Three Doors to Death
or... The Choice is Yours
A Murder-Mystery Entertainment

By Keith Jackson

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THREE DOORS TO DEATH
or... The Choice Is Yours

An Interactive Murder-Mystery Entertainment
Book By KEITH JACKSON

CHARACTERS
(In Order of Speaking)

AUDREY THAXTER amateur actress
GORDON FORREST murder victim
PHYLLIS LOVE another amateur actress
PAUL WESTERFIELD amateur actor
JEANNETTE MARSH community theatre director
DETective WOOLRICH investigates murder
BArbara Lloyd community theatre stage manager
DOLLY BRAY part-time cleaning woman
OFFICER GARRETT* works with Detective Woolrich

*Role of Officer Garrett can be played as male or female.

SYNOPSIS

The action takes place on the stage of a community theatre.

The present.
THREE DOORS TO DEATH

SETTING: STAGE RIGHT are six folding chairs, in something of a semicircle. STAGE LEFT is a desk or table and chair. UP RIGHT CENTER is a table for stage props. Chair beside it. To further suggest a "theatre" atmosphere, there might be some scenery stacked against the back stage wall, overhanging lights, work lamp, standing door frame, etc. Whatever looks good. ENTRANCES/EXITS STAGE RIGHT and STAGE LEFT. As the play begins, the STAGE is in BLACKNESS. In a moment we hear VOICES IN THE DARK. At first the VOICES seem terribly affected, like actors trying to sound verrrry British. A play is being rehearsed. [NOTE: Dialogue in "quotes" indicates dialogue from the play in rehearsal.]

AUDREY: "Here's your favorite wine glass, Uncle Harry."
GORDON: "Thank you, Cynthia."
PHYLLIS: "Why you should think that particular wine glass is charmed is something I'll never understand."
GORDON: "That doesn't surprise me, my dear."
PAUL: "Allow me to fill your glass, brother Harry." (Now comes the VOICE of the inner-play's DIRECTOR, giving guidance.)
JEANNETTE: Good, good. So far, good. Don't lose your British accents. Keep up the pacing.

OTHERS: Right.
JEANNETTE: Speak out loud and clear.
GORDON: (Voice up.) "A toast. To health, wealth and good fortune."
ACTORS: "To health, wealth and good fortune." (Naturally, we can't see the actors, but we assume they taste the wine.)
GORDON: (Savoring the taste.) "Excellent bouquet, excellent taste, sweet without being sentimental."
ACTORS: "Ahhhhhh." (Suddenly, GORDON begins to make some TERRIBLE THROAT SOUNDS. GASPING for breath as he chokes. The VOICES forget about the play they're rehearsing and register genuine alarm.)
PAUL: Gordon, what's happening?
BARBARA: What's wrong?!
AUDREY: Help him! He's choking!
PHYLLIS: Look at his face. He's turning blue!
GORDON: AAAAAuuuuugh... (Sound of GORDON'S body hitting the floor with a thud.)
AUDREY: He's fallen!
JEANNETTE: Gordon!!
PAUL: I'll take care of this. *(PAUL, if we could see him, would be investigating the body on the floor.)*

AUDREY: *(Tentative.*) Is he... all right?

PAUL: I don't see how he can be. *(Pause.*) He's dead.

OTHERS: *(Incredulous.*) Dead? *(JEANNETTE SCREAMS. In the darkness, all but GORDON EXIT UP RIGHT. Long pause. Slowly the LIGHTS COME UP somewhat to reveal the community theatre stage. A corpse [GORDON FORREST] is face down on the floor LEFT CENTER. A few seconds more pass. The corpse groans. He gets up, brushing dirt from his trousers.)*

GORDON: *(To no one in particular.*) Murder can be such a nuisance. *(Notices audience.* Oh. There you are. *(He walks DOWNSTAGE, addresses audience. NOTE: Depending on the auditorium's sight lines, some will notice the corpse's body has been outlined in white chalk on the STAGE FLOOR.)* I don't know who "done me in," as they used to say in British mystery thrillers. But I won't sleep easy in my coffin until I find out. That's where you come in. I'll need your help. *(A police detective, WOOLRICH, ENTERS DOWN LEFT. Wears the inevitable trench or raincoat.)*

WOOLRICH: If you don't mind, Mr. Forrest, I'm in charge of this investigation.

GORDON: Only trying to help.

WOOLRICH: Leave it to a professional. Besides, you're dead. Beat it.

GORDON: Call me if you need me.

WOOLRICH: I'll do that. *(GORDON EXITS RIGHT. WOOLRICH moves DOWN CENTER. Speaks to audience.)* Name's Woolrich. Detective Woolrich. Homicide. I'm the investigator in charge. A murder has been committed on the stage of our local community theatre. You've already met the stiff. Pardon. I meant to say, the victim. It's me you're assisting, not him. Murder took place three days ago, during a rehearsal of some dumb play. Just so you'll understand, I'll stop the action every once in awhile, and you can tell me how I should proceed. We work together. Got that? Okay, okay. Good. I gave you the scene of the crime. The time was early evening. No wounds on the body. What we need are suspects. *(On cue, from UP RIGHT ENTER PHYLLIS, AUDREY, PAUL, JEANNETTE, BARBARA. Last in line is
DOLLY, with a mop, apron and hair net. PHYLLIS turns sharply at UP CENTER and walks directly DOWNSTAGE. The OTHERS follow in a straight line behind her. As each character introduces herself/himself to audience, said character returns to the end of the line.)

PHYLLIS: Phyllis Love. (Dirty look to WOOLRICH, who has stepped DOWN LEFT.) I was an actress in the "dumb" play. Leading lady.

AUDREY: Audrey Thaxter. Another actress. I usually play the sweet young thing.

PAUL: Paul Westerfield. (With fierce dignity.) Actor!!

JEANNETTE: Jeannette Marsh. Exceptionally talented director.

BARBARA: Barbara Lloyd. Stage manager and props.

DOLLY: Dolly Bray, part-time cleaning woman. I only do it to pass the time. I don't need the job. I've got plenty of money set aside. I like to feel useful. (At this point, PHYLLIS is, once again, at the head of the line.)

WOOLRICH: (To audience.) Like the stiff... er, uh... the victim wanted to know, "Whodunnit?" Okay, so what have we got? The scene of the crime, the approximate time, the suspects. What else should we be looking for? Motive or how the murder was committed? (WOOLRICH listens as the audience answers. Most will go for "Motive." Some for "How the murder was committed." If the vote for "Motive" is loud and clear, WOOLRICH announces "Motive it is. Let's hear some motives." If, however, the vote goes for "How the murder was committed," WOOLRICH will point to someone in the front row who voted for "Motive" and ask, "What did you say?" When front row AUDIENCE MEMBER answers "Motive," WOOLRICH quickly announces, "Motive it is. Let's hear some motives." As the motives are announced, WOOLRICH sits on edge of desk, observes and listens. The motives are announced in a crisp, no-nonsense manner.)

PHYLLIS: I had an excellent motive. Gordon Forrest was blackmailing me. I come from a very wealthy, socially prominent family. To put it bluntly, I'm filthy rich and highly respected. But he knew I was a kleptomaniac. That's right, I steal things. Not because I need the things or even want them. It's all mixed up with psychiatry. Gordon threatened to tell the media unless I paid off. The scandal would have destroyed my family and ruined my reputation. Did I kill him or not? You decide. (PHYLLIS goes to end of
line, as do OTHERS when they finish statement.)

AUDREY: I'm not surprised Gordon turned out to be a blackmailer. He was a bad sort. But, oh, so charming and hard to resist. We were getting married, or, at least, that's what people thought. The wedding invitations were already in the mail and he just dumped me. You can imagine how awful it would be if I had to tell the guests the wedding was off. I'm glad he's dead. I didn't know how to tell everyone the truth that I was dumped. Did poor, penniless Audrey kill him or not? You decide.

PAUL: You've heard it before, I'm sure. An actor would kill for a good part. Community theatre is my life. It's all I live for. But Gordon Forrest always got the good roles. The best lines. It was all community theatre politics. I should have gotten Gordon's role in the "dumb" play, but I didn't. He always took what rightfully belonged to me. I'm a brilliant actor. Ask Jeannette. He was never better than mediocre. Did I get rid of the competition? Did I kill him or not? You decide.

JEANNETTE: I simply don't know what to say. I certainly had no reason to "off" the man. *(Corrects herself.)* I mean, murder the victim. He was always on time for rehearsals and he always knew his lines.

BARBARA: I might have done it. Could have been revenge. Y'see, I was married to Gordon Forrest. He ran out on me years ago. He got quite a shock when I turned up again. I enjoyed watching him squirm. Maybe it wasn't revenge. Maybe I murdered him to protect Audrey. Did I kill him or not? You decide.

DOLLY: I don't know nothing about nothing. Right now I'd like to be home feeding the citizens in my fish tanks.

WOOLRICH: *(Off the desk.)* Hmmm. We have at least three strong motives to work with. Should I book Phyllis Love? Or should I book Audrey Thaxter? Or should I book Paul Westerfield? You decide. *(Obviously, the audience reply will be a scramble of names. Some naming PHYLLIS, some AUDREY, some PAUL. Even one of the OTHERS. WOOLRICH holds up his hands to quiet down the audience.)* Whoa, whoa, folks. I can't book 'em all. You can only stretch circumstantial evidence so far before it snaps back in your face. I think we'd better do some more investigating. What do you say, yes or no? *(Chances are the replies will be both "Yes" and "No." If the "Yes" vote is
overwhelming, WOOLRICH says, "Okay. More investigating it is." If, however, the reply is an overwhelming "No," WOOLRICH, as before, will point to someone in the audience who answered "Yes" and ask, "What did you say?" When AUDIENCE MEMBER repeats "Yes," WOOLRICH retorts, "Okay. More investigating it is." To OTHERS.) If you'll take seats, please. (OTHERS sit in folding chairs. OFFICER GARRETT ENTERS UP RIGHT with a fairly large evidence box. He or she crosses to WOOLRICH, who is now seated behind the desk. He takes out a large envelope and hands it over.)

OFFICER GARRETT: Here's that material you requested, Detective Woolrich.

WOOLRICH: (Takes envelope, checks inside.) Thanks, Garrett. (To OTHERS.) I think you all know Officer Garrett.

JEANNETTE: We're not likely to forget him [her]. He was the first officer on the scene.

WOOLRICH: Scene of the crime, you mean.

JEANNETTE: Naturally.

PAUL: (To WOOLRICH.) "Scene," "Scene of the crime." Why quibble over words? We talked to him before we talked to you. What does it matter?

AUDREY: I thought this building was supposed to be sealed off.

DOLLY: Sticky yellow tape on the doors. Nasty stuff. I'll have to use Goo Gone.

WOOLRICH: The building can be re-opened. The department's got all the information it needs from the crime scene.

BARBARA: Such as?

WOOLRICH: Tell 'em, Garrett. It's okay.

GARRETT: Anything the coroner's office required. Forensics. DNA. Photographs were taken of everything on the stage. Evidence bagged. I took plenty of notes.

JEANNETTE: I recall.

PHYLLIS: It's so gruesome to think about. At first we all thought poor Gordon choked to death when the wine went down the wrong way.

DOLLY: It's not unheard of.

PAUL: I couldn't believe it when I heard he'd been poisoned.

BARBARA: And I can't imagine what new information anyone can give you, Detective Woolrich.

WOOLRICH: Purely routine.

PHYLLIS: We've already told everything we know.
PAUL: Several times.
WOOLRICH: Never can tell. Someone may have forgotten something.
AUDREY: Like what?
WOOLRICH: That's what I'm hoping to find out. (Indicates evidence box.) Why don't you put that on the prop table, Garrett? Take a seat.
GARRETT: Yes, sir. (He crosses to prop table and puts the evidence box atop. Sits by prop table. From inside the box, he takes out a pair of surgical or rubber gloves. Puts them on to protect exhibits.)
WOOLRICH: I appreciate everyone showing up.
PAUL: What choice did we have?
DOLLY: Cops on my doorstep day and night.
PHYLLIS: Police pestering neighbors.
AUDREY: Answering the same questions over and over.
WOOLRICH: Patience, ladies and gentlemen. Patience. I'll make this as painless as possible.
DOLLY: (Scoffs.) What are you? A policeman or a dentist?
JEANNETTE: That's not funny, Dolly.
PHYLLIS: Neither is murder. (WOOLRICH removes some paper from the large envelope. Looking at it, he stands.)
WOOLRICH: The coroner's initial report stated Gordon Forrest was probably poisoned.
BARBARA: Probably?
PAUL: You mean he wasn't?
WOOLRICH: I mean the coroner was unable to identify the poison immediately.
PHYLLIS: Isn't that rather unusual?
WOOLRICH: Not if the poison is extremely rare.
AUDREY: Was it?
WOOLRICH: In this country, yes. (Waves paper.) This is a copy of the toxicology report. The poison that killed Gordon Forrest is nearly always lethal. Once the toxin enters the bloodstream, death is almost instantaneous. A few seconds, that's all.
JEANNETTE: (Feathers ruffled.) Obviously, you're suggesting the prop wine, which was nothing but grape juice, was poisoned.
WOOLRICH: Am I?
AUDREY: How could it be the grape juice? We all sipped a glass poured from the same decanter.
WOOLRICH: Perhaps the poison was in the glass Gordon
Forrest used. Not in the decanter.

BARBARA: I resent that. I handled all the props for the rehearsal. There was nothing in that glass.

AUDREY: Someone might have dropped something in when you weren't looking.

BARBARA: I tell you, the glass was empty.

WOOLRICH: Hmmmm, I have an idea. (To audience.) What do you think? Shall we restage the murder and look for clues? You decide. (Regardless of a "Yes" or "No," WOOLRICH says "Thank you.") Miss Marsh.

JEANNETTE: Yes?

WOOLRICH: I'd like you to tell me, again, what happened the night of the murder. The rehearsal. Exactly as you remember it. Describe the set.

JEANNETTE: (Exasperated.) Oh, very well. If you insist.

WOOLRICH: We'd appreciate it. (JEANNETTE stands, speaks to audience.)

JEANNETTE: We were rehearsing a play called Three Doors To Death. It's a murder mystery.

WOOLRICH: (To audience, with a wink.) We assumed that by the title. (JEANNETTE moves about describing this and that.)

JEANNETTE: The setting is a library in a large manor house on the English moors. Early eighteen hundreds.

WOOLRICH: Uh-huh.

JEANNETTE: There are three doors into the room. (Points DOWN RIGHT.) One door leads to a small study. (Points DOWN LEFT.) Another door leads to a hallway that opens onto the gardens. (Points UPSTAGE.) Another door leads into the main part of the house. (As JEANNETTE speaks, the STAGE LIGHTING DIMS DOWN somewhat to suggest a flashback. With the exception of JEANNETTE and BARBARA, ALL LEAVE the scene. WOOLRICH EXITS LEFT, GARRETT RIGHT. AUDREY, PHYLLIS and PAUL EXIT LEFT. BARBARA moves to prop table. DOLLY EXITS RIGHT. JEANNETTE continues to describe the inner-play's set. Points RIGHT.) A fireplace there. (Points to desk.) The desk. Wine decanter and glasses on the top. (Points RIGHT, UPSTAGE a bit.) Armchair there. (She steps to one of the folding chairs and pulls it out for the "armchair." Clapping hands, she steps CENTER. The STAGE LIGHTING DIMS a bit more to emphasize we are now back to the time of the murder.) Everybody, please, I
want a good rehearsal. You ready with props, Barbara?
BARBARA: I've got most of them. (DOLLY ENTERS RIGHT.)
DOLLY: You want me to sweep the stage, Miss Marsh?
JEANNETTE: Not now, Dolly. If you don't mind.
DOLLY: I don't mind.
JEANNETTE: Can't you see we're rehearsing? (DOLLY
notices "armchair.")
DOLLY: The armchair don't belong that far out. (JEANNETTE
sighs with irritation. DOLLY returns "armchair" to position
it held before JEANNETTE moved it. DOLLY picks up and
pats imaginary pillow, replaces it.) That's better. Nice
pillow.
JEANNETTE: Dolly, Three Doors To Death already has a
stage manager.
DOLLY: I like to feel I'm part of the team.
JEANNETTE: (Coolly.) I'll let you know when you can sweep
up.
DOLLY: (Huffy.) I don't have to do this work, y'know. I've got
money. (DOLLY EXITS RIGHT. JEANNETTE sighs again.)
JEANNETTE: Can we PLEASE get on with the rehearsal?
Begin. (AUDREY, PHYLLIS and PAUL ENTER from LEFT.
We are now re-enacting the fatal rehearsal. Again,
dialogue "in quotes" indicates dialogue from Three Doors
To Death. British accents badly done, exaggerated.)
AUDREY: "Ha, ha, ha. You're a witty fellow, George."
(JEANNETTE steps EXTREME DOWN RIGHT, observes
rehearsal.)
PAUL: "Am I?"
PHYLLIS: "You kept us laughing on the moors."
AUDREY/PHYLLIS: "Ha, ha, ha."
PAUL: "If you say I'm witty on the moors, then I must be witty
on the moors. If one must be on the moors, one might as
well be witty."
TRIO: "Ha, ha, ha." (GORDON ENTERS from UP RIGHT,
pretends to open UP CENTER door.)
GORDON: "I say, back from the moors so soon, are we?"
PHYLLIS: (Crosses to armchair, pats the "pillow.") "Sit here,
sir. Close to the fire. It will warm your gout."
GORDON: "Don't mind if I do." (Pretending to walk with a
game foot, GORDON crosses and sits in "armchair.")
PAUL: "I think a glass of a..." (A mistake.) ...grape juice...
(Catches himself.) Oops. Sorry, Jeannette.

End of Script Sample
PRODUCTION NOTES

ON STAGE: Folding chairs (8), table for props, desk, OPTIONAL atmospheric touches: scenery against the stage wall, work lamp, etc.

BROUGHT ON: Trench or raincoat (WOOLRICH); mop, apron, hair net (DOLLY); pad and pencil, handcuffs, box [yellow or red, if possible] for evidence exhibits: large envelope with official reports, surgeon's gloves [or rubber gloves], blowgun in plastic bag, prop fish in plastic bag, hand bell (OFFICER GARRETT); tiny bottle (KILLER).

MISCELLANEOUS: In the opening, when the stage is in darkness, make certain the dialogue is spoken LOUD and CLEAR. Mainly because audience, for a few seconds, will assume something is wrong with the lights. Since they don't see what's briefly going on, they MUST HEAR.

Another way to go with the opening scene is to have the dialogue spoken through LOUDSPEAKERS or pre-recorded. Although this technique will prove most effective, it's not really necessary.

THE DECISION IS YOURS: In most instances, the audience will play along with the script as written. But to make sure this is the case, you may want to plant one or two "stooges" in the front row. This way, WOOLRICH can point to one or the other when he wants to make sure he gets the right response.

WOOLRICH, of course, must be ready for any surprise the audience comes up with. That is, if the audience gets a mite unruly, he can step DOWNSTAGE and motion audience quiet with "Calm down, folks. Calm down. We've got a murder to solve." Or "Trust me. I know what I'm doing." In short, WOOLRICH is in control at all times.

If you wish, JEANNETTE can be switched to a male role: JOHNNY MARSH. DETECTIVE WOOLRICH might also be played as female.

Some OPTIONAL MOOD MUSIC before and after the flashback might prove effective.
We hope you’ve enjoyed this script sample.

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