

# A Family Reunion to Die For

**By Mike Steele and Matt Steele**

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**Pioneer**  
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## A FAMILY REUNION TO DIE FOR

A Murder Mystery Comedy with Audience Interaction

By MIKE STEELE and MATT STEELE

### DEDICATION

For our mother, who has never stopped supporting our dreams.

### CAST OF CHARACTERS

(In Order of Appearance)

	<u># of lines</u>
GRETCHEN WILCOX .....Christine's elderly aunt and owner of Wilcox's Western Bed and Breakfast; sweet to the guests but nasty to the staff	84
CONNIE CARLSON .....new maid at Wilcox's Western Bed and Breakfast; not too smart	76
BEATRICE GOOGLEHEIMER .....cranky cook at the same B&B	78
CHRISTINE FRANKLIN .....Freddie's pushy new wife; Gretchen's niece	182
FREDDIE FRANKLIN .....wannabe detective; married to Christine	174
COSTUMED GUEST.....comic book enthusiast who dresses as his favorite characters	54
LOLA MATTHEWS.....knitting champion originally from New York City; beautiful former showgirl	56
CARLA JO MICHAELS .....Texan who loves to hunt squirrels; Rhonda Mae's sister	65
RHONDA MAE MICHAELS .....Carla Jo's sister; also loves to hunt squirrels;	42
NEIL CAMP .....manager of a troupe of mimes	62
MOLLY.....hungry mime	16
MINNIE.....another	N/A
JOEL MARCH.....nasty hotel critic	74
STEFAN LIVINGSTON.....regional theater stage actor with a large ego; married to Suzanne and cousin to Christine	42
SUZANNE LIVINGSTON.....Stefan's wife; a regional theater stage actress with a large ego	73

RACHEL SHANKLIN.....	eccentric anthropologist; married to Robert and cousin to Christine	49
ROBERT SHANKLIN .....	Rachel’s husband; also an eccentric anthropologist	40
OPTIONAL EXTRAS.....	as mimes	

SETTING

Place: Wilcox’s Western Bed and Breakfast, a resort in the Virgin Islands.  
Time: The present.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE

Scene One: A cloudy afternoon.  
Scene Two: That evening.

ACT TWO

Scene One: An hour later.  
Scene Two: That night.

SET DESCRIPTION

The action takes place in the living room area of a ranch-style bed and breakfast. There is a front door DOWN RIGHT, an entrance into the kitchen DOWN LEFT and two entrances on the UPSTAGE wall, one UP RIGHT and one UP LEFT, leading to the same hallway. All of the guest rooms, a dining room and any other rooms found at the bed and breakfast can be accessed through this hallway. Next to the front door is a window. A large painting hangs above an unlit fireplace UP CENTER between the UPSTAGE entrances. The fireplace and picture conceal a secret passageway—see PRODUCTION NOTES. A bookshelf with books is just to the left of the fireplace. A loveseat, armchair, end table with a lamp and coffee table are arranged slightly LEFT of CENTER, creating the main seating area. Another chair is against the wall CENTER LEFT. There is a check-in desk along the wall CENTER RIGHT. On the desk are a guest registry book, notebook, pen and vase with flowers. Behind the check-in desk is a locking cabinet tall enough to hold a rifle. The key for this cabinet hangs on a full key ring on a hook on the wall behind the desk. The décor for the set is Western-themed. Feel free to dress it up further as desired.

See pages 62 and 63 for set design and secret passage design.

## A FAMILY REUNION TO DIE FOR

### ACT ONE

#### Scene One

1 AT RISE: GRETCHEN and CONNIE ENTER UP LEFT, having a discussion.

**GRETCHEN:** I have made myself perfectly clear, Miss Carlson. I do not tolerate laziness on the job. You must have all of the beds made neatly by noon, the rooms cleaned thoroughly by four o'clock and  
5 the dining table set impeccably by 5:30 so that supper may be served precisely at six. Do I need to explain this yet again?

**CONNIE:** No, ma'am. I think I finally understand.

**GRETCHEN:** Finally! Here at Wilcox's Western Bed and Breakfast we keep our guests well-accommodated, and that means sticking to  
10 our schedule. I hope you are prepared for the demands of keeping this establishment in pristine condition.

**CONNIE:** Yes, ma'am. I'll be trying my hardest to keep up, ma'am.  
*(BEATRICE ENTERS DOWN LEFT carrying a tray with a pitcher of iced tea and several drinking glasses. She places it on table CENTER LEFT.)*  
15

**GRETCHEN:** I hope you will. Now, do you remember how to greet the guests?

**CONNIE:** I think so. *(As if reciting something she has memorized.)*  
Welcome to Wilcox's Western Bed and Breakfast, the best place  
20 for a little taste of the wild, wild West in the tropics.

**GRETCHEN:** Not bad. I'll be keeping my eye on you. Any indication of incompetence and you'll be looking for employment elsewhere.

**CONNIE:** Oh, dear! Yes, ma'am. *(GRETCHEN EXITS UP RIGHT.)*

**BEATRICE:** I'd be on my toes if I were you. I've seen more young girls  
25 pass through this place than you can imagine. The old bat goes through two or three maids a season.

**CONNIE:** Goes through?

**BEATRICE:** You know... *(Indicates chopping the neck as if she were being beheaded.)*

30 **CONNIE:** She murders them? Oh, dear! What have I gotten myself into, Beatrice?

**BEATRICE:** No! She gives them the ax!

**CONNIE:** Huh?

**BEATRICE:** Ugh! Not literally the ax. She just— *(Tries to think of a simple explanation.)* —sends them away.  
35

**CONNIE:** To where?

1 **BEATRICE:** The unemployment line.

**CONNIE:** Oh, dear! She fires them?

**BEATRICE:** Either that or they quit. They can't handle the pressure.

**CONNIE:** Oh, dear! (*As if quoting what someone has told her.*) Well,

5 it's a good thing I have a charming presence and a sweet face. At least that's what my trainer down at Maids-R-Us said about me when I graduated from their training program. Yes, she said I have what it takes to succeed in any bed and breakfast. "Good service," she said, "requires nothing more than a charming presence, a

10 sweet face and a plate piled high with pancakes." Pancakes for the guests, that is.

**BEATRICE:** Ha! Well, she never stayed at this place. With all the running around we do, you'll need bandages for the blisters on your feet to go along with those pancakes. And to think I once had

15 a charming presence and a sweet face, too.

**CONNIE:** Oh, dear! What happened?

**BEATRICE:** The old lady used some of her own "charm" to make this face turn sour.

**CHRISTINE:** (*ENTERS DOWN RIGHT with FREDDIE. She carries a small purse while FREDDIE struggles with three large suitcases. To FREDDIE.*) Whew, that was quite a walk from the dock.

20 **FREDDIE:** We must be nearly a mile inland. And the sky is getting awfully dark. I thought for sure it would start pouring rain before we made it.

25 **BEATRICE:** (*To CHRISTINE and FREDDIE, as if she has said it a hundred times.*) Welcome to Wilcox's Western Bed and Breakfast, the best place for a little taste of the wild, wild West in the tropics.

**CHRISTINE:** Hello, we're here to check in. Christine and Freddie Franklin.

30 **BEATRICE:** Oh, Christine! It's so wonderful to have you back! Do you remember me?

**CHRISTINE:** Um...

**BEATRICE:** Eh, no worries. (*To CONNIE.*) See? The sweet face is gone. (*To CHRISTINE.*) I'm Beatrice Googleheimer, the cook.

35 **CHRISTINE:** Oh, Beatrice, I didn't even recognize you. How are you?

**BEATRICE:** Fine, thank you. Your aunt said you'd be staying here this week.

**CHRISTINE:** Yes, for the Knotting Family Reunion. Oh, and Freddie and I are on our honeymoon.

**FREDDIE:** We were married just yesterday.

1 **BEATRICE:** Is that so? Well, congratulations! (To *CONNIE*.) Connie, could you find Mrs. Wilcox and let her know that her niece Christine has arrived?

5 **CONNIE:** (Eager, to *CHRISTINE*.) I'll find your aunt right away. (EXITS UP RIGHT.)

**BEATRICE:** Poor thing is gonna get eaten alive. Well, I have to get back to the kitchen and finish preparing the afternoon chuck. (*FREDDIE looks confused.*) That's a snack—in Western terms. Christine's aunt makes us talk like cow people to the guests. (Mutters as she

10 EXITS DOWN LEFT.) Stupid...

**FREDDIE:** This place looks great. I couldn't imagine a Western-themed bed and breakfast in the Virgin Islands until I saw it with my own eyes.

**CHRISTINE:** Isn't it fun? I haven't been here since I was a little girl. It

15 will be so nice to see Aunt Gretchen again.

**FREDDIE:** A family reunion isn't exactly the most romantic way to spend a honeymoon, but free is free.

**CHRISTINE:** Oh, this isn't much of a family reunion. It's just Aunt Gretchen that lives here. Somehow she manages this place all by

20 herself. The only other family members who will be here are my cousins Rachel and Stefan. They're all that's left of the Knotting family, really. At least the parts we keep in touch with.

**GRETCHEN:** (ENTERS UP RIGHT.) Howdy, partners!

**CHRISTINE:** Aunt Gretchen!

25 **GRETCHEN:** Little Christine! My, how you've grown! Why, you're a woman now!

**CHRISTINE:** Oh, Aunt Gretchen, you look great.

**GRETCHEN:** Thank you, dear. And this handsome young cowboy must be...

30 **CHRISTINE:** Freddie, yes.

**FREDDIE:** It's a pleasure meeting you, Aunt Gretchen. Christine has told me so much about you.

**GRETCHEN:** All flattering, I hope.

**CHRISTINE:** Of course.

35 **GRETCHEN:** So, Freddie, what business are you in?

**FREDDIE:** Well, I want to be a detective.

**GRETCHEN:** Is that so?

**FREDDIE:** Yes. Right now I'm captain of the evening security shift at a shopping mall. I haven't been accepted into the police academy yet, but—

1 **CHRISTINE:** But he plans to apply soon. Freddie will be a big detective someday.

**GRETCHEN:** Well, I wish you luck. And how was the wedding?

**CHRISTINE:** Lovely. It was exactly what I wanted—just a small  
5 ceremony with Freddie, me and a flock of white doves.

**FREDDIE:** I'm lucky she even let me invite the minister. Christine wanted a small, simple wedding.

**CHRISTINE:** *(Like a mother talking to a baby.)* And, of course, little Freddie looked adorable in his little tuxedo. It made me just want  
10 to pinch his little cheeks.

**GRETCHEN:** Uh... how sweet.

**CHRISTINE:** I'm just glad we could make it out here for our honeymoon. It's so generous of you to let us stay here.

**FREDDIE:** We really do appreciate it.

15 **GRETCHEN:** Nonsense. This is what family is for. It's a honeymoon and a family reunion all rolled into one for you. And speaking of family, your cousin Rachel and her husband, Robert, checked in a few hours ago.

**CHRISTINE:** Oh, I haven't seen Rachel in years. Are those of us here  
20 for the reunion the only guests this week?

**GRETCHEN:** Oh, no. This is our busy season. Wilcox's Western Bed and Breakfast is almost fully booked for the next several months.

**CHRISTINE:** This place looks beautiful. I haven't been here in so long. And little Freddie can't wait for his pancakes.

25 **GRETCHEN:** Yes, well, when your uncle died, I decided to renovate the main rooms and always have a housekeeper on staff to help me keep things tidy. I believe you met the new maid, Connie Carlson.

**FREDDIE:** Yes! She has quite a charming presence.

**CHRISTINE:** And such a sweet face.

30 **GRETCHEN:** Well, this is her first day on the job—only been here a few hours. I'm not quite sure how much longer she's going to last. And of course you remember Beatrice, the cook.

**CHRISTINE:** We were just speaking. I didn't even recognize her!

**GRETCHEN:** Yes, I deserve the credit for that. *(CONNIE ENTERS UP  
35 RIGHT and begins to dust the bookshelf with a feather duster.)*

**CHRISTINE:** *(Mysterious.)* Is the secret still here?

**GRETCHEN:** Of course.

**FREDDIE:** Secret?

**CHRISTINE:** This old place has a secret, but we're not telling yet, are we, Aunt Gretchen? Not unless you're a good boy, Freddie!

1        (*BEATRICE ENTERS DOWN LEFT with a tray of saddle biscuits, plates and napkins and places them on table CENTER LEFT.*)

**GRETCHEN:** Yes, dear, we'll have to wait and see if he can find it on his own. That will be a fun little game now, won't it?

5 **CHRISTINE:** (*To FREDDIE.*) If there's one thing you'll learn about Aunt Gretchen, it's that she loves to play games.

**GRETCHEN:** We play a variety of games in the evenings here. The guests simply adore it. And tomorrow we have our weekly movie night. Oh, enough chitchat. The two of you must be exhausted from  
10 the trip. Let me show you lovebirds to your room, the Hoedown Honeymoon Suite. (*FREDDIE picks up the suitcases and EXITS UP LEFT after GRETCHEN and CHRISTINE.*)

**CONNIE:** (*To BEATRICE.*) Who was that? That sweet old lady can't be the same nasty woman who hired me.

15 **BEATRICE:** Oh, that's her, all right. I've been working here for almost two decades, and Mrs. Wilcox always treats the guests like cream and the staff like mud pies. It's like working for two different women.

**CONNIE:** Oh, dear!

20 **BEATRICE:** You'll get used to it. (*COSTUMED GUEST, a comic book enthusiast, ENTERS DOWN RIGHT. He is dressed as the Night Crusader and carries a suitcase.*)

**CONNIE:** What on earth is that?

**BEATRICE:** It's not Halloween, so either he's here to finally save us  
25 from the evil Wilcox, or someone has escaped from the loony bin.

**CONNIE:** (*To COSTUMED GUEST.*) Welcome to Wilcox's Western Bed and Breakfast, the best place for a little taste of the wild, wild West in the tropics. Can I help you, sir?

**COSTUMED GUEST:** I have a reservation.

30 **CONNIE:** Name?

**COSTUMED GUEST:** The Night Crusader.

**CONNIE:** (*Looks in the registry book at the check-in desk.*) Oh, dear! There's no one listed under that name.

**BEATRICE:** You better find Mrs. Wilcox. I have to get back to the  
35 kitchen. (*Mutters.*) Stupid... (*EXITS DOWN LEFT. CONNIE starts toward UP LEFT EXIT.*)

**GRETCHEN:** (*ENTERS UP RIGHT.*) Miss Carlson, what are you doing leaving a guest standing at the check-in desk?

**CONNIE:** I was just about to look for you, ma'am. I can't find this gentleman's name in the registry book.



- 1 **GRETCHEN:** You're not getting off to a very good start. How difficult is it to find someone's name and show him to his room?
- CONNIE:** Sorry, ma'am.
- GRETCHEN:** (To *COSTUMED GUEST*.) Well now, sir, what can I do for you?
- 5 **COSTUMED GUEST:** Reservation for the Night Crusader.
- GRETCHEN:** Let me see here. (Looks in the registry book.) No, no, I don't see a Mr. Crusader here. When did you make the reservation?
- COSTUMED GUEST:** About a month ago.
- 10 **GRETCHEN:** The only reservations I'm waiting on are for a Mr. Camp and a Mr. Steel.
- COSTUMED GUEST:** That's me. Steel. A month ago I was going by the name Steel. Warrior of Steel.
- GRETCHEN:** I see. Well, how nice. You have multiple personalities. They always say two is better than one. Miss Carlson, can you show Mr.—uh—Night Crusader to his room? The Wyoming Room.
- 15 **CONNIE:** Yes, ma'am. (EXITS UP RIGHT with *COSTUMED GUEST*, who carries his suitcase.)
- LOLA:** (ENTERS UP LEFT with *CARLA JO* and *RHONDA MAE*, who carries a rifle. *LOLA* is scantily clothed and has a long piece of knitting hanging off of two knitting needles. Speaks in a New York accent.) There's no way I'm going to suffer through the agony of rooming next to the two of you. We'll just see what Mrs. Wilcox has to say about this.
- 20 **CARLA JO:** (With a Texas accent.) Go ahead and state your complaints.
- LOLA:** Mrs. Wilcox, I need to converse with you right away.
- GRETCHEN:** Well, ladies, what is it?
- LOLA:** I cannot room next to these two barbarians. I refuse to be neighbor to any person who hunts animals.
- 30 **RHONDA MAE:** Would you prefer we hunt humans? (Aims the rifle at *LOLA*.) I can sure think of a Yankee I'd like to see hangin' above my mantle.
- LOLA:** You disgust me. You just disgust me. (To *CARLA JO*.) And you disgust me, too.
- 35 **GRETCHEN:** Now, Ms. Matthews, we go through this every year. You know I can't stop the guests from hunting.
- RHONDA MAE:** (With a Texas accent.) Yeah, we got as much right to hunt as you got to twirl those little needles back and forth. Huntin's why we came here. We got a tip that the best squirrels in any territory of the good ol' U. S. of A. are found on this here
- 40 in any territory of the good ol' U. S. of A. are found on this here island, didn't we, Carla Jo?

- 1 **CARLA JO:** That's right, Rhonda Mae. There's nothin' like huntin' squirrels.
- GRETCHEN:** Well, yes, of course! This island is home to many of nature's most useful resources that—squirrels, you say? Here?
- 5 On an island?
- RHONDA MAE:** Pretty darn shockin' that the squirrel populations haven't been controlled yet, ain't it?
- GRETCHEN:** But, this is a tropical island! You'll never find any—
- CARLA JO:** I know you must be worried about all of them breedin' and
- 10 multipliyin'. But don't get too upset, ma'am! We'll take care of this problem in no time.
- RHONDA MAE:** And get some good squirrel meat in the meantime. We'd be killin' two birds with one stone. Or two squirrels, for that matter. As long as there's some killin' involved, I'll be happy.
- 15 *(Laughs with CARLA JO.)*
- LOLA:** Oh! Mrs. Wilcox, I come here every year to clear my mind, relax and knit. If I have to subject myself to these barbarians, I might just go a little crazy and... and...
- CARLA JO:** And what?
- 20 **LOLA:** I don't know, but I can assure you, it won't be good for you or your sister.
- GRETCHEN:** Ms. Matthews, why don't you sit down and have a nice cup of tea while you knit. It's iced.
- CARLA JO:** Maybe it will help cool your hot Yankee temper.
- 25 **GRETCHEN:** And ladies, why don't you let me store your rifle in our locking cabinet? Ms. Matthews might be able to knit more easily knowing the firearm is locked up. *(Gets the key ring off the hook, finds the right key and opens the cabinet.)*
- RHONDA MAE:** *(Hands GRETCHEN the rifle.)* All right, we wouldn't
- 30 want to do anything to get Ms. Matthews upset now, would we? *(GRETCHEN puts the rifle in the cabinet, locks it and hangs the key ring back up on the hook.)*
- CARLA JO:** There's nothin' worse than a Yankee blowin' her top.
- RHONDA MAE:** And who knows? Maybe if we give her the chance, she
- 35 could knit herself some clothes that fit.
- LOLA:** Well! Pardon me for living, but I do believe I have the right to dress as I please. There is nothing wrong with showing a little skin in an effort to attract the opposite sex. I am a former Las Vegas showgirl, after all.
- 40 **GRETCHEN:** Ms. Matthews retired from dancing to become a professional knitter. She is now our nation's current knitting champion.

1 **LOLA:** I can knit one, pearl two faster than anyone in the country.

**GRETCHEN:** And she's also president of the animal rights organization, Mammals, Amphibians and Reptiles, Oh My. With all of those interests, I'm sure the three of you can find something to talk

5 about over a glass of iced tea.

**CARLA JO:** (*Looks LOLA over.*) I doubt it, Mrs. Wilcox.

**GRETCHEN:** Well, give it a try. When you're ready to go hunting, just ask me and I'll fetch your rifle from the cabinet. (*CARLA JO, RHONDA MAE and LOLA move to the CENTER LEFT table to get iced*

10 *tea and sit in the main seating area.*)

**FREDDIE:** (*ENTERS UP LEFT.*) Aunt Gretchen, Christine wants to know if you have any extra towels.

**GRETCHEN:** Certainly. Let me get Miss Carlson to bring you some. (*EXITS UP RIGHT.*)

15 **LOLA:** (*To FREDDIE.*) Say, who is this cutie? (*CHRISTINE ENTERS UP LEFT and moves to FREDDIE.*)

**FREDDIE:** My name's Freddie. Freddie Franklin. And you are?

**LOLA:** Lola. Lola Matthews. National knitting champion. Former Las Vegas showgirl. Originally from New York City. Pleased to make

20 your acquaintance.

**CHRISTINE:** (*Cold.*) And I'm Christine. His wife.

**LOLA:** (*Just as cold.*) Oh, pleased to make your acquaintance as well.

**FREDDIE:** (*To LOLA.*) Say, you're a knitting champion? (*To CHRISTINE.*) Honey, she's practically a celebrity. (*Pulls a pen and notepad from*

25 *his pocket. To LOLA.*) Can I get your autograph? (*LOLA takes the pen and pad and signs.*)

**CHRISTINE:** Yes, well it was nice meeting you. Freddie and I need to return to our room now. Don't we, baby cakes?

**FREDDIE:** Yeah. (*To LOLA.*) Excuse us.

30 **LOLA:** (*Drops the pen.*) Oops. (*Bends over seductively, picks up the pen and hands the pen and pad to FREDDIE.*) I dropped your pen, Mr. Franklin.

**FREDDIE:** Thank you. Call me Freddie.

**LOLA:** If you insist, Freddie.

35 **CHRISTINE:** Freddie! I said now! What did I tell you about talking to strangers? (*EXITS UP LEFT with FREDDIE.*)

**LOLA:** What's that broad's problem?

**CARLA JO:** I wonder.

**RHONDA MAE:** (*To LOLA.*) You sure have a way of making enemies, don't you?

1 **LOLA:** I don't have to stand here and listen to the two of you berate me. I'm going to my room to knit in peace and quiet. (*EXITS UP LEFT.*)

**CARLA JO:** (*Picks her teeth.*) That's one Yankee gal with no class.

5 **GRETCHEN:** (*ENTERS UP RIGHT with CONNIE.*) This is the last time I'm going to tell you to leave extra towels in the guests' rooms, Miss Carlson.

**CONNIE:** But, Mrs. Wilcox, this is the first time you've told me.

**GRETCHEN:** Don't get fresh with me unless you're in the mood to  
10 start looking for a new place to earn a paycheck.

**CONNIE:** Oh, dear!

**CARLA JO:** Mrs. Wilcox?

**GRETCHEN:** (*Suddenly talks sweetly.*) Oh, my, I didn't realize you ladies were still out here. (*To CONNIE.*) Go along, Miss Carlson, and take  
15 your time. (*CONNIE EXITS UP LEFT. To CARLA JO and RHONDA MAE.*) Now, how are the two of you enjoying the iced tea?

**CARLA JO:** It's delicious. Now about our rifle—

**GRETCHEN:** Oh, it's as safe as can be. You wouldn't want to go hunting now anyway. (*Looks out the window.*) It looks like that  
20 tropical storm is about to hit.

**CARLA JO:** Just call us when it's time for supper, then. (*EXITS UP LEFT with RHONDA MAE.*)

**NEIL:** (*ENTERS DOWN RIGHT with MOLLY and MINNIE. Each carries a suitcase.*) Checking in.

25 **GRETCHEN:** Yes, you must be Mr. Neil Camp.

**NEIL:** That would be me.

**GRETCHEN:** (*Leads NEIL, MOLLY and MINNIE to the check-in desk. On the way, MINNIE pantomimes walking into a closed door, and MOLLY pretends to open the door so they can walk through. MOLLY then pantomimes closing the door, and they join NEIL and GRETCHEN at the check-in desk. To MOLLY and MINNIE.*) And you are...? (*MOLLY and MINNIE pantomime being in a box.*)

30 **NEIL:** They're a small mime troupe I manage. We're just passing through the area on the way to our next gig. (*Points to MINNIE.*) This is Minnie. (*Points to MOLLY.*) And that's Molly. Molly here is the  
35 one who suggested a short stay at this place.

**GRETCHEN:** Oh, good. I'm sure mimes will keep the mood here calm and quiet. Now, are you sure you want three guest rooms? We have a family room with three separate beds that would be spacious enough for the three of you.

1 **NEIL:** We each need our own room, lady. I drive these kids from show to show, wash their costumes and take 15 percent of their salaries. I don't room with them.

**GRETCHEN:** I see.

5 **NEIL:** I think I would go crazy if I had to be cooped up in a room with mimes. (*MOLLY and MINNIE pantomime craziness.*) Ha ha! Yes! Just like that. I sure know how to find talent, no? (*CONNIE ENTERS UP LEFT.*)

**GRETCHEN:** Yes. Your rooms are ready and waiting for you. Miss  
10 Carlson will show you.

**NEIL:** Come on, kids. (*He, CONNIE, MOLLY and MINNIE EXIT UP RIGHT carrying their suitcases. JOEL ENTERS UP LEFT.*)

**GRETCHEN:** Why, Mr. March, I'm glad you've come out of your room.  
15 Beatrice just put out the afternoon chuck. I hope you like saddle biscuits.

**JOEL:** (*Pulls a brochure out of his pocket.*) Ah, precisely at three o'clock, just like your brochure says.

**GRETCHEN:** Yes, we pride ourselves on being on time! I hope you will mention the promptness of the service at Wilcox's Western Bed  
20 and Breakfast in your hotel review.

**JOEL:** (*Bites into a biscuit.*) But the brochure indicates that the snack is edible. Talk about an overcooked biscuit! I nearly broke a tooth on this thing.

**GRETCHEN:** Oh, what a shame.

25 **JOEL:** I won't make mention of it in my review, though.

**GRETCHEN:** Oh, good.

**JOEL:** I won't have any room to write about the snacks after discussing the small room, the lumpy bed and the view from my window of the large trash bin.

30 **GRETCHEN:** Oh, my. Well, I'll send Miss Carlson in to see if she can spruce things up a little for you.

**STEFAN:** (*ENTERS UP LEFT with SUZANNE.*) Ah, the afternoon chuck is out.

**SUZANNE:** I am starving, darling. (*She and STEFAN each take a  
35 biscuit.*)

**GRETCHEN:** (*To STEFAN and SUZANNE.*) Hello, dears. Did you rest well?

**SUZANNE:** Yes, the chance to lie down was just what I needed after that long flight.

40 **STEFAN:** These biscuits are delicious, Aunt Gretchen.

**SUZANNE:** Simply heavenly.

1 **GRETCHEN:** Why, thank you. I'll be sure to let Beatrice know you enjoyed them. Christine arrived just a few minutes ago.

**STEFAN:** Ah, I am anxious to see her. I hear she was just married.

**GRETCHEN:** Yes, her husband is a cute fellow. Let me see if I can find  
5 her. *(To JOEL.)* I'll be right back, Mr. March. *(EXITS UP LEFT.)*

**STEFAN:** *(To JOEL.)* How do you do?

**JOEL:** You look familiar.

**STEFAN:** Well, perhaps you've seen us perform.

**SUZANNE:** We are stars of the stage.

10 **STEFAN:** We've appeared in over 45 regional theatrical productions.

**SUZANNE:** And always together.

**STEFAN:** Not to mention we are husband and wife.

**SUZANNE:** We are co-stars on the stage and in life. Aren't we, darling?

**JOEL:** Yes, I remember you. Stefan and Suzanne Livingston. I saw you  
15 together in "The Elms of Passion."

**SUZANNE:** One of my finest roles.

**STEFAN:** And mine, as well.

**JOEL:** I should hope not. *(To SUZANNE.)* I believe I referred to your performance as trite and overstated. *(To STEFAN.)* And your  
20 performance as self-indulgent.

**SUZANNE:** Wait. Did Aunt Gretchen call you Mr. March? As in Joel March?

**JOEL:** Yes.

**STEFAN:** The nastiest theater critic on the West Coast?

25 **JOEL:** Correction. The former nastiest theater critic on the West Coast. I'm currently the nastiest hotel critic on the East Coast.

**SUZANNE:** I remember hearing that you no longer write for "Theatre Monthly."

**JOEL:** I now write for "Hotel Weekly."

30 **STEFAN:** What happened? Readers couldn't handle your bitterness? Or was it your jealousy?

**JOEL:** I take pride in the bitterness. But jealousy? Over what?

**STEFAN:** I can only assume that anyone who writes with such contempt for actors is jealous of their artistic talents.

35 **JOEL:** Trust me, my little friend, I consider myself lucky never to have been mixed up with you and your crowd of over-complicated, under-educated bohemians. Where did you even learn the nonsense that you refer to as art?

**STEFAN:** We both attended Juilliard for a time.

1 **JOEL:** Oh! Julliard?  
**SUZANNE:** That's right.  
**JOEL:** Never heard of it.  
**STEFAN:** I'm not going to just stand here and put up with this—

5 **SUZANNE:** Remember, darling, save this emotion for the stage.  
Practice your breathing exercises. (*STEFAN breathes heavily, making obnoxious noises. JOEL sits CENTER LEFT.*)  
**CHRISTINE:** (*ENTERS UP LEFT with FREDDIE.*) Stefan!  
**STEFAN:** Christine, you look wonderful!

10 **CHRISTINE:** Thank you. I'd like you to meet my husband, Freddie Franklin.  
**STEFAN:** (*Shakes FREDDIE'S hand.*) A pleasure.  
**FREDDIE:** It's so nice to meet you.  
**STEFAN:** This is my wife, Suzanne.

15 **SUZANNE:** It's wonderful to make your acquaintance, darling.  
**CHRISTINE:** I've been showing Freddie around the bed and breakfast.  
**STEFAN:** (*Mysterious.*) Have you told him about the secret yet?  
**FREDDIE:** What is this secret everyone keeps talking about?  
**CHRISTINE:** I'll give you a little hinty-hint, sweetie. It's found right here

20 in this room.  
**FREDDIE:** This room?  
**CHRISTINE:** Do you notice anything that looks out of the ordinary?  
**FREDDIE:** Not really, but I'm not the most perceptive person.  
**CHRISTINE:** I know, sugar face, but you try. Don't forget, you were

25 perceptive enough to notice you wanted to marry me. (*They kiss.*)  
**RACHEL:** (*ENTERS UP RIGHT with ROBERT. Both are dressed in tribal attire as if they have just been living in a remote village. RACHEL has a "pigskin" apron around her waist.*) Is that little cousin Christine attached to that man's lips?

30 **CHRISTINE:** Rachel, look at you! It's been years. (*They hug.*)  
**RACHEL:** Hello, Stefan, Suzanne.  
**STEFAN:** Looks like the family reunion has officially begun. Suzanne and I will get all of us some tea. (*He and SUZANNE move to the CENTER LEFT table and begin pouring iced tea.*)

35 **RACHEL:** (*To CHRISTINE.*) I don't believe you've ever had the chance to meet my husband, Dr. Robert Shanklin.  
**CHRISTINE:** Nice to meet you. And this is my husband, Freddie.  
**RACHEL:** (*Studies FREDDIE'S face.*) Wait, let me guess. Polish? No, no, with those eyes and cheekbones you must be Russian.

- 1 **ROBERT:** Yes, Russian would be my first guess, as well.  
**FREDDIE:** My family is Ukrainian, actually.  
**RACHEL:** Darn it! I was so close! But, they must be from eastern Ukraine. Am I correct?
- 5 **FREDDIE:** How did you know?  
**CHRISTINE:** Rachel and Robert are anthropologists specializing in human origins. They travel the world digging up human remains in remote villages.  
**JOEL:** How morbid.
- 10 **ROBERT:** *(To JOEL.)* Oh, hello, I didn't see you there.  
**FREDDIE:** Would you care to join us?  
**JOEL:** No. *(EXITS UP LEFT.)*  
**RACHEL:** He doesn't seem to be in the best mood.  
**STEFAN:** Don't mind him. He's just a bitter journalist.
- 15 **FREDDIE:** Now, Rachel, your mother was...?  
**RACHEL:** Ida. One of Gretchen's sisters.  
**STEFAN:** And my mother was Agnes. Also one of Gretchen's four sisters.  
**FREDDIE:** Four?
- 20 **CHRISTINE:** Yes, we don't know what happened to the fourth sister. But Aunt Gretchen, Aunt Ida, Aunt Agnes and my mother were all inseparable when they were alive. *(Indicates RACHEL and STEFAN.)* The three of us practically grew up together.  
**STEFAN:** That's why these family reunions are so much fun. We get to reminisce. Ever since our mothers passed away, we haven't seen much of one another. We all sort of went our own separate ways.
- 25 **LOLA:** *(ENTERS UP LEFT.)* Has anyone here seen my needle?  
**ROBERT:** Needle? I've heard of looking for a needle in a haystack, but at a bed and breakfast?
- 30 **LOLA:** Silly, it's not a tiny sewing needle. It's a big needle for knitting. I put it somewhere, and I can't seem to find it. *(Notices FREDDIE.)* Well, hello again, cutie.  
**FREDDIE:** Hi.  
**CHRISTINE:** *(Cold, to LOLA.)* Why don't you try looking for the needle in your room? I'm sure you'll find it there.
- 35 **LOLA:** *(Just as cold.)* Thanks for the advice. *(EXITS UP LEFT.)*  
**RACHEL:** Well, Robert and I better get back to our room and finish unpacking. We'll do some more catching up later.  
**ROBERT:** It was nice meeting you.  
**STEFAN:** We should get back to our room, as well.



- 1 **SUZANNE:** We'll see you at supper, darlings. (*EXITS UP LEFT with STEFAN. RACHEL and ROBERT EXIT UP RIGHT.*)
- CHRISTINE:** (*Angry.*) Well?
- FREDDIE:** Well, what?
- 5 **CHRISTINE:** What do you have to say for yourself?
- FREDDIE:** About what?
- CHRISTINE:** Your eyes look like they're about to burst out of your head whenever Miss Knitting Needles is around.
- FREDDIE:** Aw, you know I only have eyes for you, babe.
- 10 **CHRISTINE:** If I see you looking at her one more time, I'll scream bloody murder.
- GRETCHEN'S VOICE:** (*OFFSTAGE.*) Ahhhhhhh!
- FREDDIE:** I didn't look at her. She's not even here.
- CHRISTINE:** No, that wasn't me. It sounded like Aunt Gretchen.
- 15 **SUZANNE:** (*ENTERS UP LEFT.*) Aunt Gretchen is on the floor in the hallway.
- FREDDIE:** What?! Bring her in here. (*COSTUMED GUEST, RACHEL, ROBERT, NEIL, MOLLY and MINNIE ENTER UP RIGHT. JOEL, LOLA, CARLA JO and RHONDA MAE ENTER UP LEFT. STEFAN drags GRETCHEN IN, facedown, from UP LEFT and places her DOWN CENTER. She has a knife sticking out of her back. RHONDA MAE carries a note. ALL talk frantically about what is going on.*)
- 20 **LOLA:** I think there might be something wrong with Mrs. Wilcox.
- CARLA JO:** That knife stickin' out of her back might be the problem.
- 25 **RHONDA MAE:** Is she unconscious?
- ROBERT:** (*Checks GRETCHEN'S pulse.*) No, she's not unconscious. She's dead. (*BEATRICE and CONNIE ENTER DOWN LEFT.*)
- BEATRICE:** What's all the racket?
- CONNIE:** We heard a scream.
- 30 **NEIL:** The old lady's dead.
- BEATRICE:** Dead? (*MOLLY and MINNIE pantomime being dead.*)
- CONNIE:** Oh, dear!
- COSTUMED GUEST:** No! No! (*Cradles GRETCHEN'S body and speaks as if he is performing a dramatic monologue from a comic book.*) If only I had been there in time. If only I were quicker, more efficient. Why must this innocent blood be spilled? Whoever did this, whoever is responsible for this gruesome world we live in will pay!
- 35 **CARLA JO:** Is he serious?
- BEATRICE:** That knife came from the kitchen. Someone must have taken it when I wasn't there. Mrs. Wilcox was murdered with her own knife.

1 **CONNIE:** Oh, dear!

**RHONDA MAE:** (*Holds up the note.*) This note was on the floor by Mrs. Wilcox's body.

5 **CHRISTINE:** Let me see. (*RHONDA MAE hands the note to CHRISTINE, who reads it aloud.*) It's written in this weird orange ink. "There was an old woman named Gretchen. The thought of her kept me up wretchin'. I took a sharp knife and ended her life. But me, you will never be catchin'."

**RACHEL:** It sounds like someone had it in for Aunt Gretchen.

10 **ROBERT:** That poem is kind of catchy, though.

**CHRISTINE:** What are we going to do with Aunt Gretchen? We can't just leave her in the middle of the living room floor.

**JOEL:** Don't they normally put bodies on ice?

**BEATRICE:** We have ice in the kitchen.

15 **RHONDA MAE:** Me and Carla Jo can carry her.

**CARLA JO:** That's one good thing about us Michaels sisters—we're each as strong as an ox. (*Carries GRETCHEN OFF DOWN LEFT with RHONDA MAE.*)

20 **CHRISTINE:** (*Distraught.*) How could someone stab poor Aunt Gretchen? That's murder. There's been a murder at the family reunion! (*SOUND EFFECT: THUNDER and HEAVY RAIN. BLACKOUT.*)

End of Scene One

**End of script preview.**

## PRODUCTION NOTES

### PROPERTIES

ONSTAGE: Hinged flat with large painting and false fireplace, bookshelf with books, loveseat with throw pillow, armchair, end table, lamp, coffee table, chair, check-in desk, key ring full of keys, registry book, notebook, pen, vase filled with water and flowers, locking cabinet tall enough to hold a rifle.

BROUGHT ON, ACT ONE, Scene One:

Tray with pitcher of iced tea and drinking glasses, tray with saddle biscuits, plates and napkins (BEATRICE)

Small purse (CHRISTINE)

Three large suitcases, notepad, pen (FREDDIE)

Feather duster (CONNIE)

Knitting and needles (LOLA)

Rifle, first murder note (RHONDA MAE)

Suitcase (COSTUMED GUEST, NEIL, MOLLY, MINNIE)

Brochure (JOEL)

Knife (GRETCHEN)

BROUGHT ON, ACT ONE, Scene Two:

Platter of cheese and crackers (CONNIE)

Second murder note (slipped in from hole in painting)

Rifle (in passageway with STEFAN and CONNIE)

Laptop case (NEIL)

Laptop, third murder note (FREDDIE)

BROUGHT ON, ACT TWO, Scene One:

Suitcase with two toy weapons, clothes, plastic wrap (CARLA JO)

Three foot long length of two-by-four (LOLA)

BROUGHT ON, ACT TWO, Scene Two:

Hatchet (JOEL)

Piece of cake on paper plate, fork, towel (CONNIE)

Tub of popcorn (from behind the check-in desk)

Murder notes (FREDDIE)

Gun (MOLLY)

Prop gun (COSTUMED GUEST)

Knitting needle (LOLA)

### SOUND EFFECTS

Thunder, heavy rain, gunshot, electric buzz, electronic toy weapon.

## COSTUMES

The action takes place in one day, so all except Stefan, Suzanne and Costumed Guests wear the same costume for the entire play. All characters wear contemporary costumes befitting their station in life, with the following specifics:

GRETCHEN wears a house dress with a cowboy hat to show off her bed and breakfast's Western theme.

CARLA JO and RHONDA MAE dress as Texans and wear overalls and boots as if they are about to go hunting.

SUZANNE wears a gown since she is an actress and cannot be seen underdressed. In ACT ONE, Scene Two, she enters with facial cream on her face and wears a bathrobe so as not to get any cream on her gown. She can then return to her original costume for ACT TWO or change into a new gown.

STEFAN also wears something fancy, such as a suit or a tuxedo. Since he is murdered in the bathtub, he wears a bathrobe for all of ACT TWO.

RACHEL looks as if she has just stepped out of a remote village. She wears a "pigskin" apron around her waist.

ROBERT also wears tribal attire.

MOLLY and MINNIE dress as mimes in traditional black and white with white face makeup and white gloves. There is an orange stain on Molly's glove in ACT TWO.

COSTUMED GUEST has three costumes: The Night Crusader, Yak Man and Princess Gracie Gumdrop—original characters that can be costumed however you see fit. The Night Crusader is supposed to be a dark comic book superhero. Yak Man is your typical animal-themed comic book superhero. Princess Gracie Gumdrop is a cutesy little girl comic book character with a short, bright dress and a lollipop magic wand. The funnier the better!

## FLEXIBLE CASTING

Three roles can be played by either gender. RHONDA MAE could be RONNIE JAY, JOEL MARCH could be JEAN MARCH, and NEIL CAMP could be NELL CAMP.

Additional mimes may be added to allow for flexible cast sizes. They should be given names that begin with the letter M and end with a long E sound, just like Molly and Minnie (such as Mikey, Maddie, etc.). All the mimes need strong pantomime skills. It is important to note that GRETCHEN'S line on page 9 in reference to the number of rooms that NEIL has booked will need to change accordingly with the number of

additional mimes added so that each mime is staying in his or her own guest room. If additional mimes are used, they should be incorporated into the pantomimes already in the script and should accompany MOLLY and MINNIE whenever they are onstage.

### AUDIENCE INTERACTION

The audience interacts with the ghosts of Gretchen, Rachel and Stefan throughout the play. Thus, the actors who play these parts should have strong improvisational acting skills. Gretchen is the first character to interact with the audience, and she may need to do a little coaxing to encourage a reluctant audience to respond. Whether Gretchen allows the audience to shout out to her or whether she establishes that they raise their hands to answer her questions is up to the director. In the original production, when Gretchen, Rachel and Stefan would speak to the audience, the stage lights would slightly dim. This indicated to the audience that it was appropriate at that time to call out to these actors.

Depending on the size of the auditorium, it might be a good idea for the ghost of Gretchen to carry around a hand-held microphone so she can hand an audience member the microphone, and the rest of the audience will be able to hear what is being said. This would be particularly helpful toward the end of ACT TWO, Scene One, when Gretchen takes questions from the audience for Rachel to write down for Freddie to ask the suspects.

During this interrogation scene, Freddie and the rest of the cast will have ample opportunity to improvise. This can be a lot of fun for both the actors and the audience, but the director should make sure that the cast is well prepared. During the rehearsal process, each cast member should practice responses to questions that the audience might ask. Popular questions in the original production included, “How did Carla Jo and Rhonda Mae get their gun onto the island?” and “Where did Lola get her two-by-four from?” The number of questions that Gretchen gathers is up to the director. In the original production, 8 to 10 questions were gathered at each performance, creating an improvisation segment that lasted roughly five minutes.

Alternatively, the question-and-answer improvisation segment can easily be cut from the production. Freddie’s line, “Yes, but I don’t know how to do that,” can be followed directly by Joel’s last line in the scene, “There’s a surprise,” and the scene can simply end.

## THE SET

In ACT ONE, Scene Two, part of the wall UP CENTER opens to reveal a secret passage. This effect can easily be created by building a door onto the wall UP CENTER. Hanging a picture on the door and either painting or building a fireplace underneath the picture will give the illusion that this door is simply part of the wall. If the picture and fireplace are wider than the actual door, they will cover the seams and the audience will not see that the door exists until it is opened. Attaching the picture and the fireplace to the door with wooden blocks that are several inches thick and off-setting the doorway (so that it is a few inches DOWNSTAGE of the rest of the wall) will allow the door to open freely. A hole large enough to be able to stick a rifle through should be made in both the painting and the door. The hole can easily be concealed with a scrap of cloth on the back of the painting until the rifle is pushed through.

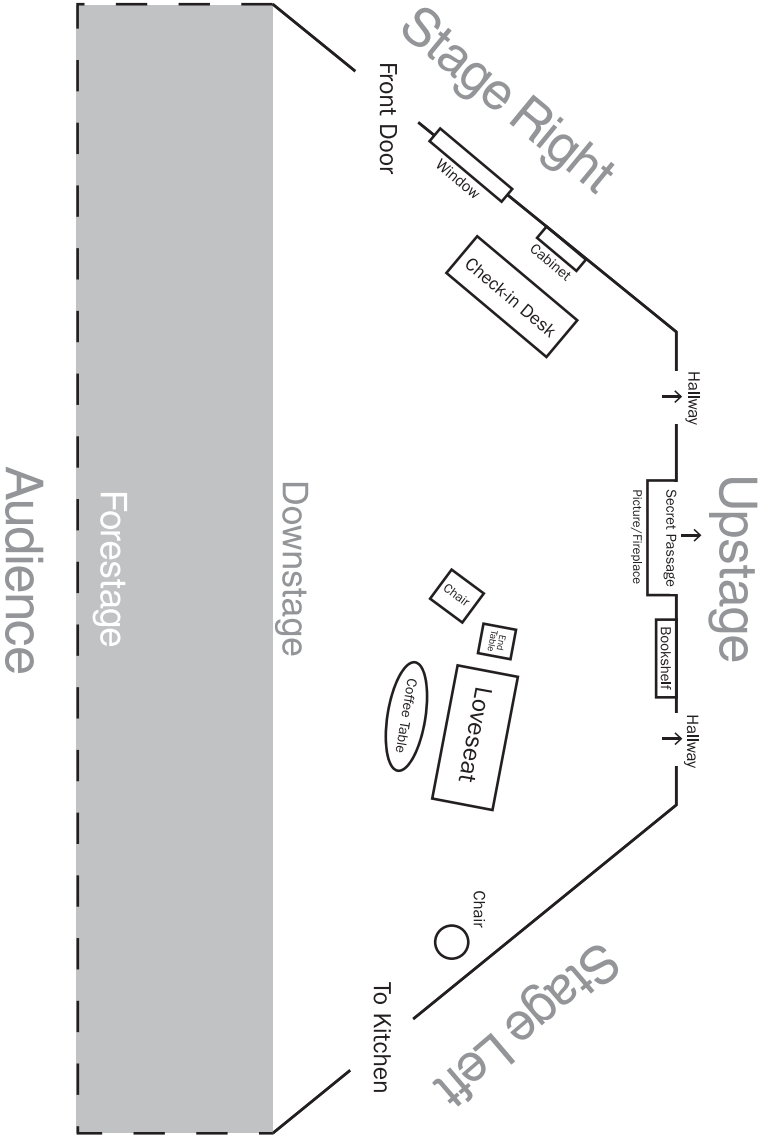
### A FEW NOTES ABOUT STAGING THIS PLAY

In ACT ONE, Scene Two, RACHEL exits the stage through the front door DOWN RIGHT and enters again soaking wet, as if she has just walked outside in a terrible storm. How this is staged is up to the director. In the original production, RACHEL opened the front door, stepped into a children's wading pool just outside while still being visibly onstage, and a bucket of water was dumped from above all over the actress. This elicited a wonderful response from the audience, as they actually saw the water hit the actress. HINT: It's a good idea for RACHEL to have two identical costumes so that during intermission the actress can change into a dry costume for the remainder of the play.

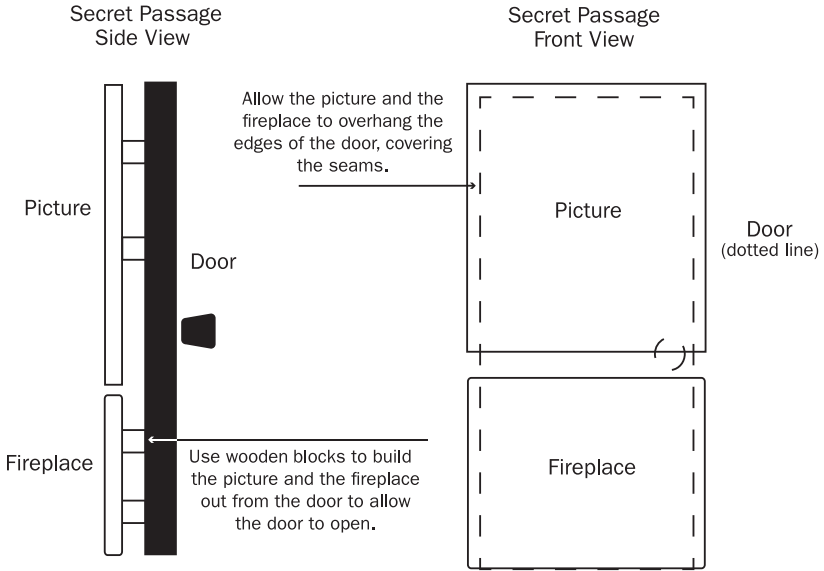
It is a good idea for CONNIE to usually (except in ACT TWO, Scene Two) have a rag as part of her costume so that she can wipe up any water or stage blood on the stage floor to avoid actors slipping.

In ACT TWO, Scene Two, the ghosts of GRETCHEN, RACHEL and STEFAN sit with the audience to watch FREDDIE accuse MOLLY of being the murderer. Seats can be left empty specifically for these characters or the characters can sit in any empty seat available. The characters could also simply sit on the house floor if no seats are available.

# A Family Reunion to Die For - Set Design



# Secret Passage Design





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