

Hell Hath No Fury...

It is fund raising night for the local High School organised by the Ladies Committee. The room is decked out with tables and chairs and, on a raised dais, there is a top table with seven chairs arranged around it. There will be the means for the actors to be able to exit either to the right or the left. These entrances and exits are important to the solving of the case and so should not be altered.

As the audience enters the room the characters are there to greet them. Characters will be in character throughout and should carry something to help the audience identify them. The Chair Lady should have a chain or badge of office while the Vice Chair should have a similar but smaller one. All should carry a carrier bag of some sort, but it is vital that Mrs Scribens carries a carrier bag bearing the name of a local butcher which should appear to have something the size and weight of a leg of lamb in it. No one else should carry a butcher's bag. These bags do not have to be obviously on show. At the appointed time Mrs Settle will make her way to the dais and call for order. The remaining members of the cast may stay distributed around the room, being careful not to impede the view of the audience.

Settle Ladies and Gentlemen... If I may have your attention for a moment. Please! Thank you. First of all, I would like to give you all a big welcome and thank you for coming to support the school this evening. As you know, the Ladies Committee have put in a lot of hard work and it is only fair that we should thank them individually. You know me, Barbara Settle, the Chair Lady, Vice Chair is Glenda Shorthouse and our faithful Secretary is Julia Scribens. Money matters are in the hands of our Treasurer - and a real treasure she is too - Susan Cashman. None of you would know about tonight's fun if it wasn't for the publicity arranged by Maureen Teller, and you would not eat or drink if it wasn't for Moya Cookson and there would be no fun at all without our Entertainments Organiser, Dr Valerie Playfair. Now, no more idle chat from me... Have a good evening.

[Where ever Mrs Scribens is she says to the nearest cast member:]

Scribens Get me a drink will you? I'll collect the food for the cooks.

[Mrs Scribens collects the carrier bags off everyonand then EXITS LEFT.]

Settle is joined on the dais by Cashman, while the other members of the cast gather in small groups around the outside of the audience.

Settle Well, it seems as though the evening is going to go down rather well, don't you think?

Casman As Treasurer, I most certainly hope it does, considering...

Settle Considering?

Cashman You know full well what I'm talking about.

Settle I'm sure I have no idea.



Cashman Well, we'll just have to see what my meeting tomorrow brings, won't we?

[EXIT Cashman LEFT, leaving Settle staring after her. Settle is joined on the podium by Shorthouse and Teller.]

Teller Are you all right, Barbara? You look as if you've seen a ghost.

Settle I'm fine, I really am.

Shorthouse Maureen's right, you don't look at all well.

Settle Really... I'm just a bit worried about Brian.

Shorthouse [A little too quickly] Why? What's the matter with him? He IS all right, isn't he?

Settle My... You're very concerned all of a sudden.

Shorthouse No... Just normal concern.

Settle Well, it's nothing for you to worry about. I'll see you later, ladies.

[EXIT Settle LEFT]

Teller A bit snappy today, isn't she?

Shorthouse I can't think why.

Teller Really? Is there any truth in these rumours I've been hearing?

Shorthouse Of course not. How can you even ask me such a thing?

Teller All right, all right, no need to bite my head off.

Shorthouse I wouldn't have to bite anyone's head off if everyone just minded their own business.

[Shorthouse storms off RIGHT. Cashman enters again from LEFT]

Cashman Was it something you said?

Teller Heaven knows. I just mentioned hearing about a rumour and she leapt down my throat.

Cashman Mmmm, not surprised.

Teller You mean the rumours are true?

Cashman Absolutely.

Teller Well, I'll be...

Cashman Been going on a long time.

Teller But if her husband ever found out, she'd be cut off without a penny - and you know what sort of rich lifestyle she likes to live.

Cashman Could buy and sell both of us and not notice the difference.

Teller Really... Glenda Shorthouse and Brian Settle - who would have believed it?

Cashman Just keep it to yourself, dearie. I would hate to have a nice little earner spoiled.

Teller What...

[Cashman sees the approach of Shorthouse and Cookson]

Cashman You'll have to excuse me - I need a word with these two.

[EXIT Teller RIGHT]

Shorthouse Going well, isn't it? We should make quite a bit.

Cashman Well, we'll be OK financially, even if you won't.

Shorthouse And what do you mean by that?

Cashman Nothing - don't worry about it. Have you organised the vegetarian meals for nay who want them?

Cookson Of course I have. With Julia Scribens being one of them she never lets me forget. God, that woman! She'll cross a road so as not to pass a butcher's window. Things seem a little tense tonight - what is the matter with everyone?

Cashman Some people need their comfort from more than one source.

Shorthouse I think that that comment is a little out of line.

Cookson I'm sorry, but I don't have a clue what everyone is talking about.

Cashman Ah, but you never really inhabited the same world as the rest of us, have you?

Cookson Sorry, I...

Cashman I'm sure your employers would be very disappointed in you and Maureen Teller if they were to know about your sleeping arrangements.

Cookson There's no reason at all why they should find out anything - not, that is, unless some interfering busy body tells them.

Cashman Now, wouldn't that be a pity?

[EXIT Cashman LEFT]

Cookson Why - that woman!

Shorthouse Take no notice of her. She likes to think that she has a hold on people - that's all.

Cookson But she's right. Not all the world's enlightened even today - especially not the governors of that private school we both work at. We'd be out of jobs as soon as they heard.

Shorthouse I'm sure it will all come to nothing.

Cookson I really can't afford to leave anything to chance.

[EXIT Shorthouse RIGHT. Val Playfair approaches the dais]

Cookson Ah, Dr Playfair. Enjoying yourself?

[Dr Playfair is drinking frequently from a large glass of wine and is carrying a bottle for regular top-ups. She is already obviously a bit squiffy]

Playfair It looks as if it's going to be a good night.

Cookson Not on duty tonight, are you?

Playfair Just for my own practice.

Cookson Is it wise to be er... *[Indicates the bottle and the glass]*

Playfair This? Oh, piffle. It's just a little drink.

Cookson I'd try to be a little more, er, circumspect if I were you. There are people around here who wouldn't think twice about repring you to your authorities.

Playfair What? Now who would be mean enough to do a thing like that?

Cookson Has Mrs cashman, by any chance, ever asked you for a loan?

Playfair Well... Yes, she has.

Cookson And has she paid you back yet?

Playfair No... Not yet.

Cookson Well, just wait and see what she says when you ask her for it.

Playfair What?

Cookson I'll say no more - just be careful is all I'm saying.

Playfair What complete and utter rubbish.

Cookson OK. Have it your own way.

[EXIT Cookson RIGHT. ENTER Scribens LEFT]

Scribens Are you all right, Val?

Playfair What? Sorry - I was miles away.

Scribens I asked if you were all right.

Playfair Me? Fine - why do you ask?

Scribens I thought you looked worried to death.

Playfair What are you talking about?

Scribens Sorry, dear. Only making conversation.

Playfair Well, if that's the best you can do, then don't bother.

Scribens All right, all right. Just because you're feeling a bit guilty, there's no need to take it out on me.

Playfair Me feeling guilty? Me? Talk anout the copper calling the kettle black.

Scribens And what exactly does that mean, if I may ask?

Playfair You know full well what I mean.

Scribens I'm sure I don't.

Playfair Don't worry yourself about it, dear. I'm sure I don't mind what you're doing ion the slightest. Good for you, I say.

Scribens You're out of your mind... Again.

Playfair Now you're becoming offensive.

Scribens My, my. You managed to say 'offensive' without slurring. You must be holding your drink better than you used to.

Playfair Why you... *[She launches herself at Scribens]*

[Enter Cashman from LEFT]

Cashman Now, now, children - don't fight.

[Playfair pulls herself together and EXITS LEFT]

Scribens *[Reluctantly]* Thank you.

Cashman No, don't thank me. It's not in my best interests to see you harmed.

Scribens I haven't got any more for you you know.

Cashman My dear, I can wait. I can wait for as long as it takes.

Scribens Well, you'll just have to wait then... there IS no more.

Cashman We'll see, won't we.

[Cashman EXITS LEFT. Scribens is left alone on the dais. ENTER Shorthouse from the RIGHT]

Shorthouse Shouldn't we all be here now?

Scribens *[Pulling herself together]* Sorry? What was that?

Shorthouse I said...

Scribens No - I heard you. Yes, it's time for the speeches. I'll go and ring the bell.

[EXIT Scribens LEFT. Sound of school bell]

Shorthouse Ladies and Gentlemen? If I may have your attention for a moment? I won't keep you long, but I want to tell you a little about what this fundraiser is for. As you know, all schools are strapped for cash in this day and age - and this school is no exception. We are hoping to raise enough money to restock the labrary - but this *is going to cost a great deal of money...*

[ENTER, one by one, Settle, Scribens and Playfair from the LEFT; Teller and Cookson from the RIGHT]

Scribens Now... Are we all here?

Teller Hang on - Sue Cashman isn't here yet.

Scribens Go and find her, will you?

[EXIT Teller LEFT]

Shorthouse Excuse me! I was speaking to our guests.

Settle That is my job - and we can't start until everyone is here.

Playfair Typical! Wanders around as if she owns the place, then is late for the most important part of the whole evening.

Cookson It's not like her to be late.

[Screams Off. ENTER Teller, running and distressed, from LEFT]

Teller It's horrible! It's awful! There's blood everywhere.

Scribens Calm down, Maureen, calm down.

Smallhouse Yes... What are you on about?

Teller It's Sue Cashman - she's dead.

ALL What? No. It can't be, etc.

Teller It's true, I tell you. Looks like someone has beaten her senseless.

ALL *[Buzz of conversation between them]*



[ENTER Inspector Foot of the Yard from the RIGHT]

Foot Hello, hello, hello - and I won't say the rest. I'm Inspector Foot of the Yard. I was waiting outside to pick the wife up, when I couldn't help but notice the disturbance in here. Anyone care to tell me what it's all about?

Teller This way, Officer. It's awful - it really is.

Foot Lead on, dear lady, lead on.

[EXIT Teller and Foot to the LEFT. Few moments and Teller returns alone]

Teller I couldn't stay - it's just too awful.

Scribens What on earth could have happened?

Teller It looked like she'd fallen and hit her head on the wall.

Cookson Oh, what a tragic accident.

[ENTER Foot from the LEFT]

Foot Accident? Did I hear someone say 'accident'? This was, I'm afraid to have to tell you, no accident.

ALL You mean...

Foot Yes, I do mean. Mrs Cashman has been - murdered.

ALL [Various shocked gasps and amazement]

Foot Yes - murdered. Therefore, I will have to treat this as a murder enquiry. I shall now go and make some more detailed notes at the scene of the crime, but for now I must ask that no one leaves the room - especially none of you ladies here.

Playfair You can't possibly mean that we are suspects, Inspector?

Foot Oh yes I can. Now - no one leave the room.

[EXIT Foot LEFT]

Scribens Murder! I just can't believe it.

Settle No? Let's you off a bit of a hook, doesn't it?

Scribens Me off a hook? I think you'll be sleeping easier in your bed tonight.

Settle What could you mean? And while we're talking about hooks - you *[Indicating Shorthouse]* thought you were safe, didn't you?

Shorthouse What...

Settle Don't try to hide it. I know what's been going on - and I know that Cashman Knew. Lovely rich hubby is bound to find out now, isn't he?



Cookson *[Indicating Playfair]* And no one to report you for your drinking now, is there?

Playfair And no one to report you and little Miss Teller.

Teller That's not fair.

Playfair Whoever said life was fair, dearir?

[ENTER Foot LEFT]

Foot Ladies. If I may have your attention please? Thank you. This is definitely a murder investigation - I am now in no doubt. And so you are all under arrest until we can get to the bottom of it all. *[Addresses the audience]* As for you lot - I am reliably informed that none of you have either the wit to commit a murder nor did any of you go anywhere near the murder scene and so you are all free to go if you so wish. HOWEVER, it would aid my investigations greatly if you would remain here and help me with my interrogation of the suspects. But... Let's eat first. This way, you lot.

[EXIT ALL]