

# MURDER'S in the HEIR

AN AUDIENCE INTERACTIVE  
MURDER MYSTERY-COMEDY



BY BILLY ST. JOHN



 **Pioneer**  
DRAMA SERVICE

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## An Audience Interactive Murder Mystery-Comedy

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An Audience Interactive Murder Mystery-Comedy

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## CAST OF CHARACTERS (In Order of Appearance)

	<i># of lines</i>
<u>THE FAMILY</u>	
SIMON STARKWEATHER .....	71
FIONA STARKWEATHER.....	74
JORDAN STARKWEATHER.....	109
PAULA THOMPSON .....	67
SIMON STARKWEATHER III...	n/a
<u>THE STAFF</u>	
BENSONHURST .....	55
MRS. TRENT .....	55
MINERVA WALKER.....	62
NANCY POLLARD.....	58
RUFUS JONES .....	63
<u>THE PROFESSIONALS</u>	
LOIS VAN ZANDT .....	60
MISS WITHERS .....	52
KATHY COLLINS .....	49
MIKE DAVIS .....	126
GENE (or JEAN) CULPEPPER ....	17
AN USHER .....	1
THE KILLER.....	13

## SETTING

Time: 1998.

Place: The Starkweather Mansion.

## SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

### ACT ONE

Scene One: A stormy November night.

Scene Two: About midnight.

### ACT TWO

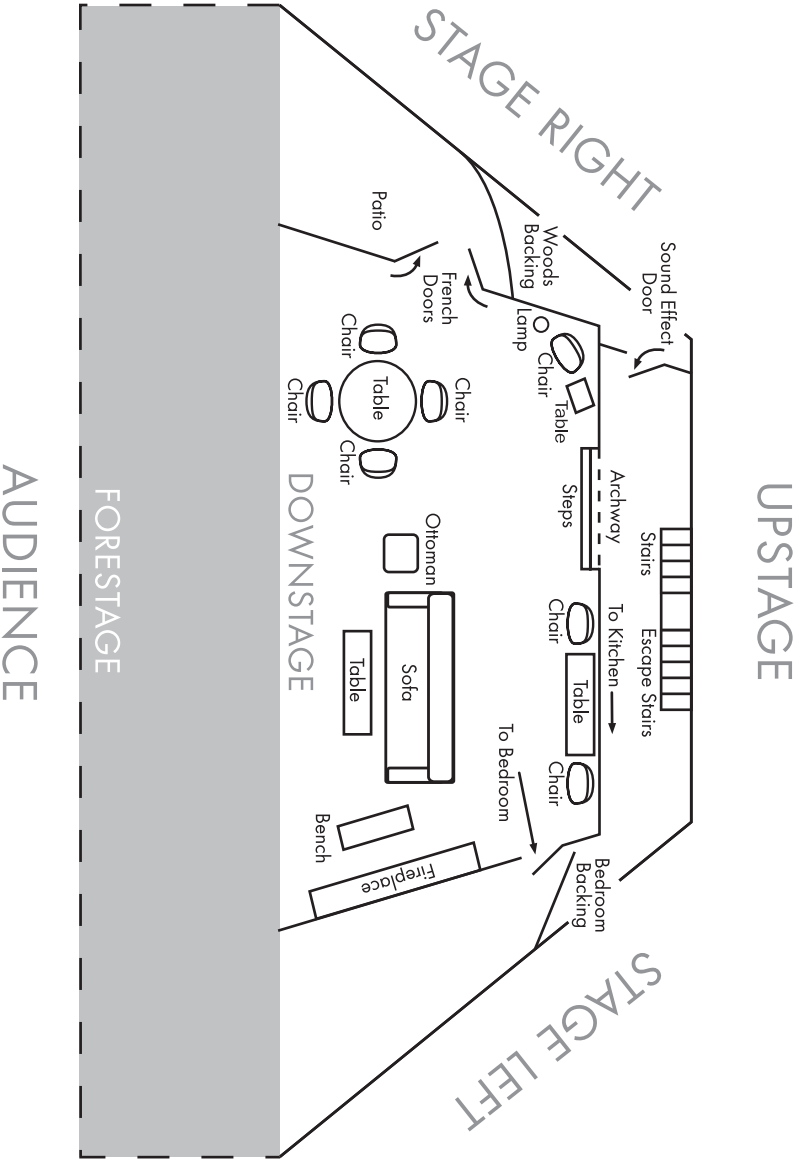
Scene One: The rest of the night.

## SET DESCRIPTION

The setting is the living room of the Starkweather Mansion which is nestled on an isolated country estate surrounded by woods. It is a large room with high ceilings and is dark and gloomy. A platform spans the UP RIGHT area; two steps from the main room lead up to it through an archway UP RIGHT in the UP STAGE wall. A light switch is on the wall STAGE LEFT of the archway. OFF UP RIGHT behind the wall is the front door which we'll hear open and close. The base of a staircase is visible beyond the archway; the steps lead OFF UP LEFT to the upstairs bedrooms. A space between the staircase and the UPSTAGE wall allows access to the kitchen area. A set of French doors that open out onto a patio is centered in the STAGE RIGHT wall; they are surrounded by a set of dark, heavy drapes, and sheer curtains are attached to the doors themselves. Woods are visible beyond them. A door opening out is in the UP LEFT corner of the STAGE LEFT wall; it leads to SIMON STARKWEATHER'S bedroom. A massive fireplace is DOWNSTAGE of the door, on the STAGE LEFT wall, with a rug in front of it and fireplace tools, including a poker, next to it. The furniture, possibly antique, is heavy and dark. A round table is STAGE RIGHT with four chairs around it. Another chair is in the UP RIGHT corner; a small end table is STAGE LEFT of it; a floor lamp is STAGE RIGHT of it. A wide sofa is STAGE LEFT, facing the audience; several throw pillows, one with fringe, are on it. A coffee table is DOWNSTAGE of it. A bench is DOWN LEFT of the sofa, before the fireplace. An ottoman is DOWN RIGHT of the sofa. A table is placed against the UP LEFT side of the UP STAGE wall; an old-fashioned lamp sits on it. A chair sits at each side of the table, perhaps mates to the ones at the round table. The walls are covered with paintings; all are in thick frames and all are old and dark renditions of still lifes or landscapes. The room is lighted by the floor lamp, the table lamp, an unseen ceiling light from above, the electric coals in the fireplace, lightning flashes, and, later, moonlight at the French doors. The LIGHTING is low, including a light in the foyer, which makes the room shadowy and menacing.

A sloppy, handmade sign on which is written in magic marker RESERVED FOR THE DIRECTOR is taped to a seat in the front row of the audience. A set of steps gives access to the stage.

SET DESIGN



# MURDER'S IN THE HEIR

## PROLOGUE

1 The CURTAIN is CLOSED. The play's director, GENE (or JEAN) CULPEPPER ENTERS. GENE'S entrance can be made through a door in the auditorium or through the main curtain. LIGHTS on the stage apron COME UP as the HOUSE LIGHTS DIM OUT.

5 **GENE:** (*Carries a copy of the script in a loose leaf notebook, notes and other scraps of paper stick out from it. He seems very frazzled. To the audience.*) Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. If I can have your attention, I need to make an announcement. I'm Gene Culpepper (*or the play director's real name*). I directed tonight's play. The...  
10 uh... the circumstances surrounding our production are... uh... a little unusual. I was very flattered when Billy St. John, who wrote "Murder's in the Heir"... as you probably noticed on your program, "heir" is spelled H-E-I-R—"Murder's in the Heir," get it? Yes, well, as I was saying, I was flattered when Mr. St. John contacted me  
15 and asked me to direct his play's premiere production. Actually, it was a work in progress, and he made changes and rewrites throughout the rehearsal period. While it was very exciting to be part of creating a brand-new work, to tell the truth, it put quite a strain on me, the playwright and the cast.

20 **THE ACTOR'S VOICE WHO PLAYS SIMON:** (*From behind the curtain.*) You got that right.

**GENE:** (*Calls out.*) Hush, [the actor's first name]! Actors should be unseen and unheard until the curtain opens! (*To the audience.*) Sorry 'bout that. The fact is, the cast and I are feeling a little  
25 nervous about the show, because... well... it's not quite finished. Oh, don't worry, we're going to go on. "The show must go on," as somebody once said. (*Mutters to himself.*) I don't know who said it, but I'd love to get my hands around his neck. (*Out loud.*) Anyway, as I was saying, the play isn't quite finished. You see, it's a murder  
30 mystery, and most of the characters have great motives to kill... well, you'll see who. The thing is, Mr. St. John couldn't make up his mind which character should be the killer. In fact, he wrote several different endings in which the various suspects were revealed to be  
35 the murderer. We performed them all for him, and he still couldn't decide. As it got closer and closer to opening night, the tension in the air, that's A-I-R, grew so thick you could cut it with a knife. It got so bad that Mr. St. John had what I feel sure will prove to be a temporary breakdown. The reason he's not here with us tonight is because he is presently under heavy sedation in a very nice place  
40 surrounded by soft walls with lots of padding. (*Mutters under his breath.*) Some people have all the luck. (*Out loud.*) The cast and

1 crew and I are here, though, and we are determined to provide an  
entertaining show for you, even if it kills us! (*Chuckles.*) That's just  
a figure of speech, of course! This brings me to the main point of  
my being up here: to announce that you're going to have to help  
5 us. If you'll look in your programs, you'll see we've inserted a loose  
slip of paper, a ballot of sorts. As you watch the first act, you'll  
discover which characters have a motive to murder someone, a  
person who will, indeed, be dead by the time the act ends. During  
intermission we need you to check on your ballot which character  
10 you think is most likely to be the killer. Give your ballot to one of  
the ushers before you take a break for intermission. We'll tally  
them quickly, and, for the second act, the cast will perform the  
scene Mr. St. John wrote that has the character the majority of you  
choose as the murderer. At least, we hope that's what will happen.  
15 It got very confusing during rehearsals.

**THE ACTOR'S VOICE WHO PLAYS MIKE:** (*From behind the curtain.*)  
It's a wonder we didn't kill the playwright!

**GENE:** Quiet! (*To the audience.*) Um... look... we might as well get  
started. I saved myself a seat there on the front row where I can  
20 follow in the script, and maybe help out if, uh, things get a little  
shaky... which they won't!... but just in case. (*Calls out.*) Are you  
ready, cast?

**THE ACTRESS'S VOICE WHO PLAYS TRENT:** (*From behind the curtain;  
not thrilled to be doing the show.*) As ready as we're gonna be.

25 **GENE:** Then, uh, let's do it! Places! (*He descends steps at the edge  
of the stage and goes into the audience where he sits on his chair.*)  
Lights! (*The LIGHTS on the apron FADE OUT. SOMBER MUSIC  
FADES IN, plays a few beats, then FADES OUT as the CURTAIN  
OPENS and the STAGE LIGHTS COME UP. GENE will unobtrusively  
30 follow in his script.*)

ACT ONE  
Scene One

AT RISE: The room is empty. A storm rages outside. We hear the  
RAIN POUNDING down and the WAILING OF THE WIND. LIGHTNING  
FLASHES, sending streaks of cold, white light through the sheers  
on the French doors, and is answered by CRASHES OF THUNDER. At  
35 times during the scene, the SOUND EFFECTS will grow softer and the  
LIGHTNING EFFECTS fainter, providing background atmosphere. After  
a couple of beats, NANCY POLLARD, the maid, ENTERS UP RIGHT at  
LEFT side of the archway from KITCHEN. NANCY is a quiet, shy girl.  
She wears a maid's outfit: black dress and white apron and maid's  
40 cap. She is carrying a silver tray with a silver coffee pot, six cups and  
saucers, spoons, napkins, creamer and sugar bowl. She steps down

1 into the room. A FLASH OF LIGHTNING and BOOM OF THUNDER startle  
her; she cries out and nearly drops the tray. She hurries with it to the  
table UP LEFT and sets it down. MISS WITHERS ENTERS through the  
door UP LEFT. She is a stern woman, a nurse, and wears a nurse's  
5 white uniform. Her hair is pulled back severely into a bun. Her entrance  
startles NANCY, who jumps and cries out.

**WITHERS:** Nancy, please! You know Mr. Starkweather is resting in his  
bedroom just through that doorway. *(She gestures UP LEFT.)* You  
mustn't startle him.

10 **NANCY:** I'm sorry, Miss Withers, but you startled me.

**WITHERS:** My apologies, but I dare say a slight scare will do you no  
harm. However, a sudden shock to a man in his nineties in Mr.  
Starkweather's medical condition could prove fatal. Remember  
that, girl.

15 **NANCY:** Yes, ma'am. I guess this terrible storm has made me a little  
edgy. *(As if on cue, there is a blinding FLASH OF LIGHTNING and a  
huge CRASH OF THUNDER.)*

**WITHERS:** *(Crosses to the table STAGE RIGHT.)* Yes, it is a tempestuous  
evening. I presume all of the guests have been shown to their  
20 rooms? *(She takes the chair LEFT of the table and carries it to  
STAGE RIGHT of the archway where she places it LEFT of the chair  
and end table there.)*

**NANCY:** Yes, Miss Withers. Well, all but Mr. Starkweather's grandson,  
Mr. Simon the third. It's a long drive from his college, and the  
25 storm... you know...

**WITHERS:** I hope we can start without him. It is already past Mr.  
Starkweather's bedtime, and he must have his sleep. *(She frowns,  
wipes the fingertips of one hand across the end table, and looks at  
them. She doesn't see MRS. TRENT ENTER at the STAGE LEFT side  
30 of the archway from UP LEFT. MRS. TRENT is the housekeeper, a  
dour woman. She wears a plain, dark dress.)*

**TRENT:** *(Sees WITHERS'S action.)* I assure you, Miss Withers, the room  
is spotlessly clean.

**WITHERS:** *(Turns to TRENT.)* I certainly hope so. Mr. Starkweather's  
35 asthmatic condition makes the merest mote of dust potentially lethal.  
*(There is another FLASH OF LIGHTNING and CRASH OF THUNDER.)*

**TRENT:** I served as Mr. Starkweather's housekeeper for many years  
before you came here, Miss Withers. I don't need you to tell me  
how to do my job. *(She turns to NANCY.)* You've brought the coffee?

40 **NANCY:** It's right here on the table, Mrs. Trent.

**TRENT:** Then go back to the kitchen and help Minerva with the rest of  
the refreshments.



1 **NANCY:** Yes, ma'am. *(She hurries up the steps, goes past the STAGE LEFT side of the archway, and EXITS UP LEFT.)*

**TRENT:** *(To WITHERS.)* Mr. Starkweather gave specific instructions that he wishes to have everyone present in the drawing room at eight o'clock sharp. I'll ask Bensonhurst to fetch the guests from their rooms.

5 **WITHERS:** Mr. Starkweather will be ready. *(TRENT gives her a cold look, then EXITS UP LEFT. We hear the TINKLING OF A HAND BELL OFF UP LEFT.)* I'm coming, Mr. Starkweather. *(She crosses to the door and EXITS UP LEFT. After a beat, BENSONHURST, the butler, ENTERS at the STAGE LEFT side of the archway from UP LEFT, and crosses to the foot of the staircase. He wears a tuxedo, and is very formal in looks and manner. Before he can ascend the stairs, he hears the SOUND OF THE FRONT DOOR OPEN OFF UP RIGHT, and an increase in volume of the STORM NOISES a beat before the DOOR CLOSES. He turns to face RUFUS JONES, who ENTERS at the STAGE RIGHT side of the archway from UP RIGHT. RUFUS is a handyman. At the moment he wears a yellow plastic raincoat, hat and rain boots; all gleam with a sheen of water. Under these are work clothes: a rumpled shirt and pants and scuffed boots. RUFUS is a suspicious character, surly, none too clean, and where his mental facilities are concerned, we will begin to suspect he might be one can shy of a six-pack.)*

**RUFUS:** I done got all the cars parked in the garages, like you told me.

25 **BENSONHURST:** "As" I told you... oh, why waste my breath. You're dripping water all over the foyer. Why did you enter through the front door, Rufus? I've told you a million times that servants never enter through the front door.

**RUFUS:** I reckon I forgot, Mr. Bensonhurst. 'Sides, it's raining out there.

30 **BENSONHURST:** I am aware of that. It now looks as if it has been raining in here as well, thanks to you.

**RUFUS:** You're welcome.

**BENSONHURST:** *(Through clenched teeth.)* Go back out the way you came and maneuver yourself around to the back door. Do you think you can manage that?

35 **RUFUS:** Well, I don't know, but I suppose I'm gonna to find out.

**BENSONHURST:** When the final guest, young Mr. Simon, arrives, I'll summon you so you can park his car for him.

40 **RUFUS:** Oh, good. While I'm waiting, I'll sit by the stove and see if'n I can grow gills.

**BENSONHURST:** Don't be impertinent!

**RUFUS:** How can I be if'n I don't know what it means?

1 **BENSONHURST:** Just do as you're told! Go to the kitchen and wait  
there until I call for you. (*RUFUS starts as if to go STAGE LEFT, but  
BENSONHURST puts a hand on his chest to stop him.*) Not that  
way! Have you forgotten already that I told you to go around to  
5 the back door?

**RUFUS:** Nope, but I was hoping you had.

**BENSONHURST:** (*Stares daggers at him as RUFUS EXITS UP RIGHT  
through archway and crosses backstage to outside the French doors.  
The DOOR and STORM SOUNDS are repeated. BENSONHURST  
10 shakes his head, turns and starts up the stairs. To himself.*) That  
man is an idiot! (*There is a FLASH OF LIGHTNING.*)

**RUFUS:** (*Silhouetted right outside the French doors, peering IN.*) I heard  
that! (*The LIGHTNING FLASH GOES OUT, followed by a CRASH OF  
THUNDER. RUFUS EXITS. BENSONHURST pauses without looking  
15 toward the voice, closes his eyes a beat to keep his composure,  
then ascends out of sight and EXITS UP LEFT.*)

**NANCY:** (*ENTERS at the STAGE LEFT side of the archway followed  
by MINERVA WALKER, the cook. She is temperamental and has  
an acerbic tongue. She wears a cook's uniform: white dress and  
20 long white apron with a bib. Each carries a tray of hors d'oeuvres.  
They step down into the room.*) Where do you want me to put this  
one, Minerva?

**MINERVA:** On the coffee table. Careful with it.

**NANCY:** Yes, ma'am. (*She crosses to the coffee table and sets her tray  
25 there as MINERVA crosses to the table STAGE RIGHT and places  
hers there.*) I think everything is ready.

**MINERVA:** (*Looks at the table UP LEFT.*) You think wrong. Place the  
cups on the saucers so all we'll have to do is pour the coffee.

**NANCY:** Yes, Minerva. (*She crosses to the table UP LEFT, sets the  
30 saucers on it, then puts a cup on each. As she does this, MINERVA  
rearranges a couple of the hors d'oeuvres on her tray, then crosses  
to the coffee table and does the same to the ones on the tray there.*)

**BENSONHURST:** (*ENTERS, descending the stairs from UP LEFT.*) The  
others are coming down. Ms. Van Zandt informed me that Mr.  
35 Starkweather wishes the staff to be present as well.

**MINERVA:** (*Surprised.*) He wants the servants here?

**BENSONHURST:** (*At the archway.*) Precisely. Even Rufus. Had I  
been informed of that fact sooner, I would have ordered him  
to take a bath. He has been out in the rain, parking cars, so  
40 perhaps that will help.

**MINERVA:** If you ask me, Noah's flood wouldn't help.

- 1 **BENSONHURST:** Be that as it may, I shall summon him and Mrs. Trent. *(He goes past the STAGE LEFT side of the archway and EXITS UP LEFT.)*
- NANCY:** Why would Mr. Starkweather want the servants to be here?
- 5 **MINERVA:** I'll pull out my crystal ball and let you know. *(She crosses to UP LEFT.)* Do you remember what I told you when you came to work here?
- NANCY:** Yes, ma'am. "Do as you're told and don't ask questions."
- MINERVA:** Exactly. Stick to that.
- 10 **NANCY:** I will, Minerva.
- FIONA:** *(ENTERS with her son, JORDAN STARKWEATHER, descending the stairs from UP LEFT. FIONA, SIMON'S niece by marriage to his late nephew Ezra, is a befuddled woman. She wears a nice dress. JORDAN, an attractive man, is a playboy. He wears slacks, a sport shirt, and jacket.)* Oh, dear, I never know what to wear on special occasions. I suppose Uncle Simon's inviting us here is a special occasion, isn't it, Jordan?
- 15 **JORDAN:** I suppose so, when you consider that most of the time he treats us like lepers.
- 20 **FIONA:** *(Confused.)* You think Simon treats us like jungle cats?
- JORDAN:** Not leopards, Mother, lepers... oh, forget it... and don't worry, Mother, you look fine.
- FIONA:** Thank you, son. *(They stop at the archway.)*
- JORDAN:** I'll tell you one thing, if we should ever inherit this mausoleum, the first thing we'll do is call up the Addams Family and let them know it's on the market.
- 25 **MINERVA:** Counting chickens, are we? *(FIONA and JORDAN jump, startled. They step down INTO the room.)*
- JORDAN:** Minerva, we didn't see you and your attractive young helper there. *(Flustered, NANCY rattles a cup and saucer she's arranging.)*
- 30 **MINERVA:** Nancy is a nice girl, and I mean for her to stay that way.
- JORDAN:** I'm sure I don't know what you mean.
- MINERVA:** I doubt that.
- FIONA:** I don't understand...
- 35 **MINERVA:** I believe that. Miss Fiona, why don't you have a seat and I'll bring you a cup of coffee.
- FIONA:** Coffee? That sounds nice. It's a little damp in here.
- MINERVA:** That's because it's a lot damp out there. *(LIGHTNING AND THUNDER.)* How do you take your coffee?

- 1 **JORDAN:** *(Takes FIONA'S arm and leads her to the sofa where she sits on the STAGE RIGHT end.)* Mother prefers hers black. I like mine sweet. I'll flavor it myself. *(He crosses to the table UP LEFT.)*
- MINERVA:** *Whatever. (She pours a cup of coffee.)*
- 5 **FIONA:** *Oh, what lovely hors d'oeuvres. (She takes one and eats it. MINERVA crosses to her with the coffee and a napkin which she puts on the coffee table. NANCY pours JORDAN a cup of coffee, which he sweetens.)* These are delicious! *(She drinks her coffee and nibbles hors d'oeuvres.)*
- 10 **MINERVA:** Glad you like 'em.
- JORDAN:** You're looking very pretty tonight, Nancy.
- NANCY:** *(Shy.)* Thank you, sir.
- JORDAN:** Sir? That makes me feel as old as Great-uncle Simon. Call me Jordan.
- 15 **MINERVA:** *(Crosses to them UP LEFT.)* She'll call you Mr. Starkweather, the way a proper maid should. If anyone calls you another name, it'll be me, and you don't want to know which one I'm thinking.
- JORDAN:** *(Laughs.)* Minerva, you never change.
- MINERVA:** Neither do you... more's the pity. Now take a seat next
- 20 to your mother.
- JORDAN:** Yes, drill sergeant. *(He takes his coffee and a napkin, crosses to the sofa and sits at the center.)*
- PAULA:** *(ENTERS with KATHY COLLINS, descending the stairs from UP LEFT. Both are pretty young women. PAULA is SIMON'S great-niece, the granddaughter of his late brother Paul. She is from the South, obvious by her accent. KATHY is SIMON'S personal secretary. She is bright and self-assured. PAULA wears a very feminine dress, maybe a soft floral print. KATHY wears a skirt and blouse. She carries a steno pad and pen.)* My goodness, Kathy, I don't see how y'all can
- 25 stand living out here in the boonies, away from fine restaurants and movies and shopping centers. Why, I'd get so depressed I'd just sit down and weep!
- 30 **KATHY:** It's not that bad, Paula. I stay here during the week and go to my apartment in town most weekends.
- 35 **PAULA:** I am so relieved to hear that!
- KATHY:** I worked for a large corporation before Mr. Starkweather hired me to be his personal secretary, and, believe me, this position is much nicer. *(They are at the archway.)*
- JORDAN:** *(Rises.)* Look what we have here—two rays of sunshine to dispel the gloom. You look beautiful, ladies. *(NANCY gives him a furtive look which no one notices.)*
- 40

1 **PAULA:** (*Giggles.*) I swear, Cousin Jordan, you are a rogue and a charmer.  
**JORDAN:** I do my best. Won't you join us?  
**MINERVA:** (*To PAULA and KATHY.*) Have a seat over there. (*She indicates the table STAGE RIGHT; mutters under her breath.*) You'll  
5 be safer. (*Out loud.*) We'll bring you some coffee. (*NANCY pours two cups of coffee. JORDAN sits.*)  
**KATHY:** Thank you, Minerva. I take mine black.  
**PAULA:** Load mine down with lots of cream and sugar, sugar. I must admit I have an enormous sweet tooth.  
10 **MINERVA:** (*Under her breath.*) Maybe that's what causes that corn syrup accent. (*She and NANCY prepare the coffee as PAULA sits RIGHT of the table and KATHY sits DOWNSTAGE of it.*)  
**PAULA:** And how are you this evening, Cousin Fiona?  
**FIONA:** What? Oh, I'm very well, thank you, Paula.  
15 **PAULA:** That's just peachy. I swear, I don't know why we don't see more of one another. It seems like the only time we get together is for somebody's funeral.  
**JORDAN:** Well, aren't all funerals for some "body"?  
**PAULA:** (*Giggles.*) Shame on you! Don't be morbid, Cousin Jordan.  
20 (*NANCY crosses to serve PAULA and KATHY'S coffee.*) I'm glad this weekend's an exception to the rule. For once, no one is dead!  
**JORDAN:** So far, anyway. (*LIGHTNING AND THUNDER.*)  
**NANCY:** (*Clatters the cup and saucer she is setting before PAULA.*) Oh...  
**PAULA:** That's okay, honey. You didn't spill any. (*NANCY returns to UP LEFT.*)  
25 **KATHY:** What did you mean by that remark, Jordan?  
**JORDAN:** Oh, nothing... it's just that when you called to tell us that Great-uncle Simon wanted Mother and me to come to Starkweather Mansion for the weekend, at first I assumed you were going to say  
30 that he had... passed on.  
**MINERVA:** (*Under her breath.*) You wish.  
**FIONA:** I started to pack my new black dress.  
**JORDAN:** It was a natural assumption. I mean, he is up in years and in bad health. I was relieved to find out the old boy is still with  
35 us, of course.  
**MINERVA:** (*Under her breath.*) Ha!  
**PAULA:** Kathy, darlin', I bet you know why Great-uncle Simon desired our presence this frightful evening. Come on—tell!  
**KATHY:** Ms. Van Zandt will go into the particulars, but I believe Mr.  
40 Starkweather wishes to discuss his will. (*LIGHTNING AND THUNDER.*)

1 **JORDAN:** (*Eager; leans forward.*) Really?  
**MINERVA:** I'd appreciate it if you didn't drool on the hors d'oeuvres.  
**JORDAN:** You misjudge me, Minerva. I was... surprised, that's all.  
**MINERVA:** (*Dubious.*) Uh-huh.

5 **PAULA:** Where's Cousin Simon? Shouldn't he be here too?  
**KATHY:** When I contacted him last week, he said he could make it.  
Apparently, he's going to be late. If he's tried to call here tonight,  
he couldn't get through; the phone lines are down.

**PAULA:** Well, if we're going to talk about the will, he should be here.  
10 After all, he is Great-uncle Simon's only grandchild.

**JORDAN:** (*Mutters under his breath.*) Yeah, and he'll probably get everything.

**GENE:** (*Rises from audience, holding his notebook.*) Excuse me a  
minute... uh... (*The CAST looks at him, surprised. GENE goes up  
the steps and ONTO THE STAGE.*) I hate to interrupt. (*To the CAST.*)  
15 You're doing great, guys, you really are. (*To the audience.*) Uh...  
folks... I suggested to Mr. St. John that these family relationships  
might be a bit confusing. (*Some of the OFFSTAGE actors ENTER  
hesitantly and watch the following. WITHERS ENTERS STAGE LEFT  
and stands at the doorway; BENSONHURST, TRENT and RUFUS  
20 ENTER at the STAGE LEFT side of the archway and stand in the  
opening. LOIS and MIKE ENTER down the stairs and lean over the  
stair rail.*) He agreed and was going to write a scene that explained  
everything; he was working on it when he... uh... snapped like a  
rubber band. So I'll just tell you. I think the family tree might be  
25 in your program, too. Here's the way it works. (*He consults his  
papers.*) Simon Starkweather, the old billionaire whom you'll meet  
shortly, married late in life and produced one son, Simon Junior.  
Simon Junior, in turn, married and produced one heir, Simon  
the third, the college student who's late for the gathering. The  
30 original Mrs. Starkweather, Simon the second and his wife are  
now deceased. (*He moves around to the characters as he talks  
about them.*) Old Simon's eldest brother, Paul, had a daughter,  
Bella, who married Lucian Thompson, an Atlanta businessman,  
and they produced a daughter, Paula here. Paul, his wife, Bella  
35 and Lucian are now deceased. Old Simon's younger brother, John,  
married and produced Ezra, who married Fiona, here, and they had  
Jordan. This is Jordan... but you know that already. Anyway, John,  
his wife, and Ezra are now deceased. I realize that's a lot of dead  
people, but if they had been included in the play, too, the stage  
40 would look like a marching band had wandered into the living room.  
Believe me, it was hard enough moving everyone about the stage  
as it was. At any rate, Old Simon is Fiona's uncle by marriage, and  
is Jordan and Paula's great-uncle. That makes Jordan, Paula and

1 young Simon cousins... second or third cousins, I guess—  
don't really understand how that works. I hope that clears  
things up for you. (*He starts down the steps.*) Sorry for the  
interruption. (*To the CAST.*) Carry on! (*He sits. The CAST looks*  
5 *at one another, bewildered.*)

**THE ACTOR WHO PLAYS JORDAN:** (*After a beat; to GENE.*) We don't  
have the foggiest notion where we are.

**THE ACTRESS WHO PLAYS PAULA:** (*Mutters; without the Southern*  
*accent.*) I'm not even sure who I am anymore.

10 **GENE:** (*Frantically searching the script.*) Sorry, sorry... oh, yes, resume  
with [first name of ACTOR PLAYING MIKE]'s and [first name of  
ACTRESS PLAYING LOIS]'s entrance. (*The CAST gives one another*  
*a "can you believe this?" look, then MIKE and LOIS EXIT upstairs,*  
*while BENSONHURST, TRENT, RUFUS and WITHERS EXIT STAGE*  
15 *LEFT side of the archway.*)

**GENE:** (*Loud stage whisper.*) [First name of ACTOR PLAYING JORDAN]!

**THE ACTOR PLAYING JORDAN:** Huh?

**GENE:** (*Stage whisper.*) Give them their entrance cue.

**THE ACTOR PLAYING JORDAN:** What is it?

20 **GENE:** "He'll probably get everything."

**THE ACTOR PLAYING JORDAN:** Who will?

**GENE:** Your cousin Simon.

**THE ACTOR PLAYING JORDAN:** Okay, I got it. (*Back into character.*)  
Yeah... and he'll probably get everything.

25 **LOIS:** (*ENTERS with MIKE, descending the stairs. MIKE is a private*  
*detective, smart and tough. He wears a suit and tie. LOIS is a*  
*lawyer. Her demeanor is businesslike, and she carries a briefcase.*  
*She wears a suit—jacket, skirt, blouse.*) I'm very pleased with your  
investigation. I'll be glad to recommend you to my other clients.

30 **MIKE:** Just doing my job, Ms. Van Zandt. (*The OTHERS are puzzled by this.*)

**LOIS:** Good evening, everyone. (*She crosses to the chair UPSTAGE of*  
*the table STAGE RIGHT, puts her briefcase on the table, opens it and*  
*takes out some papers.*)

**MIKE:** (*Crosses to CENTER STAGE.*) I know we haven't met yet, but I've  
35 got a pretty good idea who you all are. (*He goes out of character to*  
*give GENE a wry look, then goes back into character. To FIONA and*  
*JORDAN.*) Mrs. Starkweather and her son, Jordan, right?

**JORDAN:** (*Rises.*) That's right, Mr...?

**MIKE:** (*Extends his hand.*) Davis. Call me Mike. (*They shake hands.*)

40 **JORDAN:** From what Ms. Van Zandt just said, I assume you must be  
some sort of investigator?

1 **MIKE:** You got it, pal, the private kind.  
**JORDAN:** I see. *(He sits.)*  
**FIONA:** Who is this nice young man, dear?  
**JORDAN:** He's a detective, Mother.

5 **FIONA:** A detective? How exciting! *(To MIKE.)* Do you know Jessica Fletcher?  
**MIKE:** No, ma'am. She's way outta my league. *(He turns STAGE RIGHT.)* I do know who you two ladies must be, though.  
**PAULA:** If you're a private investigator, I'd be surprised if you didn't.  
**MIKE:** That accent settles it. You're Paula Thompson.

10 **PAULA:** You're one hundred percent correct. I can't deny I'm from the deep South.  
**MINERVA:** *(Mutters.)* If you came from any deeper south, you'd live in Central America.  
**MIKE:** So that leaves you to be Kathy Collins. It's nice to finally meet

15 you in person.  
**KATHY:** Me too, Mike. *(To the OTHERS.)* Mike and I have corresponded for some time by mail and fax, on Mr. Starkweather's behalf.  
**MIKE:** *(Gestures at the ottoman.)* Is this seat taken? No? I'll park it here. *(He sits on the ottoman. TRENT, RUFUS and BENSONHURST ENTER at the STAGE LEFT side of the archway from UP LEFT.)*

20 **BENSONHURST:** *(To RUFUS, who has shed his rainwear.)* ... and I expect you to remain unobtrusive.  
**RUFUS:** I sure will, as soon as I find a dictionary and look it up.  
**BENSONHURST:** Just sit over there by the fire and keep quiet.

25 **RUFUS:** By the fire? Glad to. My backside is still kinda soggy. *(He crosses to the bench STAGE LEFT and sits, facing in.)*  
**BENSONHURST:** *(Quietly, to TRENT.)* Keep an eye on him.  
**TRENT:** I shall do my best. *(She crosses above the sofa and sits on the LEFT end.)*

30 **BENSONHURST:** *(Crosses down into the room.)* If all is in readiness, Ms. Van Zandt, I shall inform Mr. Starkweather.  
**LOIS:** Yes, thank you, Bensonhurst. *(He nods, crosses to the door UP LEFT and EXITS.)*  
**MINERVA:** There's coffee if anybody else wants some.

35 **MIKE:** I could use some, Minerva.  
**MINERVA:** How do you take it?  
**RUFUS:** In a cup! *(He gives a wheezing laugh at his own joke, rocking back and forth on the bench.)*  
**MIKE:** Black, please. *(MINERVA pours a cup which NANCY brings to*

40 *MIKE; she then returns to UP LEFT.)*



1 **TRENT:** *(A harsh whisper to RUFUS.)* Keep still! *(RUFUS abruptly stops rocking and freezes in place.)*

**PAULA:** Ms. Van Zandt, I understand Great-uncle Simon has asked us here to talk to us about his will.

5 **LOIS:** That is correct. Frankly, I did not think it was a good idea. Mr. Starkweather's health is precarious at best, and he doesn't need the excitement. I advised him to communicate with you by mail, but he insisted on summoning you to Starkweather Mansion. I only hope he doesn't live to regret that decision.  
10 *(LIGHTNING AND THUNDER.)*

**BENSONHURST:** *(ENTERS UP LEFT.)* Miss Withers is bringing Mr. Starkweather in to join us. *(He crosses to the chair UP RIGHT that is RIGHT of the end table and sits. LOIS sits UPSTAGE of the table STAGE RIGHT. KATHY opens her pad and will take notes after*  
15 *SIMON enters.)*

**RUFUS:** *(A whisper to TRENT.)* Can I move now? *(TRENT waves a hand at him, dismissively. He relaxes from his freeze. WITHERS ENTERS UP LEFT, pushing SIMON STARKWEATHER in a wheelchair. SIMON looks every day of his ninety years. If he has any hair, it is snow*  
20 *white. There are liver spots on his skull and hands, and blue veins stand out on his hands as well. He wears pajamas and a bathrobe two sizes too large so that he looks shrunken inside his clothes. He is like an ancient lion, once powerful, but weakened by time. Though his voice is wheezy, he is still able to project a strong will and tyrannical nature. There is a rod attached to his chair from*  
25 *which hangs an IV drip bag; a tube runs from it to where the end with the needle, presumably, is taped to the top of one hand. There is a bag on the back of the chair; inside it are an oversized blood pressure cuff and a stethoscope. An oxygen tank is also attached to*  
30 *the chair from which runs a tube to an oxygen mask. Other medical items might be attached to the chair, as well. WITHERS pushes him LEFT of the table STAGE RIGHT, facing DOWN STAGE. Once they are there, there is a very bright FLASH OF LIGHTNING and CRASH OF THUNDER, as if nature is providing him a dramatic entrance.)*

35 **WITHERS:** Here you are, Mr. Starkweather.

**SIMON:** Go... go...

**WITHERS:** *(Crosses to the chair she moved earlier to STAGE RIGHT of the archway.)* I'll be right here if you need me. *(She sits.)*

**SIMON:** *(Looks around.)* To think I was once surrounded by presidents  
40 and kings. Can my world have shrunk to this? A handful of relatives and a meager staff of hired help? Simon... where's my grandson?

**KATHY:** We presume he's on his way, Mr. Starkweather.

**SIMON:** Can't wait for him... not enough time anymore.

1 **JORDAN:** Good evening, Great-uncle Simon. You're looking well.  
**SIMON:** Are you blind, boy, or just a habitual liar?  
**JORDAN:** I was only making pleasantries, Uncle.  
**SIMON:** Save your breath. You've always been a smooth talker, Jordan,  
5 but that doesn't cut any ice with me. You're nothing but a greedy opportunist, boy. I ought to know, I was one myself at your age.  
**JORDAN:** Then I guess it runs in the family.  
**SIMON:** You have a point. Well, Fiona, you look the same.  
**FIONA:** I do? Why, thank you, Uncle Simon.  
10 **SIMON:** It wasn't necessarily meant as a compliment. (*FIONA looks confused.*)  
**PAULA:** (*Giggles.*) Great-uncle Simon, you're awful!  
**SIMON:** At my age—and with my money—I can afford to say exactly what I think... and I do. And how is my little Georgia peach?  
15 **PAULA:** Little ol' me? I'm just... peachy, Uncle.  
**MINERVA:** (*Under her breath to NANCY.*) I may barf. (*Out loud.*) Would you care for some coffee, Mr. Starkweather?  
**WITHERS:** (*Rises.*) He mustn't have any. The caffeine would keep him awake, and it could affect his blood pressure. Sometimes his  
20 medications cause it to run a little high.  
**SIMON:** Apparently, I won't be having any, Minerva. You heard my keeper.  
**MINERVA:** Yes, sir. (*WITHERS sits. MINERVA gestures to NANCY. They sit on either side of the table UP LEFT.*)  
**SIMON:** Everyone aspires to live to a ripe old age, and for what? To  
25 be kept alive by medicines and machines? To be prevented from enjoying so much of life's little pleasures, like a cup of coffee?  
**WITHERS:** You mustn't excite yourself, Mr. Starkweather.  
**SIMON:** You see? I'm not even allowed to feel any strong emotions.  
**RUFUS:** That's a bummer.  
30 **SIMON:** Ah! You put it very succinctly, Rufus. Old age is "a bummer."  
I could have searched my vocabulary extensively and never come up with such an apt description. "Bummer!"  
**RUFUS:** Glad you like it.  
**SIMON:** According to my doctors, I won't have to remain a prisoner in  
35 this weak old body much longer. There's only one thing I hate to leave behind—my money.  
**JORDAN:** You know what they say, Uncle. "You can't take it with you."  
**SIMON:** Yes, that's what they say, so several years ago I had Lois here draw up my will. I suppose you'd like to know how I provided  
40 for you, my heirs.

- 1 **PAULA:** I, for one, admit I'm just a teensy bit curious.
- SIMON:** A teensy bit, eh. *(He starts to laugh, which turns into a wheeze then gasps for air.)*
- WITHERS:** *(Rises, rushes to SIMON, puts the oxygen mask over his*  
5 *mouth and turns on the nozzle to the tank.)* I was afraid something like this would happen. Here, Mr. Starkweather... breathe deeply. *(To PAULA.)* See what you've done?
- PAULA:** Me? I didn't...
- MIKE:** Should somebody call an ambulance?
- 10 **KATHY:** We can't, the phones are dead.
- WITHERS:** *(Still holding the mask over SIMON'S mouth.)* It's all right. He lost his breath. He just needs to breathe pure oxygen for a few moments.
- SIMON:** *(Pushes her hand with the mask away. To LOIS.)* Tell them...  
15 *(WITHERS puts the mask back over his mouth.)*
- LOIS:** *(Rises, taking a will from among the papers she took from her briefcase. It is several pages thick and has a blue backing sheet.)* Very well. *(To EVERYONE.)* This is the will Mr. Starkweather was referring to. As you know, he has been a phenomenally successful  
20 businessman for many years.
- JORDAN:** I'll say! He's been on the cover of Forbes magazine at least a dozen times.
- RUFUS:** I never read it.
- LOIS:** He has the distinction of becoming one of the world's first billionaires.
- 25 **FIONA:** Twenty years ago I begged dear Ezra to ask his Uncle Simon to advise him on his business investments, but he was too proud.
- JORDAN:** Yeah, Dad had his pride—lots of pride and very little money.
- LOIS:** If I may continue? Mr. Starkweather's fortune is now worth in the neighborhood of fifty billion dollars. *(The OTHERS react, hardly able*  
30 *to conceive of such a fortune.)*
- RUFUS:** If I'd knowed that, I'd-a asked for a raise.
- LOIS:** I won't go into the details of the will, but it essentially bequeaths a million dollars each to his household staff: Mr. Bensonhurst, his butler; Mrs. Trent, his housekeeper; Minerva Walker, his cook;  
35 Miss Withers, his nurse; Nancy Pollard, his maid; and Rufus Jones, his handyman.
- RUFUS:** Forget the raise.
- NANCY:** *(Rises; shocked.)* Oh, Mr. Starkweather, I had no idea... *(She sinks back down onto her chair.)*
- 40 **LOIS:** The will goes on to state that the rest of the money is to be divided equally among his surviving relatives. They are his grandson,

1 Simon the third; his niece Fiona Starkweather and her son Jordan, who share one-third; and his great-niece, Paula Thompson.

**FIONA:** Isn't that nice?

**JORDAN:** I always knew you'd do right by us, Uncle.

5 **PAULA:** I know you got mad when Mama married a Southern boy, Great-uncle Simon, but you two must have agreed on one thing: "Blood is thicker than water."

**RUFUS:** I bet Miz Withers could tell ya if'n it is.

10 **LOIS:** Now that I've informed you of the will's contents, I have another announcement to make. As of tomorrow this will becomes invalid. *(There is a shocked outburst from the heirs, gasps and exclamations of surprise... all except RUFUS.)*

**RUFUS:** *(After a beat.)* What does "invalid" mean?

**TRENT:** It means "no good."

15 **RUFUS:** I got a brother that's "invalid."

**JORDAN:** Ms. Van Zandt means we're not going to get the money, you fool!

**RUFUS:** Oh. Guess I won't be buying that big screen T.V. I wuz thinking 'bout after all.

20 **SIMON:** *(Has regained his breath. He pushes away WITHERS'S hand with the mask.)* Sit... sit... you, too, Lois. *(LOIS sits. WITHERS turns off the nozzle, replaces the mask, and returns to her seat.)*

**PAULA:** Why did you decide to disinherit us, Uncle?

25 **SIMON:** Found a better use for my money, that's why. Oh, I didn't cut you out entirely. All of you in the old will will get fifty thousand dollars each.

**JORDAN:** Fifty thousand... out of fifty billion?

30 **SIMON:** Lois advised me it would be a good idea to leave you a little something, that way you'd be less likely to be able to contest my new will.

**PAULA:** New will?

35 **SIMON:** Yes. That's why I asked Kathy to stay over at Starkweather Mansion this weekend, to type it up nice and legal for my signature. Mr. Davis, as a disinterested party, can witness the signing. Lois will file it at the court house come Monday.

**JORDAN:** Mr. Davis said he's a detective. What did you hire him to do? *(SIMON waves his hand at MIKE.)*

40 **MIKE:** *(Rises and picks up his cup. As he talks, he crosses to the table UP LEFT, pours himself a fresh cup of coffee from the pot, then returns to CENTER STAGE.)* Mr. Starkweather hired me to conduct an investigation, on the quiet. For the last six months, I've flown to

1 a dozen or more foreign countries, checking out some of the world's  
most brilliant scientists—some well known, others who prefer to  
keep their experiments hush-hush. I succeeded in finding one in  
Belgium, let's call him Dr. X, who agreed to help Mr. Starkweather  
5 do what he desires, which is... *(Now back at CENTER STAGE, he  
pauses to take a sip of coffee while the others wait, breathless.)*  
to clone himself. *(LIGHTNING AND THUNDER, then there is a wild  
outburst from the heirs, overlapping.)*

**BENSONHURST:** Clone?

10 **NANCY:** Oh, my goodness!

**JORDAN:** That's insane!

**MINERVA:** What nonsense!

**PAULA:** You must be kidding!

**TRENT:** It's immoral!

15 **FIONA:** I don't understand...

**RUFUS:** Good. I'm glad I'm not the only one.

**WITHERS:** *(Rises. To SIMON.)* Those blood and skin samples you had me  
prepare... *(MIKE sits on the ottoman; WITHERS crosses to STAGE LEFT  
of SIMON.)* the ones you said would be examined by specialists...

20 **SIMON:** They were sent to specialists, Withers, specialists in DNA.

**WITHERS:** I thought you were trying to find a cure.

**SIMON:** I was. Not a cure for my various ailments, but a cure for dying.  
And I did find it.

**WITHERS:** Cloning?

25 **SIMON:** Precisely. Through modern science, I shall live forever!  
*(LIGHTNING AND THUNDER.)*

**TRENT:** It's not right.

**SIMON:** That's neither here nor there. Let the moralists and politicians  
debate that question for decades to come. In the meantime, Dr.  
30 X, as Davis named him, will be creating a brand new me. Sit down,  
Withers. *(Frustrated, WITHERS returns to her seat.)* The lot of you  
seem to be displeased, not, I suspect, because of the moral  
question, but because of your change in fortune. Too bad. Cloning  
is very expensive, especially since the process I require must be  
35 done in absolute secrecy, but I will still have a sizable fortune  
left for the new me to inherit. No doubt I will be the first person  
on earth to become my own heir! *(He laughs, which becomes a  
wheeze.)* Withers... my blood pressure...

**WITHERS:** *(Rises and crosses to him. We sense she is holding in intense  
anger.)* Yes, Mr. Starkweather. *(She takes a stethoscope from the  
bag on the wheel chair, hangs it around her neck, then takes out*

1     *the blood pressure cuff; to the others.)* If you'll excuse us, I need to take Mr. Starkweather's blood pressure.

**PAULA:** Why don't you take it right here?

**WITHERS:** Mr. Starkweather's arms are too frail for me to get a reading from them. This is an outsized cuff, made to go around a patient's thigh. He can stand the pressure from the inflated cuff better there. Mr. Starkweather has had enough excitement for one evening. I shall put him to bed. *(The OTHERS watch as WITHERS wheels him to UP LEFT where they EXIT.)*

10 **LOIS:** *(Rises.)* I guess our meeting is concluded, unless anyone has any questions. *(She starts putting her papers back into her briefcase.)*

**RUFUS:** I do. What the heck was that all about?

**JORDAN:** It's simple, Rufus. Uncle Simon was going to leave us all a fortune, but he changed his mind. Instead, he's decided to clone himself.

15 **RUFUS:** What does "clone" mean?

**MIKE:** It means to take some cells from a person's body and create a duplicate of the original.

**RUFUS:** They can do that? That's great! When old Mr. Starkweather passes away, maybe I can get a job working for the new Mr. Starkweather.

20 **TRENT:** The new Mr. Starkweather will have to be born and grow up. It goes against the laws of nature! *(To LOIS.)* How...?

**LOIS:** It has all been arranged. Once Dr. X has created the new life, the cells will be implanted in a host mother who will carry the child to term.

25 **PAULA:** Host mother? Who?

**KATHY:** *(Beat.)* Me. *(EVERYONE but LOIS and MIKE reacts, surprised.)* Why not? I'm young and healthy. I'll make a good mother for little Simon.

30 **TRENT:** How could you ever consider being a part of this... this... travesty?

**KATHY:** I'll be well compensated. Besides, have you ever known anyone else to give birth to a baby billionaire?

**FIONA:** Uncle Simon is giving his money to a baby?

35 **LOIS:** In a manner of speaking, yes. The new will places Mr. Starkweather's fortune into a trust fund, which I'll administer. I'll release the money to pay Dr. X and his staff to perform the cloning procedure. After that, ample funds will be available to provide for Kathy's needs, and the child's upbringing and education. Once he's grown and properly trained to deal in high finance, the fortune will be turned over to him.

- 1 **MIKE:** The kid will look, think and act like Simon Starkweather. He could conceivably parlay those billions into trillions by the time he's an old man.
- TRENT:** (*Rises and crosses to STAGE LEFT of LOIS.*) But for what purpose? To leave it to another clone, then another and another?
- 5 **LOIS:** Where will it end? When there's a Simon Starkweather with enough money and power to rule the world?
- LOIS:** We didn't discuss it, but you might well be right.
- TRENT:** (*To LOIS.*) I can't believe you'd condone such madness!
- 10 **MINERVA:** (*Rises and crosses to above the sofa.*) Oh, I can see why she would. Ms. Van Zandt and the Collins girl will live like billionaires themselves off Mr. Starkweather's money. (*Pause.*) Money that should have gone to us and his family. (*To MIKE.*) I guess you'll get rich, too, since you're a part of this scheme.
- 15 **MIKE:** Not me. I did the job I was paid to do. My part's over. I'll take my very generous check and go home. Frankly, I don't care if the boss's science fiction experiment works or not.
- TRENT:** You should be ashamed! (*She includes LOIS and KATHY.*) You should all be ashamed!
- 20 **BENSONHURST:** (*Rises.*) I believe you've made your feelings quite clear, ladies. If you and the other servants will join me, I wish to speak to all of you in the kitchen. (*TRENT and MINERVA cross to the archway; RUFUS and NANCY rise and follow them. To the OTHERS.*) We'll clear after you've finished. I trust you'll ring if you require
- 25 anything else? (*He, MINERVA, TRENT, RUFUS and NANCY go past the STAGE LEFT side of the archway and start to EXIT.*)
- RUFUS:** (*As he EXITS.*) It might be kinda nice, hearing the pitterpatter of little feet around the house.
- MINERVA:** (*As she EXITS.*) Oh, shut up, Rufus.
- 30 **LOIS:** Kathy and I will retire to my room. (*To KATHY.*) You might as well begin typing up the new will tonight. I'll direct you how to put everything in the proper legal terms.
- KATHY:** (*Rises.*) Sure, Lois. The sooner it's finished and signed, the better. (*They start toward the archway.*)
- 35 **PAULA:** Hey, wait a minute! How come nobody asked me if I wanted to carry the baby? I could do it as well as she can!
- LOIS:** You're Mr. Starkweather's blood kin, Paula. It wouldn't be proper.
- PAULA:** I guess it would be kinda tacky.
- JORDAN:** (*Jumps up.*) Proper? You're about to conduct an experiment
- 40 that makes Frankenstein look like an amateur, and you're worried about being "proper"?

- 1 **MIKE:** *(Rises.)* Cool it, kid, before you burst a blood vessel. Mr. Starkweather has made up his mind, and I get the feeling whatever the old man wants, he gets.
- LOIS:** Succinctly put, Mr. Davis. Kathy? *(She and KATHY cross to the foyer, ascend the stairs, and EXIT UP LEFT.)*
- 5 **MIKE:** I'll go upstairs and pack. After I witness the signing of the new will tomorrow, I won't have any reason to hang around. 'Night. *(The OTHERS watch as he crosses to the foyer, ascends the stairs and EXITS UP LEFT.)*
- 10 **JORDAN:** *(Paces to CENTER STAGE, angry.)* We were robbed!
- FIONA:** We were?
- JORDAN:** Yes, Mother. Great-uncle Simon dangled a fortune in front of our noses, then snatched it away!
- PAULA:** That was mean!
- 15 **JORDAN:** Mean? The man is a monster! Didn't you see the evil glint in his eye? He enjoyed pulling the rug right out from under our feet! *(FIONA, puzzled, looks down at the floor to see if there's a rug there.)*
- PAULA:** At least he is leaving us fifty thousand.
- JORDAN:** To him, that's no more than tossing a dime to a beggar!
- 20 And he's just doing it to keep us from breaking his new will. You heard him.
- PAULA:** Yeah.
- JORDAN:** I wish he were dead! I wish the old goat would drop dead tonight!
- 25 **PAULA:** It would serve him right!
- FIONA:** *(With an odd little smile.)* If Uncle Simon did die tonight, then we'd get all our money, wouldn't we, my dears? *(JORDAN and PAULA stare at her in surprise. Is it possible FIONA is not as spacey as she seems?)* Would anyone care for a game of bridge?
- 30 *(They continue to stare at her as the LIGHTS FADE TO BLACKOUT. SOMBER MUSIC FADES IN, plays a few beats, then FADES OUT as the LIGHTS COME BACK UP.)*

ACT ONE  
Scene Two

- It is later that night. The storm has passed, and moonlight is seen through the French doors. The hors d'oeuvres and coffee items have
- 35 been struck. WITHERS'S chair has been replaced LEFT of the table STAGE RIGHT. NANCY is seated on the bench, staring into the fire which has burned down to coals. After a beat, JORDAN ENTERS from STAGE LEFT side of the arch, descending the stairs. He has removed



## **PRODUCTION NOTES**

### **PROPERTIES LIST**

ON STAGE: Sign on director's chair in front row; pillows with fringe on the sofa; fireplace tools by fireplace, including a poker; fire screen; rug in front of fire.

BROUGHT ON, ACT ONE, Scene One: Script in notebook (GENE); silver tray, coffee pot/coffee, six cups & saucers, spoons, napkins, creamer, sugar bowl, tray of hors d'oeuvres (NANCY); tray of hors d'oeuvres (MINERVA); steno pad and pen (KATHY); briefcase, papers and will with blue backing sheet (LOIS); wheelchair (WITHERS); rod, IV drip bag, bag with blood pressure cuff and stethoscope, oxygen tank with tube to oxygen mask (SIMON).

BROUGHT ON, ACT ONE, Scene Two: Kitchen knife (MINERVA); ax (RUFUS); two cookies (JORDAN); gun (PAULA); bottle of pills (FIONA); wrench (BENSONHURST); hypodermic needle and protective sheath, pitcher of water (WITHERS); pocket flashlight (MIKE); green candle, matches (LOIS); white candle (KATHY); blood pressure cuff (SIMON).

BROUGHT ON, ACT TWO, Scene One: Pad and pen, pocket flashlight, two plastic sandwich bags, gun, handcuffs (MIKE); silver coffee pot, dish towel, candle, matches, fireplace poker (NANCY); kitchen knife, dish towel, candle, matches (MINERVA); pocket flashlight (GENE); bottle of pills, candle, matches (FIONA); T.V. set, ax, candle, matches (RUFUS); forehead bandage, pitcher of water, candle, matches, hypodermic needle (WITHERS); ziplock bag with five green, five white, and one red candle, candle, matches, sofa pillow (TRENT); handkerchief, car keys (SIMON); candle, matches (BENSONHURST); green candle, matches, wrench (LOIS); white candle, matches (KATHY); candle, matches, gun (PAULA); telegram (USHER).

### **SOUND/LIGHTING EFFECTS**

The music you select to play before each act and to bridge the flashback scenes should be "heavy." You might use appropriate classical music or other public domain selections. Handbell. Thunder. Front door opening and closing.

Lightning. Moonlight through French doors. Red glow from fireplace. Spotlights on foyer and STAGE LEFT side of stage.

## COSTUMES

Specific costume notes are included in the script. Additionally, all the actors should have pockets in their clothing. SIMON may or may not have red dots on his robe when he is wheeled out at the end of ACT ONE. WITHERS will need to add some blood to her forehead at the end of ACT ONE.

## MISCELLANEOUS

GENE/JEAN CULPEPPER can be played by a man or a woman. If the play's actual director wishes to play the part, he or she will use his or her real name, and the role of GENE will be omitted from the Cast of Characters in your program.

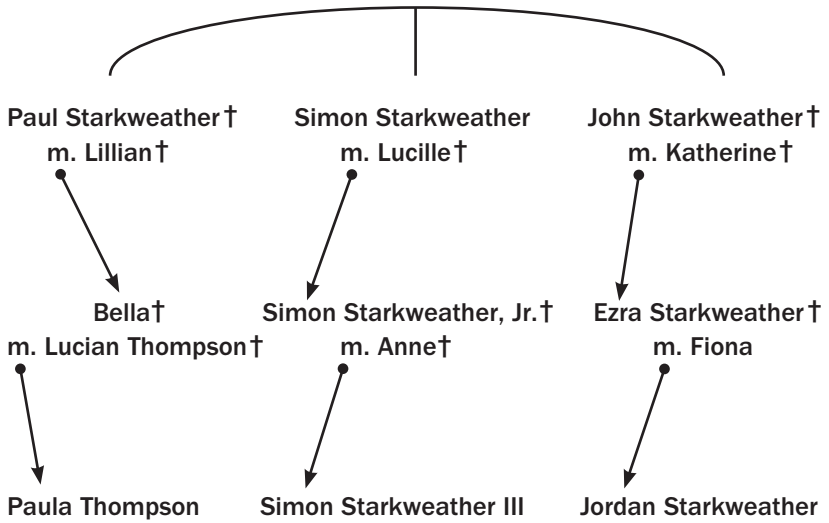
Since the audience could not conceivably see the candle scrapings and nail scrapings from their seats, MIKE'S evidence bags can be empty. Also, they probably couldn't see the scratches on THE KILLER'S wrist. If red dots are put on SIMON'S robe, they should be small; it's not necessary to use them unless the audience is sitting very close to the stage.

You'll want to plan a rehearsal or two to run through the climactic scene numerous times, letting each potential killer play the part until all of the actors are totally prepared to do the role. It would be a shame to have the play going great, only to falter at the climax because the scene was under-rehearsed, wouldn't it?

During THE KILLER'S confession, the actor must bring his or her character's personality to the speech. For example, TRENT, MINERVA, WITHERS or JORDAN have strong personalities, and their delivery would be forceful; BENSONHURST might be more formal and detached in his delivery; PAULA'S Southern belle qualities would show through; FIONA would be fluttery; NANCY would be shaky; RUFUS can adjust the lines to include his poor grammar, using "ain't" and such when appropriate. In other words, actors, take the lines and make them your own.

During the series of flashbacks, the various suspects' stories will be enacted in the foyer; the archway will become a mini-proscenium, framing these scenes, and the LIGHTS will be brighter there than they are at any other time in the play. During these flashbacks, the AREA LIGHTS STAGE LEFT will FADE OUT; when each scene has been concluded, the FOYER LIGHTS will FADE OUT and the AREA LIGHTS STAGE LEFT will FADE UP on MIKE, SIMON and the next witness. During his or her interrogation, THE KILLER at that performance will scrape the thumbnail of one hand across the thumbnail of the other, a slight nervous gesture. The action should be subtle—some of the audience might notice it, others might not.

# THE STARKWEATHER FAMILY TREE



† = deceased

# WHODUNIT?

Mark which character you think is the murderer (only choose one):

- |                                      |                                  |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bensonhurst | <input type="checkbox"/> Fiona   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Minerva     | <input type="checkbox"/> Jordan  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trent       | <input type="checkbox"/> Paula   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nancy       | <input type="checkbox"/> Withers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rufus       |                                  |
- 

# WHODUNIT?

Mark which character you think is the murderer (only choose one):

- |                                      |                                  |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bensonhurst | <input type="checkbox"/> Fiona   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Minerva     | <input type="checkbox"/> Jordan  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trent       | <input type="checkbox"/> Paula   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nancy       | <input type="checkbox"/> Withers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rufus       |                                  |

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