

THE MYSTERIOUS MURDER AT MANCHESTER MANOR

By Richard Gremel

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THE MYSTERIOUS MURDER AT MANCHESTER MANOR

A Full Length Comedic Mystery

by Richard Gremel

SYNOPSIS: Nancy and Prudence are your everyday, run of the mill, teenage girls by day. But by night, they are Nancy, Pru: Private Detectives and they have just finished cracking another case. On their way to a concert, their car breaks down and they need to call for help. Naturally they happen upon an old house at the top of the hill during a rainstorm: The perfect setting for a murder mystery. Which is just what they get. All the Manchesters have gathered to celebrate the birthday of Oliver J. Manchester, but during a hilarious turn of events, Oliver turns up dead, after being shot, poisoned, and hit on the head with a shovel. The only problem is everyone is trying to cover up the murder because they believe that they are the ones to blame. Can Nancy and Prudence solve the case? Who really killed Oliver J. Manchester?

CAST OF CHARACTERS

*(14 females, 3 males, 2-3 either, 0-1 extras; doubling possible,
gender flexible)*

NANCY WATERS (f).....	An Over-enthusiastic detective wannabe. Teenager. (204 lines)
PRUDENCE “PRU” PETERSON (f)	A scaredy-cat, brainiac detective. Teenager. (179 lines)
SUSAN MANCHESTER (f).....	She is a snobby, high-class, housewife. Early 50’s. (172 lines)
DAVID MANCHESTER (m)	The Mysterious head of the household. Early 50’s. (86 lines)
FRANCESCA (f)	A sneaky con-artist disguised as a French Maid. Mid 20’s. (133 lines)
RUSTY (m).....	The gullible, dim-witted gardener. In love with Francesca. Mid 20’s. (59 lines)

JANE BLACK (f)	The overly excited, naive nurse. Early 20's. (46 lines)
OLGA (f)	The estranged, mysterious, and a little creepy foreign cook. Old..really old. (32 lines)
ELEANOR MANCHESTER-ADAMS (f) ...	The has-been, pretentious soap opera actress. Early 30's. (57 lines)
SALLY MANCHESTER-ADAMS (f)	A young, witty, child with her nose in everyone's business. 11 years old. (41 lines)
KELLY GREEN (f)	The undercover reporter, just trying to get her scoop. Early 20's. (18 lines)
WALTER MANCHESTER (m)	The womanizing plagiarist, willing to do anything to protect his name. Late 20's. (121 lines)
CAROLYN MANCHESTER (f)	The loyal wife and number one fan to Walter. Late 20's. (61 lines)
LUCILLE LAVENDER (f).....	The quick talking, publicist. Early 30's. (36 lines)
JUNIPER MANCHESTER (f).....	The outcast, disappointing art college dropout. Early 20's. (45 lines)
VALERIE FITZGERALD (f)	The desperate Real Estate Agent who just needs to make a sale. 30's -40's. (22 lines)
ANNIE BODY (f).....	Perspective Homebuyer. (23 lines)
OPERATOR (m/f)	Your average police operator. (9 lines)
INSPECTOR (m/f).....	The bumbling, old-fashioned detective type. (12 lines)
OFFICER (m/f)	The stereotypical police officer. (4 lines)
EXTRAS (m/f).....	Oliver J. Manchester. A dead body. (Non-Speaking)

CAST NOTE: *Doubling Possible. The Police Operator/The Police Officer. *It is funnier if Oliver J. Manchester (*the dead body.*) is played by a real person. However, a dummy can be used, if necessary.

DURATION: 90 minutes.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE, SCENE 1: The Office of Nancy, Pru: Private Detectives

ACT ONE, SCENE 2. The Main Room of Manchester Manor

ACT ONE, SCENE 3: Nancy's Car on the Way to the Concert

ACT ONE, SCENE 4.: The Main Room of Manchester Manor

ACT TWO, SCENE 1: The Main Room of Manchester Manor (*A few minutes later.*)

SETTING

Unit Set/Additional Playing Areas. The set consists of an old, wealthy looking home. We see the main room of the house. To one side of the room is two doors, one is the front door and the other is a closet. On the other side of the room is two more doors. One is a set of french doors that lead to the veranda and the other is the door which leads to the kitchen and dining room. Up stage is an archway that reveals a hallway and two doors that lead to the den and study. Also upstage is a set of stairs that lead to the upstairs bedrooms, which are not visible to the audience. There is also a fireplace that sits upstage center in the room. Above the fireplace is a large painting of Oliver J. Manchester. The walls, decorations, and furniture should give the appearance that a wealthy family lives here. *The den, study, kitchen, and dining room can all be imagined offstage and accessed through archways.

The office of Nancy/Pru Private Detectives and Nancy's car should be played downstage of the main set. It is suggested that a curtain be closed to hide the main set, but it is not required. The office consists of a small desk, a chair, and a small filing cabinet. The car consists of two chairs and a possible steering wheel.

PROPS

- ☐ Computer
- ☐ New Case File
- ☐ Old Case files
- ☐ Business Card(s.)
- ☐ Portrait of Oliver J. Manchester
- ☐ Large Butcher Knife
- ☐ Soup in a bowl
- ☐ Bell
- ☐ Pen and Paper
- ☐ Cleaning Supplies
- ☐ Map
- ☐ Cell Phone
- ☐ Luggage
- ☐ Fur Coat(s.)
- ☐ Coats
- ☐ Muddy Shoes
- ☐ Old Book
- ☐ Cookies
- ☐ Walter's Books
- ☐ Migraine Pill Bottle
- ☐ Notebook
- ☐ Candlestick
- ☐ Checkbook
- ☐ Gag
- ☐ Rope
- ☐ Wheelchair
- ☐ Blanket
- ☐ Pill Bottle
- ☒ Gun
- ☐ Cake*
- ☐ Party Hat
- ☐ Party Blower
- ☐ Shovel
- ☐ White Sheet
- ☐ Phone
- ☐ Officer's Phone
- ☐ Special (*colored.*) Glasses

- ☐ Purse with Contents Inside
- ☐ Wills
- ☐ Guns for Police
- ☐ Cuffs

*For the original production, the cake was made out of cupcake cups and shaving cream with a candle in it. This worked great for achieving the cake in the face, without having to ruin a full cake every night, and getting the frosting in the face look. You could also do a slice of cake on a plate.

SPECIAL EFFECTS

- ☐ Lightning
- ☐ Thunder
- ☐ Car Noises
- ☐ Rain
- ☐ Doorbell rings
- ☐ Knock at the door
- ☐ Phone rings
- ☐ Dramatic sound

COSTUMES

The period of the play is modern, however the costumes don't have to be. Instead, the costumes can reflect the characters, their occupations, or their personalities.

*Suggestions: Nancy and Pru could look like they come straight out of a Nancy Drew book. David, Susan, Walter, and Carolyn could look very wealthy and dressed in evening wear. Elenor should look like she's ready to walk the red carpet. Francesca can be dressed as a stereotypical maid and Rusty dressed in overalls and a plaid shirt to represent a gardener. The inspector could be dressed in a trench coat and fedora and the officers like your average cop. Oliver J Manchester can be dressed in pajamas and a robe.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This show is to be presented as a comical murder mystery. The characters should be exaggerated, overly dramatic, and suspicious. The play has many entrances and exits which should flow quickly, with one character entering as another one exits, rarely leaving the stage empty. All of the scenes should be quick in pace, with the pace increasing as the play goes on, becoming almost frantic by the end of act one. Also, play up the moments when the dramatic music plays. A quick pause in the action and a gasp to the audience, during the dramatic music can increase the humor of the performance.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Mysterious Murder at the Manchester Manor was originally performed on January 27-29, 2016 at Empire High School in Tucson, AZ. The original production had the following cast:

NANCY WATERS-----	Emily Gates
PRUDENCE PETERSON-----	Eileen McFadden
SUSAN MANCHESTER-----	Lily Bartholomew
DAVID MANCHESTER-----	Austin Talley
FRANCESCA-----	Blaire Krakowitz
RUSTY-----	Tyler Sandles
JANE-----	Kyleigh Sacco
OLGA-----	Kaitlyn Fabry
ELEANOR MANCHESTER-ADAMS-----	Ysenia Nava
SALLY MANCHESTER-ADAMS-----	Lorraine Timmons
KELLY GREEN-----	Moniza Zamarripa
WALTER MANCHESTER-----	Scott Hearn
CAROLYN MANCHESTER-----	Taylor Thomas
LUCILLE LAVENDER-----	Miranda Wolf
JUNIPER MANCHESTER-----	Hope Hamil
VALERIE FITZGERALD-----	Cydney Cole
ANNIE BODY-----	Nicolina Nguyen
OPERATOR/OFFICER-----	Mae Shaw
INSPECTOR-----	Daniel Quinones
OLIVER J. MANCHESTER-----	Colin Fabry

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

AT RISE: *The Office of Nancy, Pru: Private Detectives. NANCY is seated at the desk, typing on her computer. SFX: Thunder and Rain play in the background. Spot on NANCY.*

NANCY: It was a dark and stormy night

SFX: Thunder and Lightning.

NANCY: which is how most mysteries begin...well, at least the good ones. We had just finished another successful case and were ready to file it away.

Lights up on the rest of the office.

PRUDENCE: *(Enters with a file in hand.)* That's it. Case closed. Another case solved by Nancy, Pru: Private Detectives. Great work partner.

NANCY: Thank you. And might I add, good work on your part as well. You know, we make a pretty good team, you and me.

PRUDENCE: Thanks. Always happy to help.

NANCY: It has been a dream of mine to be a successful detective ever since I received my first at home detective kit and my CLUE © board game.

PRUDENCE: *(Opening up the file cabinet.)* And who would've thought, that in one year's time, we would be able to solve so many important cases. *(Pulling out the files of old cases.)* The case of the secret admirer...

NANCY: I loved that case.

PRUDENCE: The case of the missing frogs.

NANCY: That one was hard to dissect.

PRUDENCE: The case of the unknown locker combination.

NANCY: That case took a couple quick turns in the end.

PRUDENCE: The case of the hidden Easter eggs.

NANCY: That was a real tough case to crack.

PRUDENCE: *(Putting away the most recent case.)* And now the case of the cafeteria mystery meat.

NANCY: That was a case we could really sink our teeth into.

PRUDENCE: Yep. Another one to put in the files. There hasn't been a case yet, we couldn't solve.

NANCY: You're right. And that's why I've included a new tagline to our business cards.

NANCY hands PRUDENCE a card.

PRUDENCE: (*Reading.*) "Nancy, Pru: Private Detectives. There isn't a case we can't solve".

NANCY: What do you think?

PRUDENCE: The font is nice. What did you use, Courier New?

NANCY: Verdana, actually. But I'm asking about the tagline.

PRUDENCE: Oh.

NANCY: What is it?

PRUDENCE: I just think it's delivering some false promises.

NANCY: What do you mean? There hasn't been a case yet we couldn't solve. You just said it yourself a moment ago.

PRUDENCE: Yeah I know, but that's because we haven't encountered one yet. What happens when a case comes along that *is* too difficult for us to solve? What will we do then?

NANCY: Well, we will just have to solve it.

PRUDENCE: But, what if we can't.

NANCY: Then we will.

PRUDENCE: But, what if we can't.

NANCY: Then we will.

PRUDENCE: But...

NANCY: Look Prudence, if we find a case we can't solve, then we will get new business cards. But until then, let's just keep taking cases we know we can figure out.

PRUDENCE: Fine.

NANCY: Great. And now that we've had another successful case to put in the files, it's time that we celebrate.

PRUDENCE: You're right. But we better leave soon, if we're going to make it to Boston by midnight. Just think...this time tomorrow, we will be sitting third row at the Justin Timberlake [or current popular male singer] concert.

NANCY and PRUDENCE: He's so dreamy. (*Sigh with love.*)

PRUDENCE: But we're never going to make it to the hotel to check in, if we don't leave now.

SFX: Thunder and Lightning.

PRUDENCE: With this weather, it is going to be hard enough to drive.

NANCY: Just give me a few minutes to finish up here and then we can hit the road.

PRUDENCE: Nancy...

NANCY: Don't worry about it, Pru. I already have the car packed and ready to go.

PRUDENCE: Snacks?

NANCY: Chips, popcorn, chocolate covered pretzels, and licorice.

PRUDENCE: Music?

NANCY: All four of Justin's [or current popular male singer] albums including the limited edition unreleased studio tracks album.

PRUDENCE: Magazines for the hotel room, our matching Justin Timberlake [or current popular male singer] t-shirts, and our autograph book?

NANCY: Check, check, and check. Now let me finish up so we can go.

PRUDENCE: Fine. I'll go grab my stuff and load it in the car. *(Exits.)*

NANCY: Now let's see, where was I... *(Begins to type on her computer again.)* The girls were ready to head out on an experience of a lifetime. Hopefully, nothing would stand in their way.

SFX: Thunder and Lightning.

NANCY: But if the weather outside was any indication, this might be a night full of intrigue, suspense, and mystery.

SFX: Thunder and Lightning.

NANCY: *(Closing her computer.)* Now, off to the concert. Justin Timberlake [or current popular male singer], here we come.

SFX: Thunder and Lightning.

NANCY: What could go wrong? (*Exits.*)

Curtain.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

AT START: *The curtains open to reveal Manchester Manor. FRANCESCA enters the stage and begins to tidy up. Adjusting the knick-knacks, fluffing the pillows, etc. While she does, she hums the song Frere Jacques. SFX: Thunder. FRANCESCA heard the thunder and looks out the french doors at the weather, then continues back to her work. Soon after, JANE enters.*

JANE: Oh, Francesca. There you are. It's almost time for Mr. Manchester to get his nightly dose of medication.

FRANCESCA: (*Speaking with a French accent.*) Which Monsieur Manchester?

NANCY: Sorry. Old Man Manchester. And he can't take his meds on an empty stomach. Mrs. Manchester would like for you to bring up a bowl of chicken noodle soup.

FRANCESCA: I know this is your first week here, but need I remind you, I am not the cook. I am the maid. I clean and I tidy. I don't make the soup.

JANE: She isn't asking you to make it, she just wants you to bring it up.

FRANCESCA: How about you march your pretty little derriere into the kitchen and tell Olga to make the soup and you can take it up yourself.

JANE: But Mrs. Manchester asked for you to take it up. Besides... Olga scares me.

FRANCESCA: Well, I am not going to take up the soup. You were the one hired to take care of the Old Monsieur Manchester. So, you can do it yourself.

JANE: Please Francesca. I need this job. I can't have anything go wrong here or I'll get fired.

FRANCESCA: Then you better make sure old Monsieur Manchester gets his soup. I'll even tell Olga to make it for you. (*Opens the kitchen door.*) Olga!

OLGA: (*Enters.*) What?!

FRANCESCA: The Madame wants some soup for the Old Monsieur Manchester.

OLGA: Soup?

FRANCESCA: Yes, Soup. Chicken Noodle Soup.

OLGA: Soup?

FRANCESCA: Yes. You know Balk, balk, slurp, slurp.

OLGA: Oh...soup.

FRANCESCA: Oui. Mademoiselle Jane will take it up to him.

OLGA exits.

FRANCESCA: Merci Olga. *(To JANE.)* There. She will make you the soup and you can take it up. I will be in the study cleaning.

JANE: Thank you.

FRANCESCA: Je t'en prie. [*Juh Tawn Pree* "You're Welcome"]
(Curtsies and exits.)

SFX: Thunder and Lightning. The lights go out. JANE screams. OLGA enters and raises a large butcher knife. SFX: Lightning. JANE sees OLGA and screams. OLGA hides the knife as the lights come back on.

OLGA: Your Soup.

SUSAN: *(Enters. She wears a very fancy robe.)* What is all the screaming about?

JANE: I'm sorry Mrs. Manchester. I was the one screaming. The lights went out and then I thought I saw Olga holding a large knife.

SUSAN: Jane dear. You must learn to not be so jumpy. This is an old house with old wiring and the lights do go out, from time to time, during a big storm

SFX: Thunder and Lightning.

SUSAN: like the one we're having tonight.

JANE: I understand.

SUSAN: As for Olga holding a knife, you were probably right. She has to get the chicken into the noodle soup somehow.

OLGA: Soup.

SUSAN: Thank you, Olga. Give the soup to Jane. (*She does and then exits back into the kitchen.*) Jane, you can take the soup up to Mr. Manchester and feed him.

JANE: Feed him?

SUSAN: Yes.

JANE: But everytime I try to feed him, he throws a fit and acts as if I'm torturing him in a prison camp. He yells out "you can hurt me all you want, but I'll never tell my secret". Either that, or he blabbers on about a wild Safari in the Serengeti and pretends I'm an elephant ready to charge at him.

SUSAN: I know my father-in-law can be a little...eccentric, but he is family so we want to make him as comfortable as possible. So be a dear, and feed him the soup. He must eat one hour prior to taking his nightly medications.

JANE: Yes ma'am.

SUSAN: Then once that hour has passed, make sure that you give him his medications.

JANE: But Mrs. Manchester, I have the evening off remember? I asked for it when I took the position as the nurse last week. So I can feed Mr. Manchester, but once I have finished I will need to go.

SUSAN: Oh dear. I guess you're right. Well, my husband and I will just have to give him the medications ourselves. So, what do we have to do?

JANE: Well, He needs two of the blue pills, three of the green, five yellow, one and a half orange, and one horse tranquilizer to help him sleep. And, whatever you do, don't mess up the number of pills. One wrong pill and it could be the end...if you know what I mean.

SUSAN: No. I'm not sure that I do.

JANE moves her thumb across her throat to motion that he would die.

SUSAN: Oh my! Well we certainly don't want that to happen, now do we? So it was two purple pills and three yellow or three blue and five green? What was it again?

JANE: Don't worry, I have it all written down for you. I will leave the instructions on his nightstand.

SUSAN: Very well. Now hurry along before his soup gets cold.

JANE: Yes ma'am.

SUSAN: Where is that maid, Francesca?

SUSAN crosses to the mantle and rings a bell.

FRANCESCA: *(Enters from study.)* You rang, Madame?

SUSAN: Dear Francesca, we need to make sure this house is ready for our guests to arrive.

FRANCESCA: Guests?! Don't you mean your children?

SUSAN: Yes. Our guests will be here within the hour, and I want to make sure their rooms are ready for their stay. Also, that the rest of the house is clean and tidy. This is the first time that we will all be together as a family since my little birds left the nest, and I want it to be perfect.

FRANCESCA: Birds, Madame? Since when did we have birds in this house?

SUSAN: We didn't really have birds, dear. It's a saying. The birds are my children and the nest is this house.

FRANCESCA: Oh.

SUSAN: But my children will be arriving very shortly, so please get back to readying the Manor.

FRANCESCA: Right away, Madame. *(She goes to exit.)*

SUSAN: But first, can you draw me a bath?

FRANCESCA: Oui, Madame. *(Pulls out a pen and paper.)*

SUSAN: Thank you, dear. I do so need a calming soak in the tub.

FRANCESCA: *(Handing paper to SUSAN.)* Here you go, Madame.

SUSAN: What is this?

FRANCESCA: A bath, Madame. *(Pointing at the paper.)* See, there is the tub filled with the water.

SUSAN: I can see what it is, but I didn't ask for a picture of a bathtub.

FRANCESCA: Oui, Madame. You asked me to draw you a bath.

SUSAN: I meant for you to go to my room and fill my bathtub with water.

FRANCESCA: Then why didn't you just say so?

SUSAN: Just go, Francesca.

FRANCESCA: Oui, Madame. *(Exits.)*

SUSAN: Where do we get this help from?

SFX: Thunder. SUSAN crosses to the french doors and looks out.

SUSAN: I do hope they all arrive safely. This weather can be murder.

SUSAN looks out at the audience as SFX: Lightning, is seen and begins to laugh evilly and then turns into a giggle.

SUSAN: Oh, this robe always tickles and makes me laugh.

DAVID: (*Offstage.*) Susan, is that you?

SUSAN: In here, darling.

DAVID: (*Enters from Den.*) I thought I heard you in here. Is father getting his soup and nightly medications?

SUSAN: Yes. Jane, the new nurse, is up there feeding him now.

DAVID: Good. And is the house ready for the arrival of our children?

SUSAN: Yes. Francesca is tidying up as we speak.

DAVID: I just want to make sure that things go well when they arrive.

We're all gathered here to celebrate father's 100th birthday, and we have some important things to discuss tonight. So, everything needs to go perfect.

SUSAN: And it will, my darling. Everything will be perfect tonight. You have nothing to worry about.

DAVID: I wish it didn't have to be like this, but something has to be done before it's too late. Soon father will be gone and all will be different around here.

SUSAN: Yes. I think this is for the best.

DAVID: Would you make sure the food is being prepared? They're all going to be disappointed with what we have to say, but bad news is always a little better on a full stomach.

SUSAN: I will make sure Olga is working on it. Now go back to the den and relax a little. Figure out how you are going to break the news to them. Don't worry. I have everything under control out here.

DAVID: Thank you, my sweet.

SUSAN: My pleasure, darling.

DAVID exits to den. SUSAN crosses to the kitchen and opens the door.

SUSAN: Olga, will you come out here please?

OLGA: (*Enters.*) Yes.

SUSAN: Olga, I do hope you have prepared a grand dinner for tonight.
I want our guests to eat like royalty upon their arrival.

OLGA: Guests?

SUSAN: Yes. My children.

OLGA: Oh yes, Ze children. Ve Vill have grand feast. Yum yum.

SUSAN: Very good. What will you be serving?

OLGA: Grand feast.

SUSAN: Yes, but what will we be eating?

OLGA: Grand Feast.

SUSAN: *(Physically acting out the following statement.)* What are you cooking for us to eat?

OLGA: *(Physically acts out the following statement.)* Graaaaaand Feeeeeeeast. Yuuum Yuuum. Now I cook. *(Exits.)*

SUSAN: That went well...I think.

FRANCESCA: *(Enters.)* Your bath is ready, Madame Manchester.

SUSAN: Thank you, Francesca dear. Now hurry and ready the house.
(Exits.)

FRANCESCA goes back to cleaning. All of a sudden SFX: Lightning is seen and the lights go out. RUSTY appears at the french doors and enters the room sneaking up behind FRANCESCA. All of a sudden the lights come back on.

FRANCESCA: *(Screams.)* OH! Monsieur Rusty, it's you.

RUSTY: Who did you think it was? The boogeyman? *(Grabs FRANCESCA.)* Boogey Boogey Boo.

FRANCESCA: Stop it. Stop. *(Looks around. No longer speaking with french accent.)* How many times have I told you. No lovey dovey while I'm on duty.

RUSTY: But Francesca...

FRANCESCA: No buts and the name is Franny, not Francesca.

RUSTY: But I like Francesca. The accent, the little french maid outfit.
Va va voom!

RUSTY tries to kiss FRANCESCA and she pushes him away.

FRANCESCA: Look Rusty, if the Manchesters ever found out that we were together, and that I wasn't French, we would both be fired for sure.

RUSTY: I can't wait much longer. We have been engaged for almost a year and I just want to be married.

FRANCESCA: But until we get the money, we can't leave these jobs.

RUSTY: There is just one thing standing in the way of us getting that money. The master of the house.

FRANCESCA: But we're much closer to taking care of that problem. They've brought in a new nurse, and she is just dimwitted enough, we can slip it right by her and give it to him.

RUSTY: Perfect.

FRANCESCA: Also, I think I found something interesting while I was cleaning the study earlier. But I can't tell you about it here. *(Looks around.)* Someone might be listening.

SFX: Thunder and Lightning.

SUSAN: *(Enters. This time wearing a fancy gown.)* Did I hear a scream again?

FRANCESCA: *(With french accent again.)* Sorry madame. That was me. Monsieur Rusty startled me.

SUSAN: What are you doing here, Rusty? You can't be doing much gardening at this time of night—

SFX: Thunder and Lightning.

SUSAN: or in this kind of weather.

RUSTY: Just stopped in for a warm cup of coffee, ma'am.

SUSAN: What have I told you about coming into the main room for your coffee? If you want to get something from the kitchen, you should enter through the back door. Look, you have tracked mud all over the floor.

RUSTY: Sorry, ma'am.

SUSAN: Francesca, be a dear and clean this up. Rusty, I assume you can see your way out?

RUSTY: Sure. Evening, ma'am. Goodnight, Francesca.

FRANCESCA: Goodnight.

SUSAN: I have never liked that boy, always covered in dirt.

FRANCESCA: Well, he is the gardener, Madame.

SUSAN: Then he should stay in the garden. Now hurry and clean this up. Our guests-

FRANCESCA: Your children...

SUSAN: -just rang and will be here very shortly. I can't wait for them to arrive. I'm sure that someone, here tonight, will die...

SFX: Thunder and Lightning.

FRANCESCA: *(Gasp.)* What did you say?

SUSAN: I said "someone is going to die..."

SFX: Thunder and Lightning.

FRANCESCA: What?!

SUSAN: Someone is going to die...!

SFX: Thunder and Lightning.

FRANCESCA: Madame Manchester!

SUSAN: I wish this thunderstorm would quiet down. I can't finish my sentence. I was trying to say that someone will die when they hear the surprise we have in store for them. Now, let's get back to what we were doing.

FRANCESCA: And what was that?

SUSAN: A scene change.

Blackout.

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

AT START: *The Car. There are 2 chairs (or car seats.) sitting downstage. NANCY can hold or pantomime a steering wheel. You could also place a fake looking car in front of the girls. SFX: Rain. (Underscoring the scene.)*

NANCY: (*Voiceover.*) Meanwhile, on their way to the Justin Timberlake [or current popular male singer] concert...

Lights up.

PRUDENCE: Nancy, are you sure you know where you're going?

NANCY: Of course I do. I've driven to Boston plenty of times.

PRUDENCE: But, I could of sworn we passed that same house a few times already.

SFX: Thunder and Lightning.

NANCY: How can you even tell? I can't see a thing through this rain.

PRUDENCE: I don't think this is the right way.

NANCY: Look Pru, I know we are heading in the right direction.

PRUDENCE: Well, if we are going in the right direction, then why does that sign say, "Welcome to Maine"?

NANCY pantomimes slamming on the brakes and pulling off to the side of the road.

NANCY: I think we are going the wrong way.

PRUDENCE: That's what I've been trying to say for the last hour.

NANCY: Well, maybe if we didn't have to get off the interstate so someone could use the bathroom, we would be there by now.

PRUDENCE: Don't blame me for this.

NANCY: Well...I'm not the one who drank a whole 2 liter bottle of soda.

PRUDENCE: And I'm not the one who decided it would be smart to take a short cut. (*Mimicking NANCY.*) "I know a shortcut, we will get there in no time. It doesn't matter if it is on the map or not."

NANCY: If you didn't take so long in the bathroom, we wouldn't have needed a shortcut.

PRUDENCE: We could have made it if you weren't so stubborn.

NANCY: Hand me the map, and I'll figure out where we are.

PRUDENCE: Oh, so now you want to use the map?

NANCY: (*Looking at map.*) How do you even read this thing?

PRUDENCE: (*Grabbing the steering wheel while NANCY looks at the map.*) I can't believe this is happening.

NANCY: Wait, I've got it!

PRUDENCE: You found where we are on the map?!

NANCY: No.

PRUDENCE: Then what have you got?

NANCY: An idea.

PRUDENCE: Not another short cut, I hope.

NANCY: Nope. *(Pulls out her cell phone.)* I'm just going to look up the directions on my phone's GPS.

PRUDENCE: Why didn't we do that hours ago?

NANCY: I didn't think about it then.

PRUDENCE: You would think a couple of top notch detectives would have figured that out before getting terribly lost.

NANCY: Got it. We are just a couple hours off course. We will still get to Boston in enough time to check into the hotel and get ready for the Justin Timberlake [or current popular male singer] concert.

PRUDENCE: Then let's go.

NANCY: *(Begins to drive again.)* Justin Timberlake [or current popular male singer], here we come.

PRUDENCE: I can't wait. Third row seats to the biggest concert of the year.

NANCY: We're going to be sitting so close, his sweat could drip right off his brow and fall onto us.

PRUDENCE: That's kind of gross.

NANCY: Yeah, if it were someone else's sweat, but we're talking about Justin Timberlake [or current popular male singer].

PRUDENCE: You're right. This is going to be great!

SFX: The car makes some noise and comes to a stop.

PRUDENCE: What was that? Why are you stopping?!

NANCY: Uh-oh.

PRUDENCE: Uh-oh? What do you mean by "Uh-oh"?

NANCY: We might have a little problem.

PRUDENCE: How "little" is a little problem?

NANCY: We're out of gas.

PRUDENCE: Well, where can we get some more?

SFX: Thunder and Lightning.

NANCY: We're in the middle of nowhere. It's several miles until the next gas station and with this weather, It will take us hours to get there.

PRUDENCE: Isn't there anyone you can call?

NANCY: Yeah. I can just call my dad and he can bring us some gas.
(Dials on her phone.) Hello, dad? Prudence and I are stranded on the side of the road with no gas...Dad?...Dad?! (Looks at phone.)
The battery died.

PRUDENCE: What? How much of that do you think he heard?

NANCY: It's hard to say.

PRUDENCE: Could this night get any worse?

SFX: Thunder and Lightning.

PRUDENCE: Don't answer that. So...What do we do now?

NANCY: Well, there is that house we passed about 15 minutes ago.
Maybe they have a phone we could borrow so I could call my dad again.

PRUDENCE: Are you serious?

NANCY: Sure, why not?

PRUDENCE: We are in the middle of nowhere, with no phone, our car is broken down, and we're thinking of going to an old house on a hill to ask for help...

SFX: Thunder and Lightning.

PRUDENCE: ... and it's storming outside.

NANCY: Yeah...So?

PRUDENCE: I just described the perfect setting for a murder mystery.

SFX: Dramatic sound.

NANCY: Well, hopefully we won't be the victims.

PRUDENCE: This is no time to joke, Nancy. I'm serious.

NANCY: I am too. I want to make it to that Justin Timberlake [or current popular male singer] concert and if that means going to a scary

house, to see if they have a phone, so I can call my dad. Then that's what I'm going to do. Now come on. *(Exits.)*

PRUDENCE: Nancy, don't go. I'm not willing to take that chance. I'm going to stay right here. *(Beat.)* She is going to get herself killed. I am much safer staying here...all alone... in the dark...on a road in the middle of nowhere... *(Sits and looks around.)* Nancy? Nancy?!

SFX: Thunder and Lightning.

PRUDENCE: Wait for me!

Blackout.

ACT ONE, SCENE 4

AT START: *Lights up on the Manor. Time has passed and we are back in the home of the Manchester family.*

NANCY: *(Voice over.)* The girls were taking a risk that would turn into the biggest mystery of their lives...

SFX: Doorbell rings, but nothing happens. SFX: Doorbell rings.

SUSAN: *(Offstage.)* Francesca. The door.

SFX: Doorbell rings.

SUSAN: Francesca. Someone is at the door. Can you please go and answer it?

SFX: Doorbell rings. Susan enters from the stairs.

SUSAN: Does no body work in this house? Francesca?! I guess I will just have to do it myself. *(Opens the door.)*

ELEANOR: Enter Stage Right *(or whichever direction she enters from. Enters strolling through the door and strikes a pose.)* Hello, Mother.

SUSAN: Eleanor, Darling

SUSAN and ELEANOR embrace.

SUSAN: How long has it been?

ELEANOR: If I'm correct, the last time we saw each other, I had just won an emmy award for my dramatic death on the famed soap opera, "General Days of our Bold and Beautiful, Young and Restless Lives", and I had just given birth to your first grandchild, Sally.

SUSAN: Well that couldn't have been that long ago. Could it?

SALLY: *(Enters.)* Grandma! *(Goes to hug SUSAN.)*

ELEANOR: It was 11 years ago.

SUSAN: Sally, my darling granddaughter. Let me have a good look at you. Why you have certainly grown since the last time I saw you. But, let me say that you're beautiful. Just like your mother.

SALLY: I can't believe you don't have any cell reception here. I can't even text my friends. How am I supposed to live like this for an entire weekend?!

ELEANOR: I'm sure you'll manage, dear.

FRANCESCA: *(Enters carrying something but when she notices the others she quickly hides it behind her back.)* Oh, pardon moi. I did not know anyone was in here.

SUSAN: Francesca, where have you been?

FRANCESCA: I was just tidying up the study, Madame Manchester.

SUSAN: Didn't you tidy the study earlier.

FRANCESCA: Oui Madame. But you can never be too tidy.

SUSAN: As you can see Francesca, my daughter, the famed actress Eleanor Manchester, has arrived with my granddaughter. I was forced to let them in because you never came and answered the doorbell after their constant ringing.

FRANCESCA: My apologies, madame Manchester. And to you, mademoiselle Manchester. I did not hear the bell ring. May I take your coats.

ELEANOR: Oh yes. *(Removes her fur coat.)* Be careful with this. It is made of the finest mink. You will need to make sure it has a chance to dry. This rain is no good for the delicate fur.

FRANCESCA: Oui Madame. *(To SALLY.)* May I take your coat?

SALLY: Your accent is odd.

SALLY hands her coat to FRANCESCA. FRANCESCA takes the coat to the closet and throws it in the closet.

ELEANOR: Sally. That is not a nice thing to say, even if she is...the help.

SALLY: Sorry, I was just commenting on...

ELEANOR: That's enough. I swear, you are becoming more insubordinate everyday.

SUSAN: *(To Francesca who is hanging the coats in the closet.)* I do have others arriving tonight, and I hope you will make yourself in a place where you can hear the doorbell ring.

FRANCESCA: Oui, madame.

SUSAN: Thank you.

SFX: A knock at the door.

SUSAN: Ah, there is someone now.

FRANCESCA: I will get it, Madame.

SUSAN: It is probably my son, the famous writer, or my darling baby daughter the...

KELLY enters struggling to carry all the luggage.

SUSAN: Who are you?

ELEANOR: Mother, this is our nanny, Kelly Green.

KELLY: Nice to meet you, Mrs. Manchester.

ELEANOR: Have the rooms been prepared, Mother?

SUSAN: Yes, they have.

ELEANOR: Perfect. Kelly, why don't you take the luggage up to our room. I'm sure Francesca can show you the way.

FRANCESCA: Oui. Right this way Mademoiselle.

KELLY: Sure thing.

FRANCESCA shows KELLY the way out as she struggles to carry all the luggage.

DAVID: *(Enters.)* Did I hear the doorbell?

SALLY: Grandpa!

DAVID: Hello there, Sally. How's my favorite little granddaughter doing?

SALLY: I'm great.

DAVID: Boy you've grown. How old are you now...7 or 8?

SALLY: I'm 11, Grandpa.

DAVID: 11?! Has it been that long?

ELEANOR: Far too long, Father.

ELEANOR crosses to DAVID to hug him.

DAVID: My darling Eleanor. You are looking as beautiful as ever.

ELEANOR: Thank you.

SALLY: *(Viewing the picture that hangs above the mantle.)* Who is the old guy in this picture?

DAVID: That is your Great Grandfather, Oliver J. Manchester, and the reason you're here tonight. We are celebrating his 100th birthday.

SALLY: 100? That is old.

DAVID: It sure is.

SALLY: And that is one ugly painting.

ELEANOR: Sally, darling!

SALLY: What? It's true...

ELEANOR: Why don't you go explore the house? There is a lot to see in this old manor.

SALLY: Ok. *(Exits.)*

ELEANOR: *(Sits on sofa.)* You still haven't taken that old, *ugly* painting down?

SUSAN: This is still your grandfather's house, and while he might not be able to care for it the same way, we have tried to leave it as he would have wanted.

ELEANOR: How is Grandfather?

DAVID: He isn't doing too well, I'm afraid to say. This might be the very last birthday we celebrate.

ELEANOR: I'm sad to hear that. I always loved grandfather. He's the reason I became an actress. His fun imagination and fantastical characters he would create, translated into my love for acting.

JANE: *(Enters.)* Mr. and Mrs. Manchester, your father has been fed and prepared for this evenings festivities. He is asleep...and I mean, dead asleep. All that's left to do is give him his nightly

medications. However, I have finished my duties, and it's time for me to leave.

DAVID: Leave?

JANE: Yes. As I told Mrs. Manchester earlier, I have requested this evening off and will return to my nursing duties tomorrow.

DAVID: Very well.

SUSAN: Yes. Thank you, Jane darling. You are free to go.

JANE: Thank you. *(Starts to leave, but stops.)* Are you Eleanor Manchester-Adams, the famed Hollywood actress?

ELEANOR: I am.

JANE: Oh my gosh! I loved you in "General Days of our Bold and Beautiful, Young and Restless Lives". Your Emmy winning death scene gave me chills.

ELEANOR: You saw that?

JANE: Well, the reruns. But it was still outstanding. What are you doing here?

SUSAN: Jane, this is our daughter. Eleanor, this is Jane Black, our newly-hired live in nurse.

ELEANOR: Nice to meet you, Jane.

JANE: No, the pleasure's all mine. Oh my gosh, I can't believe that I just met a famous actress. *(To SUSAN and DAVID.)* I knew your last name was Manchester, but I never thought it was any relation to the Eleanor Manchester-Adams. *(Stares at ELEANOR.)*

DAVID: Weren't you going, dear?

JANE: Huh?

DAVID: You said you had somewhere to be.

JANE: I did? Oh, right. Sorry. Bye. Nice to meet you, Mrs. Manchester-Adams.

ELEANOR: Please, call me Eleanor.

JANE: Okay. Eleanor. *(Exits.)*

DAVID: So, what is our famed Hollywood actress up to now?

ELEANOR: Well, I have done a few commercials, and my agent got me an audition for an upcoming film. But for now, I am trying my hand at the stage.

SUSAN: Really? I just love the theatre. What play is it for?

ELEANOR: It is for a new work called "Dogs!". It's just like the Broadway show CATS only with K-9s. I play the old washed up dog on her way to the pound in the sky.

DAVID: That sounds...wonderful. And how is your husband, Anthony?

ELEANOR: Gone.

SUSAN: Gone where? Traveling for business again?

ELEANOR: No. Just...gone.

SUSAN: What happened?

ELEANOR: We divorced last July.

SUSAN: Divorced?! We had no idea.

ELEANOR: I told you about it in the letter I sent with our Christmas card. Didn't you read it?

SUSAN: Well, I skimmed it...briefly.

DAVID: What was it that drove you two apart?

ELEANOR: He complained I was spending too much time in rehearsals, and I complained he was spending too much time with his girlfriends. So, we decided to end it.

SUSAN: Darling. I'm sorry to hear that.

ELEANOR: Really, it's for the best. I got to keep the house, the car, most of the money, and Sally.

DAVID: And him?

ELEANOR: He got to run off with Valenzuela, our house keeper.

SUSAN: Is that why you have the Nanny?

ELEANOR: I had to. I'm at an age now where the acting roles don't just fall in my lap anymore, and I am doing all I can to pay the bills. That's why I am glad grandfather's assets are being released to us now that he's celebrating his 100th birthday.

SUSAN and DAVID look at each other.

ELEANOR: I better go check on Sally and then I might lie down for a short rest. *(Starts to leave.)* Which room are we?

SUSAN: Fourth door on the right. And darling, dinner will be at 8pm sharp.

ELEANOR: We will be down. Exit Upstage left. [or the direction she exits.] *(Exits.)*

SUSAN: How terrible. I can't believe her husband has left her.

DAVID: I can't believe she is counting on Father's money. This news is going to devastate her.

SUSAN: I know, but there's nothing that we can do.

SFX: Doorbell rings.

FRANCESCA: *(Enters.)* I will get the door.

Opens the door to reveal WALTER and CAROLYN MANCHESTER.

FRANCESCA: Welcome, Monsieur and Madame.

SUSAN: Walter, Carolyn come in. It's great to see you.

WALTER: Hello Mother. *(They embrace.)* Hello Pops

WALTER shakes hands with DAVID.

DAVID: Hello there, son. Carolyn.

CAROLYN: Hello Mr. Manchester.

DAVID: Please, we're family, call me Dad.

CAROLYN: Okay, Dad. *(To SUSAN.)* Hello Mom.

SUSAN: Please...call me Mrs. Manchester.

CAROLYN: Sorry. Mrs. Manchester. Hello.

SUSAN: Hello, dear.

FRANCESCA: Can I take your coats? *(Throws the coats in the closet.)*

WALTER: Yes. Thank you.

DAVID: How was the drive down?

WALTER: The traffic wasn't too bad, but the storm is really picking up out there.

SFX: Thunder and Lightning.

CAROLYN: The radio was saying the storm is one of the biggest we've had in years.

LUCILLE: *(Enters talking on the phone.)* Look, our tour is all booked up. No pun intended. We've got TV interviews, book readings, signings, and photo sessions. We are starting up a 60 city trip, and I just don't know if we can fit you on our list of stops. *(Stops in front of the mantle and looks at the painting.)* That is one ugly painting of an old dude. *(Back into phone.)* Anyways, as I was saying what can you offer us to make our tour stop in your town? *(Exits to the study.)*

SUSAN: Who was that?

WALTER: That was my publicist. We're getting ready to go on tour to promote my newest book. I hate to mix family and business, but you know how it is. This new book tour is just too important, so Lucille offered to come along.

CAROLYN: Walter's book is projected to be on the bestsellers list within its first week of sales.

FRANCESCA: Pardon moi. But are you Walter Manchester?

WALTER: As a matter of fact, I am.

SUSAN: Francesca, this is our son. He's a famous author.

CAROLYN: Yes. He has written many fiction novels. His latest is about a wild safari in the serengeti.

FRANCESCA: How magnifique. A famous writer here in this house.

WALTER: Well, we are here to celebrate the 100th birthday of my grandfather. I owe him a lot for helping me with inspiration for my writings. It was his fantastical stories which influenced so many of my books.

FRANCESCA: Really?

WALTER: Yes. Grandfather would always tell us stories about the many adventures he went on. I always loved to sit and listen.

SFX: Thunder and Lightning.

FRANCESCA: I would love to read them sometime.

CAROLYN: Oh. *(Pulls a book out of her purse.)* Here is a copy of his first book. It is one of my favorites of Walters. I have read it close to 50 times.

FRANCESCA: Merci, Mademoiselle. I will read it and get it back to you as soon as I can.

CAROLYN: Nonsense, you can keep it.

FRANCESCA: Really? Merci, madame.

SUSAN: That will be all for now, Francesca.

FRANCESCA doesn't move.

SUSAN: Don't you have something to do?

FRANCESCA: Oui Madame. *(Exits to the study.)*

CAROLYN: The storm is getting very close.

DAVID: That reminds me, I must go out to the garden and get something before it's too late.

SUSAN: What are you getting, darling?

DAVID: Just...something I forgot. I'll be right back. *(Exits through the french doors.)*

SUSAN: That's mysterious.

CAROLYN: This is quite an impressive home, Mrs. Manchester.

SUSAN: Yes. It is quite exquisite. This is the home that David grew up in, and Father as well. It has been in the Manchester family for 4 generations.

CAROLYN: It is certainly well maintained for being such an old home.

SUSAN: We have definitely tried our best to keep up with the property, especially since Father went ill. You should see the upstairs. It is just as lovely.

CAROLYN: Where will Walter and I be staying?

SUSAN: You'll be staying just at the top of the stairs. First door on the left.

CAROLYN: Thank you. I think I'll go and freshen up before dinner. *(Exits.)*

WALTER: You certainly have done a lovely job with the manor, Mother. It's just as I remember as a kid. I used to love coming here to visit Grandfather and playing in the study.

SUSAN: You always were the writer. Even at a young age, we would catch you in the study reading books and writing stories. We should've known you would grow up to be a famous author.

SALLY: *(Enters.)* Uncle Walter, you're here.

WALTER: Hey there, sport. How's my favorite niece?

SALLY: Uncle Walt. I'm your only niece.

WALTER: And that's why you're my favorite.

SALLY: Got any new books?

WALTER: Sure do.

SALLY: Have you seen this place? It's huge.

LUCILLE: It's all settled. I just added 5 more stops to our book tour. I'm telling you this book is getting us lots of great press.

SALLY: Who's this?

WALTER: This is my publicist. Lucille Lavender.

SALLY: Hi, Lucille. I'm Sally Manchester-Adams. Walter is my uncle.

LUCILLE: Nice to meet you.

WALTER: And, Lucy. This is my mother, Susan Manchester.

SUSAN: Hello.

LUCILLE: Hi.

SFX: Phone rings.

LUCILLE: *(On her phone.)* Hello? *(To others in the room.)* Sorry, I need to take this. Is there somewhere I can go and talk?

SUSAN: There's a room upstairs. 3rd door on the left.

LUCILLE: Thank you. *(Exits.)*

SUSAN: Sally, I need to go check that the dining room is all ready for our dinner. How about you and I, stop by the kitchen for a little snack.

SALLY: Ok!

SUSAN: Just don't let your mother know I'm letting you snack before dinner.

SALLY: I won't.

SUSAN and SALLY exit.

FRANCESCA: *(Enters from Study.)* So, Monsieur Manchester. This is quite a fascinating book.

WALTER: Thank you...uh...

FRANCESCA: Francesca.

WALTER: Francesca, right. I'm glad that you enjoyed it.

FRANCESCA: The way that you write it's like you are whispering the words right into my ears.

WALTER: Maybe I can.

WALTER goes to put his arm around FRANCESCA and she ducks out of the way.

FRANCESCA: Your character is such a charming and rugged young man.

WALTER: Thank you. You know I find that a lot of my characters remind me of myself. Charming, rugged, and handsome.

WALTER pulls FRANCESCA in tight.

FRANCESCA: Oh my, Monsieur Manchester.

WALTER: You are quite a lovely girl, Francesca.

FRANCESCA: You think so?

WALTER: I certainly do.

WALTER spins FRANCESCA in and dips her. He is about to go in for a kiss when LUCILLE enters. At the sight of LUCILLE, WALTER drops FRANCESCA behind the sofa.

LUCILLE: Walter. You will not believe who I just got off the phone with. Let me just say, I may have started some talks for a possible movie deal about your latest book.

WALTER: Really. That's...great.

SFX: Phone rings.

LUCILLE: Oh, I really should take this.

LUCILLE exits. WALTER watches her go and then helps FRANCESCA up.

WALTER: Are you alright?

FRANCESCA: Oui, Monsieur. So, where were we?

WALTER: I was just about to...

WALTER spins FRANCESCA in, but as he does, SALLY enters with a cookie, so WALTER spins FRANCESCA out the opposite way and she runs into the wall.

SALLY: That scary cook lady makes the most delicious cookies.
(Exits up the stairs.)

WALTER: I'm really sorry. You must have just slipped out of my hands. Are you hurt?

FRANCESCA: No, I'm fine...really.

WALTER: Good. Now how about we continue from where we were?

WALTER starts moving towards FRANCESCA and she begins to back away.

FRANCESCA: But, monsieur every time we get close. I seem to get hurt.

WALTER: Merely a coincidence. Now what was that you were saying about me being rugged and charming?

FRANCESCA: Just that, I felt the characters in your book seem so very familiar.

WALTER backs FRANCESCA up against the closet door.

WALTER: How about we get familiar?

WALTER goes in for a kiss, but FRANCESCA blocks it by holding up a book and WALTER kisses the book.

WALTER: What is this?

FRANCESCA: A book. Look familiar?

WALTER: No.

FRANCESCA: Really? Why don't you read a little of it.

WALTER: *(Opens the book and begins to read a page.)* Where did you get this?

FRANCESCA: So you have seen it, Monsieur?

WALTER: I don't understand. I thought I had gotten rid of all the originals. Where did you find this?

FRANCESCA: It's amazing what you can find when you're cleaning the study, no?

WALTER: Are there others?

FRANCESCA: Maybe yes, maybe no.

WALTER: Where are they?

FRANCESCA: Let's just say they're in a safe place.

WALTER: Why you little

WALTER drops the book and puts his hands up as if he is going to strangle FRANCESCA. SFX: Thunder and Lightning.

CAROLYN: *(Offstage.)* Walter?!

WALTER grabs FRANCESCA and shoves her in the closet and then holds it shut. CAROLYN enters.

CAROLYN: There you are. This house is so confusing.

WALTER: What did you need, pudding pie?

WALTER realizes the book is on the ground so he moves to pick it up as FRANCESCA tries to exit the closet, but he pushes her back, throws the book in, and slams the door.

CAROLYN: What's going on?

WALTER: Nothing. Why would you think that there is something going on?

CAROLYN: You're acting pretty strange.

WALTER: It's just from the nostalgia of being back here again in the old manor.

CAROLYN: Well, I just came down because I remembered that I left my migraine pills in my coat pocket.

WALTER: You did? Are you sure? Your coat pocket which is in this closet?

CAROLYN: Yes.

WALTER: I'll get them.

WALTER opens the door and FRANCESCA hands him the pills, then he closes the door on her again.

WALTER: Here you go sweetie.

SFX: Thunder and Lightning. Flash and RUSTY appears at the french doors. CAROLYN screams.

WALTER: What are you screaming for?

CAROLYN points at the french doors. WALTER turns, sees RUSTY and he screams.

RUSTY: (*Enters.*) Sorry to scare you folks. I was just looking for Francesca. Have either of you seen her?

CAROLYN: Well we did...

WALTER: Nope. Haven't seen her anywhere. No maids by the name of Francesca. Who did you say you were looking for again?

FRANCESCA: (*Enters from closet.*) Here I am.

RUSTY: Francesca? What were you doing in the closet?

CAROLYN: (*Looks at WALTER, then at FRANCESCA, then back at WALTER.*) What was she doing in the closet?

WALTER: Um...honey, don't you need to take your pills? How about we go up to the room and you can take them there.

WALTER tries shoving CAROLYN up the stairs.

CAROLYN: Oh, but I need water.

WALTER: No you don't. They aren't that big. You can just swallow them. Now get up there, you.

WALTER shoves CAROLYN up the stairs and then comes back down.

WALTER: (*To FRANCESCA.*) I'll be back for you later. (*Exits.*)

RUSTY: What did he mean by that?

FRANCESCA: (*Drops french accent.*) Let's just say, I found a way for us to get that money faster than we thought. I've got a little something he wants and we can get him to pay a pretty hefty sum to get it.

RUSTY: Really?

FRANCESCA: So, did you do the deed?

RUSTY: Sure did. As soon as the nurse left, I snuck in and gave it to the old man. There was hardly any struggle.

FRANCESCA: Good. After tonight, we will be on our way out of these miserable jobs.

RUSTY: Look Franny. Do you think there's anyway we could get out of here now? When I went up to the old man's room, I felt like someone else was in there and they were watching me. I think we need to get out of here before they catch on.

FRANCESCA: We aren't leaving here until we can squeeze that young Manchester for some money. Stop acting so paranoid.

Everything is going according to plan. Those snobby Manchester's won't suspect a thing.

SFX: Doorbell rings.

RUSTY: Who's that?

FRANCESCA: Relax Rusty, the Manchesters are expecting guests. *(Answers the door, speaking again with a French accent.)* Bonjour Mademoiselle and welcome. May I take your coat?

JUNIPER: Yes. Thank you. Am I the first to arrive?

FRANCESCA: *(Taking her coat.)* No. Others have arrived too.

JUNIPER: Must be my brother and sister.

SUSAN: *(Enters from dining room.)* Juniper, Darling. I'm so happy to see that you've arrived. I was beginning to worry. I thought you'd be here hours ago.

JUNIPER: Oh, well I got tied up at the studio. We're getting ready for a big art showing and we needed to make sure everything was in line.

SUSAN: I'm just glad my baby is here and safe.

SUSAN hugs JUNIPER.

JUNIPER: Thanks mom.

SUSAN: Francesca, I'd like you to meet my baby girl, Juniper Manchester. June, this is Francesca, our maid. And you remember Rusty, our gardner.

FRANCESCA: Pleasure to meet you.

RUSTY: Hello again, miss Manchester.

SUSAN: *(Sees muddy footprints near the front door.)* Rusty! What have I told you about coming in the house this way. You have tracked mud all over the carpets again. See it's all over here.

RUSTY: I apologize, Mrs. Manchester. I didn't mean to track mud in here.

SUSAN: You got it all over here, as well *(Motions to an area near the front door.)*.

RUSTY: But Mrs. Mancester, those aren't my footprints.

SUSAN: They're not?

RUSTY: No. Those are too small to be my footprints.

FRANCESCA: Oui Madame, and Rusty did not walk over there.

SUSAN: Well, if Rusty didn't make these footprints, then who did?

FRANCESCA: I believe it was Mademoiselle Juniper.

JUNIPER: *(Looking down at her feet.)* I guess you're right. I didn't even notice I had mud on my shoes. Must of picked it up as I was walking up the driveway. *(Takes off her shoes.)* I'll just take these off and place them on the front porch until the mud dries. *(Opens the front door and places her shoes outside.)* I'll go out and clean them up later.

SUSAN: Francesca, will you please get something to clean the floor again. I just can't have my guests here with a muddy floor.

FRANCESCA: Right away, Madame Manchester.

SUSAN: Rusty, did you happen to see my husband outside?

RUSTY: Sorry. Haven't seen him all day. Why do you ask?

SUSAN: No particular reason. It's just that he had some business to take care of outside and I was wondering what it was.

RUSTY: Sorry but I can't help you with that one.

SUSAN: That's alright Rusty. Now, if there is nothing else, you may go.

RUSTY: Alright ma'am. *(Starts to leave.)* Come to think of it....there is something. When I was outside, I noticed the lattice that leads up to the window of your father-in-law's room was broken.

SUSAN: Really?

JUNIPER: Must have been the wind in this terrible storm we're having.

RUSTY: I thought that at first, but then I noticed all of the plants on the ground outside of his window were damaged, as well. It looked as though someone had fallen on them or stepped all over them.

SUSAN: That seems very odd.

RUSTY: To me it looked like someone tried to climb the lattice, but when it broke, they used the flowers to break their fall.

SFX: Thunder and Lightning.

JUNIPER: The storm is really bad out there. I'm sure it's that. I mean really, who would want to climb into my grandfather's window anyways?

RUSTY: I'm not sure, but I still don't think the storm...

SUSAN: You're right Juniper. It must be that wind. Now, Rusty if we are finished, I ask that you kindly see your way out.

RUSTY: Yes, ma'am.

SUSAN: Thank you, Rusty.

RUSTY starts to leave.

SUSAN: Oh, and Rusty?

RUSTY: *(Stops and turns around.)* Yes, ma'am?

SUSAN: Remember to use the employee entrance next time, the back entrance to the kitchen. That way you don't track mud on the floors.

RUSTY: Yes, ma'am. *(Motions like he wants to strangle her, and then exits.)*

SUSAN: So Juniper, how have you been?

FRANCESCA: *(Enters.)* Don't mind me, I am just cleaning this floor *(Begins cleaning.)*

JUNIPER: Things are going well. We are getting ready to have a big art showing next week at the studio and I have 3 paintings to show.

SUSAN: Really?...Is that good?

JUNIPER: Yes. Most of the other art students only have one. But, my professor says that I show good promise and so he let me show three.

SUSAN: And do people buy these paintings you show?

JUNIPER: They can.

SUSAN: How much does a painting usually go for?

JUNIPER: It really depends on the artist, the studio, and how much a person is willing to pay. Some of the paintings go for thousands of dollars. Sometimes even hundreds of thousands.

FRANCESCA: Hundreds of thousands?! That is a lot of money for some art.

JUNIPER: Well, that is usually for a more established artist.

FRANCESCA: What about this ugly painting here? How much would that be worth?

JUNIPER: Well, I don't think we would ever know because we would never sell that painting. It is grandfather's self-portrait. It needs to stay in the family. Right, Mother?

SUSAN: Well, lets say, if we were to sell it, how much do you think we could get? I mean, your grandfather was an established artist. He

had many art showings himself and I do know that he sold some of his other paintings.

JUNIPER: I can't believe you are considering selling grandfather's painting!

FRANCESCA: It would get it out of here.

SUSAN: I'm not considering it. It was just a question. I was just curious.

JUNIPER: Well, I don't think it would be worth much. The sentimental value definitely outweighs the financial value.

SUSAN: You're right, darling.

FRANCESCA: Besides, who would want to buy an ugly picture of an old guy anyways?

JUNIPER scowls at FRANCESCA.

FRANCESCA: I am finished cleaning. Are you expecting any others tonight, Madame Manchester?

SUSAN: No, I think that is all, Francesca.

FRANCESCA: Very well, madame. *(Sneaks into the study.)*

SUSAN: I'm sorry to have upset you, Juniper. Let's just brush that conversation under the rug and you keep telling me how things are going with you.

JUNIPER: Things are going great. I'm living my dream.

SUSAN: You mean living as a starving artist in New York City?

JUNIPER: Exactly.

DAVID: *(Enters from french doors.)* Whew! What a storm.

JUNIPER: Daddy?! *(Rushes to DAVID.)*

DAVID: June bug!

DAVID and JUNIPER hug.

DAVID: I'm so glad you made it safely, that storm is really getting bad out there. I would hate to be, oh I don't know, stranded in a car with no gas or cell phone reception in the middle of nowhere right about now.

SUSAN: What was it you were doing out there?

DAVID: Oh you know...this and that.

SUSAN: I asked Rusty if he saw you out there.

DAVID: You did? And what did he say?

SUSAN: He said that he hadn't seen you.

DAVID: Well, I am going to go freshen up before dinner. *(Exits.)*

JUNIPER: Why is he acting so strange? Is there something going on?

SUSAN: I'm sure it's nothing. I am just going to go check on him.
(Exits.)

JUNIPER looks around the room to see if anyone is around and then she goes up to the painting and looks at it closely. She reaches up and rubs her hand across the painting. She pulls out a notebook and begins to take notes. As she does, OLGA enters through the kitchen door. She moves towards JUNIPER, picks up a candlestick and goes to strike JUNIPER with it. The lightning strikes and JUNIPER turns, sees OLGA, and screams.

JUNIPER: My goodness. Olga, you scared me.

OLGA: Sorry. I just wanted to say zat dinner iz served.

JUNIPER: Thank you. But...What are you doing with that candlestick?

OLGA: Finding ze candle for ze dinner table.

JUNIPER: Of course.

OLGA: Vhat vere you doing with ze painting?

JUNIPER: Huh? Me? I was just admiring it. It's really a great piece of art.

OLGA: Itz really an ugly piece of art.

JUNIPER: Yes...well...I will go get the family for dinner.

OLGA: And I vill go get ze candle.

JUNIPER exits upstairs and OLGA exits to hallway. As they exit VALERIE and ANNIE enter.

(The next section of the play should move at a quick pace. As soon as one set of characters leave, the next set should enter.)*

VALERIE: So, Miss... *(Checks her clipboard to find the name.)*

ANNIE: It's Body. Annie Body.

VALERIE: Anybody, what?

ANNIE: No. Annie Body. That's my name.

VALERIE: Oh. (*Checks her clipboard.*) Right. So here we are, Miss Body. This is the main entrance to the manor. Like I said before the manor was constructed in the early 1800's and has been part of the Manchester family for all of that time.

ANNIE: It's quite beautiful. I really love the cobblestone driveway.

VALERIE: It's a very nice feature. One of the best features of the Manor is the grand library. It has over 2,000 books which will all be available to you with the purchase of the Manor.

ANNIE: I always love a good read. Could we see that now?

VALERIE: Of course. It is right through here.

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