

CHEF: No no, *I* will lead ze way! Zis way to ze loo, everyone!

ROSEMARY: Whoop-dee-doo.

CHEF: Off we go, into ze wild loo yonder...

(The sisters chatter, the MAITRE'D and WAITER direct them, and ALL EXIT together UP STAGE LEFT, in a knot. Silence. A moment passes. A scream pierces the air, followed by another pause. Then all except ROSEMARY RE-ENTER UP STAGE

LEFT, single file, in this order: MAITRE'D, VOLLENY, VALERIE, WAITER [sans gloves], CHEF, MARJORIE, MELANIE. They are smirking. They line up behind the dais table, turn to face the audience, and very deliberately -- and simultaneously -- dust their hands.)

MAITRE'D: *(looking down the line)* I say, we seem to be one short. Who's missing?

WAITER: *(looking at the ceiling)* Couldn't say.

VOLLENY: *(playing with a fork on the table)* Sure is quieter though.

CHEF: Zis is true.

MARJORIE: *(not surprised)* Hey, whaddaya know. I think we're missing Rosemary.

VOLLENY: I ain't missin' her.

MARJORIE: I guess someone should call the cops, eh?

MELANIE: Valerie?

VALERIE: *(shouting at cell phone)* Anywhere minutes? You call this anywhere minutes? *(She throws the phone violently into the wings.)* Piece-a junk!

(We hear someone offstage making a siren noise with his voice. The source is Detective HARRIS, who ENTERS from STAGE RIGHT, urgently. He is a bit hyper, chews gum and wears a trenchcoat. He stops making the siren noise.)

HARRIS: How's my timing?

MAITRE'D: Excellent! How did you get here so quickly?

HARRIS: The poster said there was a mystery show here tonight.

WAITER: Sweet.

MAITRE'D: It's a good thing you're here, Detective...

HARRIS: Harris. Reginald Harris.

MAITRE'D: Harris. (*He notices the front table in the audience.*) Would you excuse me a moment, Mr. Harris?

HARRIS: Certainly.

MAITRE'D: [Robert / Roberta], why does this table not have any water?

WAITER: Oh -- I must have missed that one.

MAITRE'D: They've got no flowers either. I want you to take care of this right away.

WAITER: Yes, boss.

MAITRE'D: (*to TABLE*) I'm terribly sorry.

MARJORIE: Here, take ours.

WAITER: Thank you. (*WAITER takes tray of water glasses and vase from dais table and delivers it to the front table in the audience. VOLLENY, VALERIE, MARJORIE and MELANIE sit, converse and eat their appetizers. CHEF lingers.*)

MAITRE'D: My apologies, Detective. Thank you for coming on such short notice.

HARRIS: Absolutely. So what's the problem?

MAITRE'D: Well, we seem to have lost a member of our party.

HARRIS: A code James Jeffords, eh? Well, I'll check it out. Where was the person last seen?

WAITER: Try the john.

HARRIS: John who?

MAITRE'D: No no, *in* the john.

CHEF: Ze loo, ze W.C...

HARRIS: Ah, I see, the W.C.

CHEF: Oui oui.

HARRIS: No thanks, I just went.

CHEF: Pardonne?

HARRIS: Wee wee.

CHEF: Non non, mon ami, ze W.C., you see...

WAITER: That's where the woman was last seen.

MAITRE'D: Or, *not* seen, to be precise. The lights are out in the lavatory.

HARRIS: Oh, I see! Well, I'll have a look, then. Back in a flash! Ha ha! (*HARRIS pulls a flashlight from his trenchcoat and EXITS STAGE LEFT. The rest stand around silent for an awkward moment.*)

MAITRE'D: So... how 'bout those Mets? (*HARRIS runs back in from STAGE LEFT with the shirt ROSEMARY was wearing, now wet.*)

HARRIS: Have a look at this!

WAITER: What is that?

MAITRE'D: Good Lord, she's naked somewhere!

HARRIS: No, no -- I have determined the young lady was... *murdered.*

ALL BUT HARRIS: Murdered? (*ALL gasp.*)

HARRIS: Murdered. Right here in... (*ominously*) Café Muurderrr. (*Sound effect: Female scream, evil male laugh, bell rings.*) Ooh -- nice touch.

MAITRE'D: Thank you. Have you found any clues, Detective Harris? A murder weapon, perhaps?

HARRIS: (*dropping shirt onstage*) It appears she was done in with a few splashes of cold water. Never seen anything like it. The severe hydration caused some sort of chemical breakdown. She withered away right there on the bathroom floor.

MARJORIE: How disturbing!

WAITER: (*kicking the shirt*) So where's the pointy black hat?

HARRIS: I suspect, of course, that all of you had motives.

MELANIE: Why?

HARRIS: I dunno, it just seems everyone in the room usually has a motive when these things happen. Haven't you noticed?

MELANIE: No, actually, I haven't.

HARRIS: Plus I think it might have said it on the poster.

WAITER: Sweet.

MAITRE'D: We'll cooperate in any way we can, Detective Harris.

HARRIS: Excellent. Bring me a pickle and pimento loaf sandwich and give me some room to work my magic.

WAITER: Pickle and what?

HARRIS: No, wait -- questions! I need to question you all, right? Isn't that how it works? (*abruptly*) All right, HOLD it right THERE! Nobody leaves this room.

MAITRE'D: Detective, have you... done this before?

HARRIS: Well, I just graduated, see.

MAITRE'D: Ah.

HARRIS: I took a correspondance course. I'm also trained in computer programming and basic neurosurgery.

MAITRE'D: I see.

VOLLENY: So you became a Detective through the mail?

HARRIS: Private investigator, actually. See, you can't become a Detective until you -- (*He goes to sit and catches himself.*) Hey, wait a minute, I'LL ask the questions around here! Now! (*He pulls out a notepad and pen.*) What was the young lady's name?

MARJORIE: Rosemary.

HARRIS: Rosemary? Not... Rosemary Saint-John?

VOLLENY: Yeah, why? Did you know her?

HARRIS: I'm afraid I did. I had a little run-in with her this morning. Actually, she had more of a run-in with me. I don't like to speak ill of the dead, but...

WAITER: No, please. Speak freely.

MAITRE'D: Looks like we have another suspect.

HARRIS: Suspect? Me? Ha! I'm the investigator!

MAITRE'D: Where were you five minutes ago?

HARRIS: I resent this! Where were *you* five minutes ago?

MAITRE'D: In a darkened bathroom with Miss Rosemary and all the other suspects.

HARRIS: Can you prove you didn't kill her?

MAITRE'D: No. Can you prove I did?

HARRIS: No. Darn it!

MAITRE'D: Okay then. I've got an idea. Since no one seems to be impartial here, why don't we let the other guests attempt to solve the mystery. Everyone?

ALL: (*Ad lib.*) A stellar idea... absolutely... yes indeed... sounds good to me, etc.

MAITRE'D: Okay then. (*to AUDIENCE*) Ladies and gentlemen, at this time, I'd like each table to open the envelope marked "number one." Inside, you'll find a list of 20 questions. Together as a table, we'd like you to look the questions over. In a moment, the suspects will visit each table, and you will have a chance to ask each person three questions from the list. You may ask the same question of more than one suspect if you wish, or you may ask different questions each time, but each person will answer *only* three questions. Good luck!

(Music plays. Interview period begins. At each table, each character answers three of the questions below with the corresponding responses at the back of the script.)

CAFÉ MURDER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Was tonight the first time you'd met the victim?
2. Did you hear any peculiar noises, or did anyone speak in the restroom?
3. Did anyone else have access to the restroom?
4. Did you go into the restroom with the intention of doing Rosemary harm?
5. Who do you think perpetuated the crime against Rosemary?
6. Do you have anything against any of the other suspects?
7. What's the best defense you can make to convince us you're not the murderer?
8. How do you feel about what happened to Rosemary?
9. Do you enjoy your job?
10. Do you think the murderer had help?
11. When did you first become aware of Rosemary's water allergy?
12. How long have you worked in your current job?
13. Is this your first time at this restaurant?
14. A fourth, free question: Are you the murderer?

(As the interview period comes to a close...

OPTION 1 [DINNER]: Dishes are cleared, seconds on dessert are served, coffee is replenished, etc.

OPTION 2 [SNACKS]: Snacks and beverages are cleared, dessert & coffee is served.

Music stops.)

MAITRE'D: And now, the moment you've been waiting for. I will now ask you to open the envelope on your table marked "number two." Inside, you will find a ballot with which to cast your table's vote. Place an "X" next to the suspect you think is responsible for tonight's mystery at...
(ominously) Café Muuurderrr. (Sound effect: Female scream, evil male laugh, bell rings.) You have 30 seconds to choose your horse, and they begin... right now.

(Music plays. As the AUDIENCE votes, a SERVER adds four more chairs and serves plates of "food" to the dais table.)

CAFÉ MURDER VOTING BALLOT

Which of the suspects threw the water on Miss Rosemary? (Choose only one)

- The Maitre'D
- The [Waiter / Waitress]
- The Chef
- Detective Harris
- Marjorie the Banker
- Melanie the Hippie
- Valerie the Valley Girl
- Volleny the Truck Driver

MAITRE'D: When your table is finished voting, please fold the ballot, take the flowers out of the vase in front of you, deposit your ballot in the vase, and place the flowers back. Don't worry; there's no water in the vases, so your ballot will remain completely dry. *(As those at the front table in the audience pull out the flowers to cast their ballot...)* Excuse me, [sir / madam], what's that in your vase? *(MAITRE'D steps over to the front table and removes a pair of wet, white gloves that are hanging off the stems of the flowers.)* That's peculiar. They're wet.

HARRIS: But the vases didn't have any water in them.

MAITRE'D: Is anyone missing a pair of gloves?

HARRIS: Not me --

CHEF: Not me --

MARJORIE: Not me --

MELANIE: Not me --

VALERIE: Not me --

VOLLENY: Not me. (*ALL turn and look at WAITER. A beat, then an explosion:*)

WAITER: All right! I *did* it! Is that what you want to hear? I did it! And I'm *not ashamed of it!* She was a terrible woman, and I'm glad she's gone, gosh darn it all to heck! Mu-ha-ha-ha-ha -- (*suddenly calm, addressing AUDIENCE*) Now then. (*The other characters pivot on their heels, walk to the table, sit and begin eating as WAITER performs the rest of the confession. SERVER collects the vases with the ballots in them.*) Rosemary was a regular at a restaurant I used to work at. As I said before, she was miserable. One day, while trying to poison her waterless entree, I was caught by the Chef and fired. I swore revenge. I found out Rosemary was having her birthday party at... (*ominous*) Café Muurderrrr. (*Sound effect: Female scream, evil male laugh, bell rings.*) How apropos, I thought -- I'll make it her deathday party instead. Ha ha! So I applied for a job here as a [waiter / waitress]. My intent was to spill water on her at the table and make it look like an accident, but that didn't quite work out. So I followed her into the restroom and splashed water on her in the dark. Those of you with a keen eye for detail may have noticed I was wearing gloves at the beginning of the evening. When I came back from the bathroom, however, I wasn't wearing any. That's because in the process of hydrating Miss Rosemary, I got them wet. I hid the gloves in my pocket, and then snuck them into the flower vase. It was the perfect crime! And I would have gotten away with it, too -- (*indicating people at front table*) -- if it hadn't been for you meddling kids! Oh well. I might as well have a last meal. I'm famished. (*WAITER walks to the dais, where everyone is eating, and there are shouts of "pull up a chair!" "nice work!" etc. WAITER sits.*)

MAITRE'D: (*rising and addressing the AUDIENCE*) I thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for coming to our little restaurant, and for helping us to solve this mystery tonight. It is now time to find out who among you guessed correctly. The ballots, please! (*SERVER enters with the winning ballots. MAITRE'D announces the winners, and presents them with prizes, if desired.*) Excellent work -- we couldn't have done it without you. Now if you'll excuse me, our guests tonight were kind enough to let Chef and me join them, so I'm going to finish this delectable meal. (*MAITRE'D sits.*)

MELANIE: (to WAITER) Oh well. It could have worked. Nice try, anyway.

HARRIS: Yeah, nice try. Of course, you know I've got to turn you over to the police.

WAITER: Oh, of course. Maybe you'll get a promotion out of it. Your first big case.

HARRIS: Ah, you're too kind.

MARJORIE: Pass the potatoes, Val?

VALERIE: Huh? Oh sure, here you are.

MELANIE: Delicious meal.

WAITER: Yeah, this dinner is killer, Chef.

CHEF: (*jovially*) Non non, you're the killer! (All laugh.)

VOLLENY: Pass the green beans?

MAITRE'D: Here you are.

VOLLENY: Thanks.

HARRIS: The chicken is terrific.

MARJORIE: Mm-hm.

(*Suddenly, ROSEMARY stumbles in from UP STAGE LEFT, wearing a white bathrobe. Everyone's jaw drops. She gains her composure, walks over and sits down at the table.*)

ROSEMARY: Is there an extra chair? I'm *starving*.

ALL: ROSEMARY!

MAITRE'D: What a... surprise...

ROSEMARY: You were right, I guess. There's no such thing as a water allergy. But there better not be more than a *smidgen* of salt on this baked potato.

WAITER: (*standing*) You're... you're not...

ROSEMARY: Ah, [waiter / waitress]. Take back these beans, they're far too cold. Well? Don't just stand there! Chop chop! (*WAITER fumes silently, then lurches suddenly for ROSEMARY; the others hold WAITER back. ROSEMARY remains calm, cutting her dinner and singing to herself:*) Happy birthday to me... happy birthday to me... happy birthday dear Rosie... happy birthday to me... (*LIGHTS FADE.*)

For performance rights to this play, please contact:

Pioneer Drama Service, Inc.
P.O. Box 4267
Englewood, CO 80155-4267
(303) 779-4035
(800) 333-7262
pioneer@pioneerdrama.com
www.pioneerdrama.com