


MURDER By the BOOK



By Craig Sodaro

© Copyright 2000, Pioneer Drama Service, Inc.

Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that a royalty must be paid for every performance, whether or not admission is charged. All inquiries regarding rights should be addressed to **Pioneer Drama Service, Inc., PO Box 4267, Englewood, CO 80155.**

All rights to this play—including but not limited to amateur, professional, radio broadcast, television, motion picture, public reading and translation into foreign languages—are controlled by Pioneer Drama Service, Inc., without whose permission no performance, reading or presentation of any kind in whole or in part may be given.

These rights are fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America and of all countries covered by the Universal Copyright Convention or with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations, including Canada, Mexico, Australia and all nations of the United Kingdom.

**ONE SCRIPT PER CAST MEMBER MUST BE PURCHASED FOR PRODUCTION RIGHTS.
COPYING OR DISTRIBUTING ALL OR ANY PART OF THIS BOOK
WITHOUT PERMISSION IS STRICTLY FORBIDDEN BY LAW.**

On all programs, printing and advertising, the following information must appear:

1. The full name of the play
2. The full name of the playwright
3. The following notice: "Produced by special arrangement with Pioneer Drama Service, Inc., Denver, Colorado"

MURDER BY THE BOOK

By CRAIG SODARO

CAST OF CHARACTERS

	<i># of lines</i>
EDGAR ALLEN POElate thirties, the famous poet and short story writer	222
MARK TWAIN.....late sixties, the American humorist and novelist	78
CHARLOTTE BRONTElate twenties, the author of “Jane Eyre”	75
LOUISA MAE ALCOTTthirties, the creator of “Little Women”	129
MARY SHELLEYtwenties, author of “Frankenstein,” wife of Percy	95
ARTHUR CONAN DOYLEforties, creator of Sherlock Holmes	44
AGATHA CHRISTIEsixties, the famous British mystery writer	237
EMILY DICKINSONthirties, the American poet	22
WILLIAM SHAKESPEAREtwenties, the great playwright	143
VIOLIA DANGLON.....fifties, the housekeeper	87

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE

Scene One.....Parlor of Dickens House, the clock strikes midnight	
Scene TwoLater that night	
Scene ThreeAn hour later	

ACT TWO

Scene One.....The following day, noon	
Scene TwoThe midnight bells chime	
Scene ThreeAn hour later	

SETTING

The play takes place in the parlor of the Dickens House, a mansion built on an island off the coast of Maine. Wing entrances are LEFT and RIGHT. LEFT leads to the bedrooms, RIGHT leads to the main door, kitchen and dining room. UP CENTER stands a fireplace, above which is the coat of arms of the Raven Society, consisting of a raven perched upon a skull which sits before an open book. Behind the raven are two crossed quill pens, which give the appearance of swords. On the book is written, "The Pen is Mightier Than the Sword!" There is one large window UP LEFT, curtains drawn. UP RIGHT, there is a podium. Comfortable chairs and/or a couch sit about here and there. A table UP LEFT has at least one chair, and there is at least one bookshelf against the LEFT wall. Pictures of famous authors decorate the walls, all past members of the Raven Society. On the mantel rests the "Smoking Gun Award," a bronze or silver gun mounted on a base, a bronze plaque attached. Next to it is the "Dagger Award," consisting of a small knife thrust into a bronzed book. An old fashioned clock sits either on the mantel or on the wall.

ACT ONE

Scene One

AT RISE: The stage is dark. The **CLOCK CHIMES** 12 times. **LIGHTS UP** gradually as **POE** speaks. As the room grows brighter, we gradually see the members of the Raven Society. **POE** stands UP RIGHT behind the podium. **CHRISTIE** sits knitting, her knitting bag beside her chair. **SHELLEY** writes at a desk or table. **DOYLE** looks about here and there with a magnifying glass. **ALCOTT** sits primly and properly, hanging on **POE'S** every word. **TWAIN** sits in a chair, arms folded. **BRONTE** stands at the window, peeking through the curtain.

POE: Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered weak and weary o'er a many curious volume of forgotten lore. . . suddenly there came a tapping, as if someone gently rapping, rapping on my chamber door. 'Tis the Raven Society, nothing more. The hour, my good friends and colleagues, is midnight. Dark has fallen, the petty trials of the day have been won or lost, and the Raven Society can now be called to order to conduct its annual business. We work by night, the stars and moon guiding our way unfettered by mundane concerns of the day to day world.

Ours is the world of night. And ours is a most serious duty, demanding our most careful attention. To this end we have gathered at Dickens House, cut off from the rest of the world for three days and nights. Here we will ponder the fate of the mysteries of the year. Three hundred eighty-two mysteries, to be exact, published in this country. One will be deemed the best and earn the Smoking Gun Award. (*Picks up Smoking Gun trophy from mantel.*) It will be guaranteed an honored place on the library shelf after earning the author a fortune. (*Replaces Smoking Gun and holds Dagger Award.*) The other will be deemed the worst mystery, and a dagger shall be thrust into it. This book will be condemned to obscurity, “Out of print” its epitaph. But before we commence with our sacred charge, we must conduct our annual business. First, our roll call. We fully understand, of course, that our membership is secret even unto ourselves. I only know you as the author you portray. You only know me as Edgar Allan Poe, and I am present, as you can all plainly see.

TWAIN: And we re gettin’ dang tired of listenin to you!

POE: Mark Twain is obviously present.

TWAIN: For better or worse. And I still can’t understand why I’m not allowed to smoke a good cigar. Or a bad one, for that matter.

BRONTE: Really, Mr. Twain, it would be very difficult for some of us to concentrate through a haze of blue smoke.

TWAIN: Everything you wrote, Mrs. Bronte, is a haze of blue smoke.

BRONTE: My life, Mr. Twain, was a veil of tears... first losing mother, then losing Maria and Elizabeth.

TWAIN: Who were those, your chow chows?

BRONTE: My sisters, you hopeless boar!

ALCOTT: Really, Mr. Twain, we must have compassion for such little women.

POE: Ah, Miss Alcott, how good of you to come.

ALCOTT: I wouldn t have missed this for all the grapes in Concord!

BRONTE: At least you have some understanding of the human heart.

TWAIN: (*To BRONTE.*) All you need, you English crumpet, is a good cigar to clear your thinking. The smoke pumping through your system will clear all that muddleheadedness and heat up your furnace!

BRONTE: My thermostat is set on low, exactly the way I like it!

POE: May I continue with roll?

TWAIN: Nobody said you couldn't!

POE: As I was saying, Mr. Twain is obviously present. Mrs. Bronte is present. Louisa Mae Alcott is here. And how is the family?

ALCOTT: My sisters and I are well, thank you. And you, Mr. Poe? How goes it with you?

POE: I have my good days and bad days.

ALCOTT: I know what you mean. When the sun is shining and the daffodils smile, we all feel better.

POE: Those are my bad days. I long for night... dark and damp... a heart beating loudly, rapidly... lightning and thunder in the distance— (*OFFSTAGE THUNDER. The LIGHTS FLICKER.*) Weather made to order for the Raven Society. Now, we haven't heard from Mary Shelley.

SHELLEY: Please, I'm writing a poem to Percy. (*Reads.*) Dear, darling Percy... love of my life. I'm ever so happy to be your wife.

TWAIN: My dear, I think you've created a monster.

SHELLEY: Beware he who casts stones when he lives in a glass house, Mr. Twain. Your reputation comes and goes like the tide.

TWAIN: Fame's a vapor, popularity an accident, woman! The only earthly certainty is oblivion!

ALCOTT: Well, that's not a very cheery thought!

POE: How about Sir Arthur Conan Doyle?

DOYLE: (*Stops snooping around, looks up.*) Someone call my name? Hmhhh?

POE: Taking roll, Sir Arthur.

DOYLE: Jolly good show, keep up the good work. Back to sleuthing, you know.

POE: And Miss Christie? Agatha Christie?

CHRISTIE: Right here, Mr. Poe.

POE: Quiet, as usual.

CHRISTIE: Listening, Mr. Poe. There is a difference. One can't actively solve a crime if one doesn't listen carefully and speak only when necessary.

TWAIN: And what crime are you working on?

CHRISTIE: The one that hasn't occurred yet!

ALCOTT: I don't like it when you foreshadow like that, Miss Christie!

CHRISTIE: My dear, I'm only thinking of my next mystery.

POE: Well, think away. That wraps up roll call.

ALCOTT: But, Mr. Poe?

POE: Yes, Miss Alcott?

ALCOTT: We're forgetting someone.

POE: Oh, yes, I forgot again. I forget every year. Please forgive me. Miss Dickinson? Miss Dickinson?

TWAIN: I'll go get the old maid!

SHELLEY: Don't let him, Mr. Poe. Men like him are the reason she is an old maid.

CHRISTIE: Maritally challenged, I believe now, Mrs. Shelley. We want to make sure we're politically correct.

ALCOTT: I'll go fetch her. (*EXITS LEFT.*)

POE: Each year she seems to withdraw deeper and deeper.

DOYLE: Becoming part of the spirit world, I suspect. Spends a lot of time with the dead.

TWAIN: We're all going to be dead if we don't get on with this meeting, Poe. I have half a mind to call for a new scroll keeper! You never keep things moving the way you ought to.

CHRISTIE: And you would, Mr. Twain?

TWAIN: After a good cigar.

ALCOTT: (*ENTERS LEFT, her hand holding the hand of DICKINSON, who remains OFF LEFT.*) Come along, Emily. You know everyone here. We're all your friends. Please come. We can't go on with the meeting unless you're present. (*Slowly drags DICKINSON INTO the room. DICKINSON wears a long, white nightgown and a nightcap. She has a handkerchief tucked in her sleeve.*) Here we are.

POE: Welcome, Emily Dickinson.

DICKINSON: I'm nobody! Who are you? Are you nobody, too? Then there's a pair of us, don't tell. They'd banish us, you know! How dreary to be someone, how public like a frog to tell your name the live long day to an admiring bog.

DOYLE: Rubbish! That admiring bog pays the bills, dear lady.

DICKINSON: I rely on the kindness of Father.

TWAIN: We all ought to have been so lucky, eh, Poe? You never got fat on writing.

POE: But I had my admiring bog! (*Thinks back.*) How the ladies' societies loved my recitation of "The Raven." (*Dramatic.*) "Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered weak and weary—"

TWAIN: And we're all weak and weary from hearing that blasted bit of so-called poetry! Get on with it, man!

POE: (*Recovers.*) Please sit, Miss Dickinson. I do say you look lovely.

SHELLEY: You know how we all love that nightdress.

DICKINSON: Who's she?

CHRISTIE: Mary Shelley. She wrote "Frankenstein."

DICKINSON: I thought Boris Karloff did.

SHELLEY: You Philistine! Boris Karloff? He was an actor! He never wrote a word! I created the monster! I made it come alive! Alive, you hear? Alive!

POE: Well, we're all clear about that, aren't we? So, we're all here. Let's get on with business. As you all know, we lost a dear friend this year when Jules Verne broke the cardinal rule and

revealed his true identity and mentioned he was part of the Raven Society to a supermarket tabloid. We hope that Mr Verne is happy with the \$500 they gave him, because he will never be readmitted, and should he reveal any of our identities, the location of Dickens House or any of our secrets, Mr Verne will be effectively..

ALL: ...out of print!

BRONTE: How can we be sure he never mentions the Raven Society again?

POE: He won't.

ALCOTT: And, of course, we don't even know each other's identities, so how can he ever reveal those

POE: Exactly. The author we have chosen to wear protects us from the prying eyes of the masses.

DICKINSON: And from the danger.. out there.

CHRISTIE: Just as dangerous in here.

ALCOTT There you go again!

CHRISTIE Don't mind my mutterings, Miss Alcott. The little gray cells are just working overtime.

TWAIN: So we lost Verne, nothing much to cry over. Never could stand his *parlez vous* nohow anyhow. But now we're eight.

DOYLE: Can't have eight. Even number won't work.

BRONTE: That's right. Our vote might end in a tie.

POE: But we have had an application. A copy is placed beside each of your beds to look over after our meeting tonight.

SHELLEY: That's very irregular! We should have received the application a month before this meeting so we could vote on whether to pursue it or not

CHRISTIE Mrs Shelley's right, Mr Poe

POE: I only received the application yesterday.

DOYLE: Highly irregular!

BRONTE: I agree. We have rules for a purpose

TWAIN And if tea's not at four you Brits *bing bong* like Big Ben! I say let's hear about this greenhorn. Can't hurt

ALCOTT: I don't see why not, either.

DICKINSON: Maybe he's nobody, too!

DOYLE: So American! Can't wait. Got to do it right now! Take the cow by the horns!

CHRISTIE: Bull, Sir Arthur. Take the bull by the horns.

DOYLE: Oh, quite right. Cows barely have horns, do they?

TWAIN: Sherlock Holmes finally figure that out?

DOYLE: Do not mock my creation! Not one of you has created a character so ingrained in our cultural consciousness that many readers wonder whether or not he actually lived.

CHRISTIE: My Hercule Poirot is a thousand times smarter than your Sherlock Holmes!

BRONTE: My Jane Eyre is one of the tragic figures of all time!

TWAIN: Tom Sawyer lives as sure as you're standing there, Doyle!

ALCOTT: Jo isn't exactly what you'd call chopped liver, either!

SHELLEY: And my monster can beat up any of your characters any day!

POE: Please, please, please! We've gone off on another of our tangents, and while that's perfectly fine in normal years, this is not a normal year. We must have a ninth author in order to make voting possible, for never in our history have we awarded two Smoking Guns or two Dagger Awards.

CHRISTIE: Heaven forbid!

POE: Let us forego tradition for once and meet a potential new member.

DICKINSON: The new member's here?

BRONTE: I'm sure Mr. Poe's kidding.

ALCOTT: We've got to look over the application, then perhaps meet the person.

TWAIN: Really, Poe! Do you want to endanger the Raven Society?

POE: I would never endanger the Raven Society! I founded the Raven Society, and I would rather die than see it harmed. But

as the founder, I have taken that prerogative and invited a guest member for this weekend.

CHRISTIE: Leaving no room for discussion, obviously.

POE: I'm afraid not.

DOYLE: Then bring forth this neophyte!

SHELLEY: That we may put him under our scalpel!

POE: Allow me to bring in our guest. (*EXITS RIGHT.*)

DOYLE: Seems pretty nervy to me!

BRONTE: You never know who he might bring in.

CHRISTIE: Could be a writer of pulp fiction!

ALCOTT: Or worse... movies!

SHELLEY: I don't even want to think of it, but what if he hacks for television? (*Groans from the GROUP.*)

TWAIN: Makes a grown man want to cry!

DICKINSON: It's such a little thing to weep, so short a thing to sigh... and yet by trades the size of these, we men and woman die.

POE: (*ENTERS RIGHT.*) Not to worry. Allow me to introduce William Shakespeare. (*SHAKESPEARE ENTERS RIGHT. He is a very handsome young man, dressed in Renaissance clothing. The OTHERS are speechless as he bows.*)

SHAKESPEARE: But lo, what light through yonder window breaks. Tis the sun... no, tis you, my beauty. (*Kisses ALCOTT'S hand.*)

ALCOTT: (*Flustered.*) Oh, dear me!

SHAKESPEARE: (*To SHELLEY.*) I am your spaniel. I will fawn on you. Spurn me! Strike me! Only give me leave, unworthy as I am, to follow you.

TWAIN: Mrs. Shelley's off limits, Romeo.

DOYLE: She's married. Poet fellow, you know.

SHELLEY: What Percy doesn't know won't hurt him! (*SHAKESPEARE kisses her hand.*)

SHAKESPEARE: *(To CHRISTIE, taking her hand.)* If I profane with my unworthiest hand this holy shrine, my lips, two blushing pilgrims ready stand to smooth that rough tough touch with a tender kiss. *(Kisses her hand.)*

CHRISTIE: Why, you do turn little gray cells to mush, don't you?

SHAKESPEARE: *(To BRONTE.)* When we greet, with eyes best seeing, heaven's fiery eye by light we lost light. *(Kisses her hand.)*

TWAIN: She's married, too!

BRONTE: Shut up!

DOYLE: Miss Dickinson's not married.

SHAKESPEARE: *(To DICKINSON.)* Oh, blessed, blessed night! I am afeard being in night all this is but a dream, too flattering-sweet to be substantial! *(Kisses her hand.)*

DICKINSON: I'm nobody, who are you?

SHAKESPEARE: William Shakespeare. But my friends call me Will.

DICKINSON: I will then, Will.

TWAIN: I must protest, Poe!

DOYLE: Shakespeare, really!

CHRISTIE: I think he might be a charming addition!

BRONTE: He brings a bit of fresh air into the place.

SHELLEY: He's only... a guest. We ought to at least be... hospitable.

POE: Then we'll resume. Master Shakespeare, perhaps you would like to tell us a bit about yourself?

DOYLE: Yes! I'm sure we have a hundred one questions!

POE: Master Shakespeare speaks first.

SHAKESPEARE: My gracious thanks for allowing my presence amidst your ponderous personages. Methinks I have the better part of the bargain, for lo, I stand before he who makes merry but through jest turns men's hearts with his Hucklefinn Berry.

TWAIN: That's Huckleberry Finn.

SHAKESPEARE: Just so. And to be in the same chamber as the master of Sherlock Holmes, the great detective! Methinks my mind could never conjure such sweetly clever tales of revenge and murder!

DOYLE: Oh, its nothing really All formula.

SHAKESPEARE: And of you, Mr. Poe... what can words say? You who are imbued with a thousand one ways to picture dark and terrible. You who can shred the soul with fear. I tremble in your presence.

BRONTE: This guy's good. Really good.

SHELLEY: Tell us about yourself, Master Shakespeare.

SHAKESPEARE: Will!

SHELLEY: Will.

SHAKESPEARE: You know what there is to know, and this I know truly. Should you know more than what you know, 'twould be tomfoolery.

DICKINSON: (*Claps.*) Bravo! Bravo!

POE: Well, then.. we'll check your application and references, of course.

SHAKESPEARE: 'T s your pleasure and my pain for you to do so.

CHRISTIE: Just a formality, Will.

POE: Perhaps, then, I ought to explain a few facts about the Raven Society, Master Shakespe re. (*SHAKESPEARE bows in deference to POE.*) We eight, and you make nine, are known only to one another as an author. Our mundane identities are left at the dock when we took the boat here to Dickens House. We arrived one at a time and have remained in our rooms until our meeting time of midnight. We have been selected by virtue of the fact we love literature... perhaps more than life itself. We were recruited in the same fashion as you were: the classified ad appearing only one day in the New York Times.

CHRISTIE: "Wanted:

BRONTE: ...a lover..

TWAIN: ...of literature...

DICKINSON: ...in author's shoes.

SHELLEY: Bio and resume...

DOYLE: ...eagerly accepted.

ALCOTT: Serious inquiries...

POE: ...only!" And because of the nature of our society, everything we do is in secret and must remain so. Therefore, Master Shakespeare, before going any further, you must sign the following, as we all have.

BRONTE: It reads, "I, William Shakespeare, do swear to uphold the following provisos of the Raven Society.

CHRISTIE: One, I will never reveal my true identity to any member of the society whether at Dickens House or elsewhere.

SHELLEY: Two, I will never reveal to any outsider that I am a member of the Raven Society.

DOYLE: Three, I will never reveal the purpose, structure or business of the Raven Society.

ALCOTT: Four, I will never reveal the whereabouts of Dickens House, owned and maintained by the members of the Raven Society.

TWAIN: Five, I will never reveal the procedure for awarding the Smoking Gun or the Dagger Award.

DICKINSON: Six, I will attend the annual gathering at Dickens House, regardless of personal or family plans.

POE: I agree unquestioningly to the above provisos and understand the penalty for violating one or more is to be declared permanently 'Out of Print.'"

SHAKESPEARE: Out of print? No punishment could be worse!

POE: Then sign. (*Hands SHAKESPEARE a quill pen.*)

SHAKESPEARE: Pray, I see no ink with which to jot my name.

POE: We don't use ink. (*Hands SHAKESPEARE a knife.*)

TWAIN: We use blood, Willy, old boy. Your blood.

SHAKESPEARE: Oh, happy dagger! This is thy sheath! (*He pokes his finger.*) Ooooo, that smarts! (*He taps pen tip to finger,*

then signs.) Oooops! (*He dabs at the contract with his handkerchief.*) Out, out, damned spot!

POE: Quite all right And now, you may take a seat.

SHAKESPEARE: A thousand thanks, for the loss of blood nearly makes me swoon.

CHRISTIE: You can just swoon on me, honey. (*SHAKESPEARE sits near CHRISTIE*)

POE: So, good fellows, before we proceed to the business at hand, we have a treasurer's report. Mrs Bronte?

BRONTE: Thank you, Mr Poe Last year the Raven Society awarded the Smoking Gun to the mystery entitled "The Quill of Death." To date, royalties paid to the author have amounted to \$1.2 million What's more, a seven-figure deal with Hollywood has been signed, and it's rumored that there's a TV series in the works. (*ALL clap.*)

TWAIN: People listen to the Raven Society!

ALCOTT: They trust our judgment

BRONTE: Last year, we plunged the Dagger into the mystery entitled "Army Corpse of Engineers."

DOYLE: A fitting end!

SHELLEY: I still wake up at night in a cold sweat thinking about that book

CHRISTIE: Or is it your own?

BRONTE: I am proud to say, "Army Corpse of Engineers" earned its author \$29.82 and has since been declared .

ALL: . .out of print!

POE: Thank you, Mrs. Bronte As you can plainly see, our word is the literary equivalent of the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval. What we deem worthy will sell. What we deem unworthy will not And now, my friends, we have some correspondence At your leisure you will be free to read these congratulatory messages sent to the publisher of "The Quill of Death." (*Holds up stuffed bag of mail.*) There are more positive messages here than we've ever received before And here are the messages of dismay sent to the publisher of "Army Corpse of

Engineers” (*Dumps another bag. One message falls out, and BRONTE picks it up.*)

BRONTE: Oh, look! Someone took sympathy on the book.

TWAIN: An author’s mother thinks her child has spun gold even from straw.

CHRISTIE: Toss it in the fire!

DOYLE: Now that’s not very sporting, Agatha.

CHRISTIE: This isn’t a game, Sir Arthur.

ALCOTT: There you go again with your crepe-hanging.

CHRISTIE: And must you be so infernally optimistic?

SHELLEY: We’ve had many more negative letters before. Bags full of them!

CHRISTIE: But there’s only one. It doesn’t bode well.

SHAKESPEARE: The good lady doth make a fine point. Many voices raised in protest all sound the same. One voice carries a terrible fury.

DICKINSON: (*Snatches up the letter.*) “My candle burns at both ends... it will not last the night; But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends, it gives a lovely light!” (*She tosses the letter into the fire.*)

BRONTE: Emily, for heavens sake! (*POE uses a poker to retrieve the letter.*)

SHELLEY: You were quoting Edna St. Vincent Millay.

DICKINSON: I didn’t write that?

TWAIN: No, woman!

DICKINSON: It sounds like me! Shes a copy cat.

CHRISTIE: We’ve all had our copy cats.

SHELLEY: It’s a sign of success.

SHAKESPEARE: Imitation is the highest form of flattery. And you can quote me on that.

DICKINSON: Then I’m flattered. I truly am.

TWAIN: What does the note say, Poe?

POE: Nothing that can t wait. I suggest we all retire to our rooms.

ALCOTT: (*Nervous.*) It isn't anything bad, is it?

DOYLE: We can take it! We've all had our critics!

TWAIN: I like criticism, but it must be my way.

POE: (*With a forced laugh.*) I m certain it's just a harmless joke.

TWAIN: We'll judge it by the punchline.

POE: Very well. (*Reads.*) "To the Members of the Raven Society. Enjoy your steaks, enjoy your pie. Enjoy them now for you will die. The arrow will hit every bird. You shall each die by your own word!"

TWAIN: You call that poetry?

SHELLEY: An insult to the language.

BRONTE: Off with his head!

CHRISTIE: What's wrong with all of you? Our lives have just been threatened.

SHAKESPEARE: Worse, m'lady. If bad poetry can kill, I m dead already, slain by tortured rhythm and rhyme!

CHRISTIE: Edgar, I demand you call the police!

DOYLE: Agatha, aren t you overreacting?

POE: Besides, we can t call the police. We purposely have no phones, no radio and no way back to Cape Elizabeth until Monday morning.

TWAIN: Well, Agatha, this sounds more and more like one of your books!

BRONTE: We'll all have to sit back and enjoy.

DICKINSON: I don't want to enjoy this! Someone is out there trying to get us!

POE: Really, Emily, it's nothing more than a... a... prank.

BRONTE: But what if there is someone out there?

SHELLEY: It's possible, isn t it?

DOYLE: (*With bravado.*) Only one way to find out. Chaps, let's go have a look.

TWAIN: Chaps?

DOYLE: You, Edgar, Will here and me, of course.

DICKINSON: Would you? We'd all feel so much better.

POE: Mr. Twain and Sir Arthur, head east around the house, and
Will and I will head west. We'll meet back at the main door.

DOYLE: Sounds simple enough.

WILL: But what light through yonder window breaks?

POE: Swear by the moon, Will. It's full tonight. (*The MEN EXIT
RIGHT. CHRISTIE picks up the note.*)

BRONTE: What are you doing?

CHRISTIE: Looking for anything distinctive about the paper or
handwriting.

SHELLEY: Looks very ordinary to me.

CHRISTIE: To the untrained eye, yes. But you'll notice upon
careful examination not one "i" is dotted.

SHELLEY: Lots of people don't dot their "i's."

CHRISTIE: But lots do!

BRONTE: Me for one. How about you, Emily?

DICKINSON: I... I... don't know.

CHRISTIE: Poor dear. You are upset, aren't you?

DICKINSON: (*At the point of tears.*) No one's ever threatened us
before.

SHELLEY: It's only a threat, and a very poor one, too. How could
anyone do away with all of us?

ALCOTT: Especially by our own words!

DICKINSON: I don't know! (*She cries into her handkerchief.*)

CHRISTIE: You have a good cry! (*DICKINSON dabs her eyes and
nose.*)

SHELLEY: Get it all out of your system now, because you'll never
be able to read all we've got to read the next three days if you've
got teary eyes!

DICKINSON: I suppose you're... you're...

CHRISTIE: Miss Dickin on? Miss Dickinson? (*DICKINSON slumps in the chair: CHRISTIE rushes to her.*)

BRONTE: What's wrong?

SHELLEY: Is she.. .

ALCOTT: (*Horrified.*) No! Not dead?

CHRISTIE: I'm afraid so. Irreversibly so.

DANGLON'S VOICE: (*OFF RIGHT.*) Get your hands off me!

DOYLE'S VOIC : (*OFF RIGHT.*) What were you doing sneakin' around out there? (*DOYLE and TWAIN ENTER RIGHT, holding DANGLON between them.*)

DANGLON: It's my job, you lummoX!

DOYLE: Here, now! Who are you calling a lummoX?

TWAIN: Wasn t supposed to be a soul on the island but us.

DANGLON: Just what I was told

CHRISTIE: You must be the housekeeper

DANGLON: I'm glad somebody around here's got sense! Now let go of me or you'll be eating liver and onions for the weekend.

CHRISTIE: Please, gentlemen.

DOYLE: But what if she's the one?

DANGLON: What one?

TWAIN: Send any threatening letters lately?

DANGLON: Only to my ex who hasn't kept up with the alimony!

DOYLE: Don't look at me!

CHRISTIE: Gentlemen, I'm afraid someth ng terrible's happened.
(*POE and SHAKESPEARE ENTER RIGHT.*)

POE: Just as I thought. No one outside

DOYLE: Except for the housekeeper

POE: What housekeeper? We didn't request a housekeeper!

DANGLON: The agency said I was hired to cook and clean and do beds for this weekend. I've got my orders along with the key they gave me



CHRISTIE: And you didn't know about this, Edgar?

DANGLON: What is this? Some kind of costume party? Why are you all dressed up like fruitcakes?

BRONTE: This is the Raven Society! We are all famous authors.

DANGLON: (*Sarcastic.*) Oh, really!

SHAKESPEARE: Dost thou not recognize me, fair lady?

DANGLON: Are you Ronald McDonald?

POE: Please, Miss... Miss...

DANGLON: It's Mrs. Even if I hated the bum, I'm still a Mrs. Mrs. Danglon. Viola Danglon. And what's with her?

CHRISTIE: I'm afraid she's... dead. (*DANGLON screams and races OFF RIGHT.*)

DOYLE: Dead?!

POE: What happened? (*CHRISTIE gently removes the handkerchief from DICKINSON'S hand.*)

SHELLEY: She'd begun to cry...

BRONTE: Wiped her nose...

POE: But how did she?

SHAKESPEARE: Of course, for love. Her heart broke from want of use.

BRONTE: Such a romantic way to go.

CHRISTIE: (*Holds up handkerchief.*) It wasn't romantic at all. Her handkerchief has been soaked in Chloramine-T, a disinfecting agent easily obtainable at a hospital or medical supply store.

SHAKESPEARE: (*Sniffs, disgusted.*) The lady speaks true.

ALCOTT: It must have just been an accident, that's all.

TWAIN: Folks don't usually leave hankies around soaking in poison.

ALCOTT: Maybe she was cleaning it and just forgot to wash it out.

BRONTE: Really. Because the other part of the message said we would die by our own words.

SHELLEY: She just blew her nose.

DOYLE: (*Thinks back, fearful.*) Oh, dear, don't you remember?

POE: Remember what?

DOYLE: When she met Will Shakespeare?

CHRISTIE: "It's such a little thing to weep, so short a thing to sigh... and yet by trades the size of these, we men and woman die!" (*BLACKOUT.*)

End of Scene One

Scene Two

AT RISE: Later that night. The stage appears empty, but POE hides behind a chair. The dagger in the award is now gone. The CLOCK CHIMES three. LIGHTNING FLASHES, and we hear OFFSTAGE THUNDER. CHRISTIE ENTERS LEFT, holding a candle. She turns on a lamp. When she sees that it works, she blows the candle out. She looks about the room and looks at the pictures of past members of the Raven Society as she walks backwards, crossing behind a chair. CHRISTIE screams as she backs right into POE.

POE: (*Rises.*) It's all right, Agatha! It's just me.

CHRISTIE: Edgar! Do you want to give an old lady a heart attack?

POE: I beg your pardon, dear lady.

CHRISTIE: What were you doing hiding behind a chair like that?

POE: I... I couldn't sleep.

CHRISTIE: So you hide behind a chair?

POE: Actually, I was doing a bit of sleuthing when I heard you come down the hallway.

CHRISTIE: Inspector Dupin at work?

POE: (*Cunning.*) And I'm looking at Miss Marple in all her glory?

CHRISTIE: I couldn't sleep, either!

POE: It's not characteristic of us to just roll over and play dead, is it?

PRODUCTION NOTES

PROPERTIES LIST

ON STAGE: Podium, comfortable chairs and/or a couch, fireplace tools, table with at least one chair, at least one bookshelf with books, pictures of famous authors on the walls, pictures of all past members of the Raven Society, Smoking Gun Award (a bronze or silver gun mounted on a base, a bronze plaque attached), The Dagger Award (a small knife thrust into a bronzed book), an old fashioned clock either on the mantel or on the wall.

BROUGHT ON, ACT ONE, Scene One: Knitting and knitting bag (CHRISTIE); pen and paper (SHELLEY); magnifying glass (DOYLE); quill pen, knife, two stuffed bags of mail with messages (POE); handkerchief (SHAKESPEARE); handkerchief (DICKINSON).

BROUGHT ON, ACT ONE, Scene Two: Candle (CHRISTIE); book (POE); magnifying glass, deerstalker hat (DOYLE); sash (ALCOTT); tea tray (CHRISTIE); newspaper clipping (SHELLEY); files (POE).

BROUGHT ON, ACT ONE, Scene Three: Lit candle (TWIN, ALCOTT); bathing cap (TWIN); small box with "snake" inside, old fashioned keys (POE); rolling pin (DANGLON).

ON STAGE, ACT TWO, Scene One: Christie's knitted sweater.

BROUGHT ON, ACT TWO, Scene One: Hot water bottle (SHAKESPEARE); needlepoint sampler (ALCOTT); tea kettle (DANGLON); bathing cap, robe, torn swimming suit (POE).

ON STAGE, ACT TWO, Scene Two: Quill pen.

BROUGHT ON, ACT TWO, Scene Two: towel (DANGLON); dagger (CHRISTIE); dark gloves, cell phone, adapter (SHELLEY).

ON STAGE, ACT TWO, Scene Three: Various dirty dishes, papers on table, cigar.

BROUGHT ON, ACT TWO, Scene Three: Gun (TWIN); rolling pin (SHELLEY).

SOUND EFFECTS: Clock chimes, thunder, Mozart recording, electrical surge, crackling sound. (Note: The Mozart piece use for this production should be immediately recognizable, but not



blatant. For example, the overture to “Die Zauberflote” is a piece that most people know, but not necessarily by name, and is from late enough in Mozart’s career that it shares some characteristics with Beethoven’s compositions.)

We hope you've enjoyed this script sample.

We encourage you to read the entire script before making your final decision.

You may order a paper preview copy or gain instant access to the complete script online through our E-view program. We invite you to learn more and create an account at www.pioneerdrama.com/E-view.

Thank you for your interest in our plays and musicals. If you'd like advice on other plays or musicals to read, our customer service representatives are happy to assist you when you call 800.333.7262 during normal business hours.



www.pioneerdrama.com

800.333.7262

Outside of North America 303.779.4035

Fax 303.779.4315

PO Box 4267

Englewood, CO 80155-4267

We're here to help!