

LITTLE MISS MURDER

By
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LITTLE MISS MURDER

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

- Lucille Meadows: Female, 30s-40s; film star; glamorous; driven
- Karl Von Brandt: Male, 30s-40s; Lucille's husband; German-born star of silent films who now plays bits part due to his accent; a bit of a lush and a philanderer
- Hildie Kammerdiener: Female, 40s-50s; German-born maid to Lucille and Karl; stern; wary
- Freddy Castle: Male, 30s-40s; a film comedian; gay but closeted; comic persona masks insecurity
- Anita Stanley: Female, 20s; budding film actress; insecure; conniving
- Eloise Raleigh: Female, 30s-40s; African American film actress; practical; good-natured persona masks disappointment
- Audrey O'Rourke: Female, 10-12; ten-year-old child film star; spoiled; precocious
- Hazel O'Rourke: Female, 30s-40s; mother and manager of Audrey; protective; ambitious
- Abe Aarons: Male, 40s-60s; head of the film studio; tough; cagey
- Vivienne de Vries: Female, 40s-50s; a gossip columnist; polished; manipulative; vindictive

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Although the events and characters depicted in *Little Miss Murder* are fictional, the play is rooted in historical reality. Leon Lewis, a Jewish lawyer, World War I veteran, and founding executive secretary of the Anti-Defamation League, was instrumental in the fight against a series of Nazi plots during the 1930s in Southern California. Lewis recruited mostly German-American World War I veterans along with their wives and daughters as a cadre of spies to work as informants within the American Nazi party. They successfully foiled the Nazi plot referred to in the play (the attempted assassination of twenty-four top Hollywood moguls and film stars) along with several other nefarious schemes including a machine gun attack on a predominately Jewish Los Angeles neighborhood, a conspiracy to create a fake fumigation company to covertly gas Jewish families in their homes, and a plan to blow up a munitions plant in San Diego.

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ACT I

November, 1937. The Beverly Hills home of film star LUCILLE MEADOWS and her husband KARL VON BRANDT. The front door to the house is accessed through an entry hall leading offstage. There are three other doors/doorways. One leads to the main hallway off of which, unseen, are a powder room, a study, and a guest room. Another leads to a small vestibule that accesses the kitchen. A third leads to the cellar. Furniture includes a sofa, one or two comfortable armchairs, an end table or two, and a cocktails table that serves as a bar. There may also be two or three extra chairs that have been moved in from the dining room. It is nearing 8:00 PM on a Friday. Lucille and Karl are in the midst of one of their not infrequent rows. Lucille speaks with a movie studio-engrained Mid-Atlantic accent. She is dressed in fashionable eveningwear and is busy making last minute preparations for a small party. Dressed in his shirtsleeves and a loosened tie, his suit coat thrown over the back of a chair, Karl is nursing a drink and smoking a cigarette. He speaks with a marked Germanic accent.

LUCILLE. *(To Karl, as she pours nuts into a dish.)* They're going to be here any minute, Karl. *(Karl doesn't budge. Lucille continues, now more perturbed.)* Karl? Did you hear what I said?

KARL. *(Passive aggressively.)* Yes, I heard.

LUCILLE. Well? *(Karl looks at Lucille.)* Are you going to greet our guests like that?

KARL. *Our* guests? I certainly didn't invite them.

LUCILLE. You know, darling, I always host a wrap party on the last day of shooting.

KARL. You needn't remind me, dearest.

LUCILLE. *(As if speaking to a three-year-old.)* And since *Little Miss Miracle* finished shooting today, the party is tonight. Capeesh?

KARL. But why all the fuss? You're making too much of it, Lucille.

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LUCILLE. Oh, *I'm* making too much, am I?

KARL. Just look at you –

LUCILLE. (*Interrupting.*) Because apparently, darling, there are *some* things you *don't* mind me making too much of –

KARL. (*Interrupting.*) Lucille –

LUCILLE. (*Continuing.*) For instance, *money*. Am I making too much *money*, dearest? Do you have a problem with the *money* I make?

KARL. And off we go ...

LUCILLE. I mean, after all, *one* of us has to bring home the bacon, as they say.

KARL. (*Somewhat snidely.*) “Bacon,” Lucille? In *this* house?

LUCILLE. I'll pretend you didn't say that. And the very nerve – *you* get to live the life of Reilly around here while *I* slave day and night down at the studio.

KARL. I work too, you know –

LUCILLE. Playing two-bit parts in B pictures every few months?

KARL. What about my role in *Secret Passage* last year? I had fourth billing in that film.

LUCILLE. For someone with fourth billing, you were practically invisible.

KARL. Is it my fault my best scenes ended up on the cutting room floor?

LUCILLE. I heard they looked better there than in the film.

KARL. And just where did you hear that?

LUCILLE. Straight from the horse's mouth – your director.

KARL. That no-talent little worm?

LUCILLE. That no-talent little worm just happens to be working on a film for Warner Brothers with Bette Davis and Humphrey Bogart –

KARL. (*Interrupting.*) I'll send Bogie my condolences –

LUCILLE. (*Interrupting, continuing.*) – and he told me, what with your drunken slurring on top of that impenetrable accent, that most of your lines were completely unintelligible –

KARL. (*Interrupting, mocking Lucille's Mid-Atlantic accent.*) At least my accent is *my* accent, darling! (*Lucille glares at him.*)

LUCILLE. (*Interrupting, continuing.*) – which is probably why you haven't worked in the last six months! (*HILDIE KAMMERDIENER, the*

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maid in the household, enters with a tray of glasses. She, too, speaks with a German accent, though not as pronounced as Karl's.)

KARL. How kind of you to point that out.

HILDIE. *(To Lucille.)* Miss Meadows?

KARL. *(To Hildie.)* You mean Mrs. Von Brandt? *(Karl rises to adjust his tie and don his suit coat.)*

LUCILLE. *(To Karl.)* Don't remind me.

HILDIE. Mrs. Von Brandt, where would you like the glasses?

LUCILLE. Just on the cocktails table, Hildie.

HILDIE. Yes, Missus. *(Hildie goes to set the glasses.)*

LUCILLE. And you're sure that's enough?

HILDIE. There are eight, yes?

LUCILLE. Did I say eight?

HILDIE. Yes, Missus. *(Throughout, Hildie is placing the glasses and getting the rest of the cocktails table in order.)*

LUCILLE. Did I? Well, let's see ... there'll be Freddy and whomever he brings as his date for the evening ...

KARL. You mean his *beard* for the evening.

LUCILLE. *(Glaring at Karl.)* So that's two. And, of course, Audrey –

KARL. *(Interrupting, complaining.)* That *child* is going to be here?

LUCILLE. That *child* is the reason the picture got made.

KARL. *(Referring to his drink.)* And the reason I'm going to need another one of these.

LUCILLE. *(Resuming her dialogue with Hildie.)* And Audrey's mother –

KARL. *(Interrupting.)* I'll make it a double.

LUCILLE. *(Ignoring Karl, continuing.)* And there's Eloise, of course. I don't think she's bringing anyone. Oh – and Abe, obviously –

HILDIE. *(Taking special notice.)* He is coming – Mr. Aarons?

KARL. Why do you think Lucille is in such a state? Of course, that *Hurensohn* [son of a bitch] is coming. *(Hildie reacts to Karl's insult.)*

LUCILLE. That “son of a bitch” runs the studio and signs my paychecks. You remember *paychecks*, don't you, darling?

HILDIE. *(Starting to leave.)* Is that all, Missus?

LUCILLE. I believe it is – yes ... *(Reconsidering.)* No, no, wait. I think Vivi might be tagging along with Abe.

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KARL. You can't be serious.

HILDIE. Who, Missus?

KARL. Vivienne de Vries.

LUCILLE. You must have heard of her. She writes the gossip column for the *Examiner*, "Glove Letters"?

HILDIE. "Glove Letters," Missus?

LUCILLE. Yes, they're her trademark. Vivi always wears gloves, whatever the occasion.

KARL. To cover her claws, no doubt. Why the hell did you invite her, Lucille?

LUCILLE. As if I had a choice –

KARL. (*Interrupting.*) You know she has it in for me –

LUCILLE. (*Interrupting.*) She was lurking around the sound stage this morning – you know how she does – and she overheard me with Abe. She practically invited herself.

HILDIE. So, then all together eight?

LUCILLE. Yes, eight, I think. (*Hildie starts to leave.*) Oh, Hildie – wait. Make it ten – or better yet, an even dozen. You never know who's told whom about these things.

HILDIE. *Ser guht* [Very good], Missus. (*Hildie starts to leave.*)

LUCILLE. (*Glaring at Karl but addressing Hildie before she's exited.*) Oh, and make sure we're well stocked with cognac for Mr. Aarons.

HILDIE. (*Exiting.*) Yes, Missus.

KARL. So that's your plan, *ja* [yes]? To get Abe Aarons stewed enough to cast you in that part you're dying to play?

LUCILLE. Just what are you saying, darling? That Abe would have to be drunk to even *consider* me for the role of Rose McNamara?

KARL. I'm saying it won't matter *how* drunk you get him, dearest. *Forever in My Heart* is the most anticipated film of the decade –

LUCILLE. (*Interrupting.*) – which I happen to be perfect for, by the way –

KARL. (*Interrupting, continuing.*) – and the studio is not about to give the starring role to an actress who has just been labeled "box office poison" –

LUCILLE. (*Interrupting angrily.*) I told you I didn't want to hear that again!

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KARL. (*Interrupting, vindictively.*) – “box office poison,” my dear, by theatre owners across the country.

LUCILLE. Who pays any attention to that bunch of babbitts anyway?

KARL. RKO for one. They seemed only too happy to get rid of Kate Hepburn.

LUCILLE. Well, Paragon Studios is not about to cancel my contract, I can tell you that. I’ve been carrying them since the silents.

KARL. Look at the others on that list: Norma Shearer, Marlene Dietrich, Joan Crawford ...

LUCILLE. My point exactly. Joan has just signed a new million-dollar, five-year contract!

KARL. We’ll see how long that lasts.

LUCILLE. You’re just *so* jealous.

KARL. Not that again.

LUCILLE. (*Trotting out a claim she’s made again and again.*) Your star faded when the talkies hit, while mine just grew brighter – and you can’t stand that, can you?

KARL. (*More genuine.*) What I can’t stand, my dear, is how different you are now from the young girl who liked nothing more than getting a pie in the face.

LUCILLE. (*Also more genuine.*) And how different *you* are from that dashing young lover who made all the girls swoon – including me.

KARL. (*A little wistful.*) Including you.

LUCILLE. (*Jaded again.*) But that was a long time ago.

KARL. (*Disappointed.*) Not so long really. (*Then vindictive again.*) And as you well know, Lucille, I can still make the girls swoon when it suits my fancy.

LUCILLE. *Touché*, darling. Your trouble is keeping it in your pants.

KARL. And yours is wanting to *wear* the pants.

LUCILLE. And why shouldn’t I? I’m the one with hordes of fans who love me. And Paragon Studios, I assure you, is well aware of that.

KARL. I’m not arguing with that, *liebchen* [sweetheart]. (*Moving to the cocktails table to refresh his drink.*) But there are some things the studio *doesn’t* know.

LUCILLE. Just exactly what are you implying?

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KARL. *(Raising his glass to her.)* We've all done things of which we are not proud, dearest.

LUCILLE. If that's a threat, darling, I'd like to remind you who pays for that gin you're drinking.

KARL. *Danke, meine Liebe* [Thank you, my love]. And I'd like to remind you who knows all your secrets. *(Lucille is silent, her eyes shooting daggers at Karl.)* So, if you'd like my cooperation, my dear, you will mind your manners.

LUCILLE. You're not really going to lecture me on manners, are you?

KARL. As you say, *touché*, darling. *(The doorbell rings.)*

LUCILLE. *(Calling.)* Hildie?

HILDIE. *(Off.)* Coming, Missus.

LUCILLE. *(To Karl.)* I'll mind my manners, Karl. You see you do the same.

KARL. Of course, dearest. *(Hildie has gone to the offstage front door to let in the first guest to arrive: FREDDY CASTLE, a comedian who is Lucille's co-star on the film that's just completed production. Freddy has brought along a pretty young actress, ANITA STANLEY, who had a bit part in the film. They enter, with Hildie following.)*

LUCILLE. Freddy!

FREDDY. Hiya, doll! You remember –

LUCILLE. *(Interrupting.)* Of course, I do. It's ... it's Juanita, isn't it?

FREDDY. Close but no cigar.

ANITA. It's Anita, Miss Meadows. Anita Stanley.

LUCILLE. Oh, of course it is. And I'm not Miss Meadows. I'm Lucille.

KARL. *(To Lucille, giving Anita the once-over.)* And whom do we have here, darling?

LUCILLE. This is ... um –

ANITA. Anita Stanley.

LUCILLE. My husband Karl.

ANITA. How do you do, Mr. Meadows?

KARL. *(A dig at Lucille.)* And I'm definitely not Mr. Meadows, my dear. Please – call me Karl.

ANITA. With pleasure. I'm just honored to be here. *(Taking in her surroundings.)* Oh, Miss Meadows, your house is simply gorgeous!

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LUCILLE. I'll give you the grand tour later.

ANITA. It's a far cry from my little apartment in Larchmont, believe me.

FREDDY. Hiya, Karl. How's tricks?

KARL. (*Confused.*) "Tricks"?

FREDDY. You know what I mean – got any irons in the fire?

KARL. Oh, that. I thought – never mind –

LUCILLE. (*Interrupting, re-directing.*) Karl, maybe Freddy would like a drink?

FREDDY. No "maybe" about it. How about a martini? (*Karl goes to the cocktails table to mix martinis.*)

LUCILLE. You got it. Anita?

ANITA. Oh, I really shouldn't ...

KARL. But we all do things we shouldn't – isn't that right, Lucille?
(*Lucille gives Karl a look.*) Isn't that right, Freddy?

FREDDY. (*Unsure what Karl is implying.*) I mean, yeah, I guess. What's the fun in only doing what you're supposed to, right?

KARL. A man after my own heart.

ANITA. Well, all right then – but just a *teeny* martini.

FREDDY. Make mine *not* so teeny, okay?

KARL. So, Freddy, what's next for you?

FREDDY. As a matter of fact, Paragon's loaning me out to Metro for a picture with Bill Powell and Myrna Loy.

KARL. Not another *Thin Man*?

FREDDY. (*Surprised.*) Yeah – how'd you know?

KARL. I just assumed –

FREDDY. (*Laughing.*) No, no, no – I mean, that's actually the title of the picture – *Another Thin Man*!

KARL. And just how much did they pay some brain trust to come up with that?

FREDDY. (*Laughing.*) No kidding!

ANITA. Oh, I don't know ... I think it's kinda clever. (*Karl and Freddy look at Anita.*) I mean, yeah, it's corny, but so what? People love corn.

FREDDY. Yeah, they gobble it up! (*Freddy does a loud and boisterous "chomping on corn" bit using Anita's arm as an ear of corn. She*

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grudgingly goes along with the gag. By this time, Lucille is bringing the drinks to Freddy and Anita.)

ANITA. *(Peeved, pulling her arm away from Freddy.)* All right, Freddy, enough. *(Then taking the drink from Lucille.)* Thank you, Lucille. *(Then back to Freddy and Karl.)* But really – I get a kick outta that Nick and Nora Charles – even when they’re tracking down some murderer, they’re just the epitome of elegance. *(She pronounces “epitome” as “epitoam.”)*

LUCILLE. *(With a look to Freddy and Karl.)* Oh, absolutely. *(Lucille returns to the cocktails table to pour herself a drink.)*

KARL. So, Anita, are you involved in ... um ... Lucille and Freddy’s picture? I’m sorry, the title escapes me ...

ANITA. *Little Miss Miracle.*

KARL. And indeed, you are, my dear.

LUCILLE. You’ll have to excuse my husband. It seems he just can’t help himself.

ANITA. Oh, I just have a bit part, really ...

FREDDY. But she made the most of it, I tell ya. She’s got real talent, this cutie.

ANITA. Oh, Freddy, you’re too sweet!

KARL. *(With innuendo.)* So, I’ve heard.

ANITA. Actually, Mr., ... um ...

KARL. *(Correcting her.)* No, no, no. *Karl*, please.

ANITA. *(Continuing, corrected.)* All right, *Karl* – I’m really hoping for a bigger part next time. I’m determined to make a success in the business – no matter what it takes.

KARL. *(With innuendo.)* I see ...

FREDDY. And no doubt you will, honey. No doubt at all.

KARL. She’s certainly got the looks for it, hasn’t she, Lucille?

ANITA. Why, thank you. That means a lot coming from you, Karl.

FREDDY. *(Going to Lucille at the cocktails table.)* Better look out, Lucille. I think your hubbie’s got a thing for this little patootie.

LUCILLE. *(To Freddy.)* Oh, I’m not worried. Karl knows where his bread is buttered.

FREDDY. *(Sotto voce to Lucille, a little campy.)* Ooh! That sounds delicious!

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LUCILLE. (*Laughing.*) Freddy, you're incorrigible.

FREDDY. I do my best. (*Anita, still with Karl, breaks into a peal of laughter. Lucille approaches.*)

LUCILLE. Is my husband minding his manners?

ANITA. (*Giggling.*) For the most part!

LUCILLE. (*With some bite.*) Just checking.

KARL. My wife keeps track of every move I make. She's a lot like Stalin – but without the bushy moustache.

LUCILLE. You know, darling, if you trimmed *your* moustache just a bit, you'd look a lot like that other little fellow.

FREDDY. Chaplin?

LUCILLE. Hitler. (*The doorbell rings. Hildie enters, crossing to answer the door.*)

FREDDY. Hey, you two, better lay off those kinda gags. You never know who's listening nowadays – Nazis, Reds, no telling. (*Hildie momentarily pauses, noticing what Freddy has said, then continues off to the door.*)

LUCILLE. (*Indicating her hair.*) Freddy, the only thing that's "red" in this house is attached to my scalp.

KARL. Are you sure about that, darling? (*Lucille glares at Karl.*) I mean, deep down underneath? All the way to the root?

FREDDY. Watch it, Karl. You know how sensitive dames are about their beauty secrets.

KARL. But you forget, Freddy – I'm the husband. I know all the secrets. (*ELOISE RALIEGH, an African American film actress, enters, with Hildie following.*)

LUCILLE. Eloise, sweetheart! I'm so glad you made it.

ELOISE. (*Joking.*) Believe you me, honey, I am too. My taxi driver must've thought this was Indianapolis and we were in the 500.

LUCILLE. I know what you mean. Those radio comics are always making jokes about New York cab drivers, but the ones out here are twice as bad, aren't they? Hildie, take Miss Raleigh's wrap, would you?

HILDIE. Yes, Missus. (*Hildie takes Eloise's wrap.*)

ELOISE. Thank you, Hildie.

HILDIE. *Bitte.* [You're welcome.] (*Hildie exits.*)

KARL. (*Approaching Eloise.*) It's a pleasure to see you, Eloise.

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ELOISE. And you, Karl. Thanks so much for having me again.

LUCILLE. Of course.

ELOISE. I have to say, Lucille, these wrap parties of yours are one of the highlights of working on a picture with you.

KARL. But surely they can't compare with the lavish studio parties?

ELOISE. I guess, if you like that sort of thing – but these little *soirées* of Lucille's are much more my cup of tea. For one thing, I'm always invited, which isn't always the case at the studio.

LUCILLE. As far as I'm concerned, Eloise, it wouldn't be a party without you. I'm a long-time admirer of yours, you know?

ELOISE. (*Warmly.*) Well, the feeling is mutual.

FREDDY. (*With a campy Southern belle inflection.*) Why, Miss Eloise Raleigh – as ah live 'n' breathe!

ELOISE. (*Playing along.*) Ah do declare, it's Mr. Freddy Castle!

FREDDY. (*Still campy.*) Chahrmed, ah'm sure! (*Now laughing at his own silliness and switching to his regular voice.*) Hey, El, you remember Anita Stanley.

ELOISE. Um ... I'm not sure I've had the pleasure.

ANITA. I worked a couple of days on *Little Miss Miracle*.

ELOISE. (*Still unsure.*) Oh?

FREDDY. That scene where Audrey takes her piggy bank and tries to deposit it? Anita played the bank teller.

ELOISE. I wasn't in that scene, Freddy.

FREDDY. Sure you were ...

ANITA. No, Freddy ...

LUCILLE. Don't you remember – all of Eloise's scenes with us were shot on the penthouse set.

FREDDY. (*Still unconvinced.*) Is that right?

ANITA. (*Embarrassed.*) Freddy –

LUCILLE. Think about it. Eloise played my *maid* –

ELOISE. (*Interrupting, pointed.*) And maids who look like me don't go into banks with little girls who look like Audrey.

FREDDY. (*Embarrassed.*) I guess I wasn't thinking straight ...

KARL. (*Sotto voce to Anita.*) Ha! Not surprising. (*Anita laughs. Lucille glares.*)

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FREDDY. (*Oblivious, to Karl and Anita.*) What'd I miss?

ANITA. (*Still giggling with Karl.*) Just Karl being silly.

ELOISE. It's all right, Freddy. As far as Abe Aarons is concerned, I'm good for one thing and one thing only.

FREDDY. What are you talking about? You work more than Lucille and me put together.

ELOISE. And I bet I don't make *half* what you two do.

FREDDY. Maybe you need a better agent.

ELOISE. It's not just the money ...

FREDDY. What do you mean?

ELOISE. I *mean* that I'm an actress, Freddy! Not to toot my own horn, but back in New York, I starred in plays and headlined musical shows –

LUCILLE. (*Interrupting.*) And all of it spectacularly! I can attest to that.

ELOISE. Hell, that's why Paragon signed me – because I was a box office draw. But instead of giving me the chance to really carry a picture, all Abe Aarons has me playing are maids and mummies. (*The doorbell rings.*)

LUCILLE. (*Calling off.*) Hildie!

HILDIE. (*Entering and heading to the front door.*) Coming, Missus.

ELOISE. I've even brought my own scripts to Abe – good scripts with parts I could really sink my teeth into.

FREDDY. And?

ELOISE. And nothing. Oh, he *says* he'll take a look at them when he's got the time – but I guarantee you they go straight into File 13.

FREDDY. That's our Abe.

ELOISE. I keep telling him – people will pay to see quality pictures with Negroes in the leads.

LUCILLE. Hear, hear!

KARL. But the studio bosses aren't going to finance them – least of all Abe Aarons.

LUCILLE. Oh, you never know – sometimes studio bosses can be persuaded.

KARL. (*As a dig to Lucille.*) We'll see ...

ELOISE. From your mouth to Abe Aarons' ear.

FREDDY. Even better, to his wallet! (*AUDREY O'ROURKE, a ten-year-old child star, enters, accompanied by her mother and manager HAZEL*

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O'ROURKE. Hildie follows.) And speaking of Abe's wallet, here's the little lady who keeps it fat and happy – *Little Miss Miracle* herself.

AUDREY. *(Shaking Freddy's hand politely.)* Hello, Mr. Castle.

FREDDY. *(With an exaggerated British accent, good-naturedly mocking Audrey's polite greeting.)* Oh, I say – good evening, Miss O'Rourke. How very, very kind of you to come. *(Now breaking his "act" and speaking in his regular voice.)* Aw, come on an' put 'er there, kiddo! *(He extends his hand, saying –)* You ready? Remember? Okay – “Alley oopsy!” *(Freddy has initiated a physical gag routine he and Audrey performed in the movie they've just completed. Audrey responds in kind, saying –)*

AUDREY. *(Completing the funny handshake/misdirection bit.)* “Oopsy daisy!”

FREDDY. *(Laughing.)* Aha! That's the ticket! You still got it, kiddo!

HAZEL. She ought to. If we practiced that ridiculous bit once, we practiced it a hundred times.

AUDREY. *(To Hazel.)* Only because you couldn't get it right.

HAZEL. *(A little dig at Freddy.)* Well, I'm not a professional clown, precious. I'm your mother.

LUCILLE. *(Redirecting the conversation, giving Audrey a kiss on her cheek.)* Audrey, sweetheart, you made it! I'm so glad. And Hazel – it's nice to see you again.

HAZEL. Yes.

LUCILLE. Audrey, I think you know everyone – Eloise ...

AUDREY. How do you do, Miss Raleigh?

ELOISE. I'm fine, sugar. Don't you look pretty tonight?

AUDREY. Thanks. You do, too.

ELOISE. Well, thank you. That's sweet of you to say.

AUDREY. I know.

LUCILLE. And Freddy's brought Juanita ...

ANITA. *(With a little edge.)* It's Anita.

LUCILLE. Oh, of course it is. Forgive me. Anita. Oh, I'm so embarrassed – now I don't remember your last name.

AUDREY. Stanley. *(Audrey heads toward the cocktails table.)*

ANITA. *(A little stunned.)* Why, yes ...

AUDREY. You played the bank teller.

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ANITA. I can't believe you remembered.

HAZEL. Audrey has a photographic memory, don't you, dear?

AUDREY. Do you have any soda pop?

LUCILLE. Oh! Well, I'm sure we must. Hildie, could you find Audrey something to drink?

HILDIE. I'll look, Missus. *(Hildie starts to leave.)*

HAZEL. And is there somewhere I can put my coat?

LUCILLE. And, Hildie, would you take Mrs. O'Rourke's coat, too?

HILDIE. *(Coming back to get the coat.)* Anything else, Missus?

LUCILLE. Not that I can think of. Thank you, Hildie.

HILDIE. *(Leaving.)* Bitte. [You're welcome.]

LUCILLE. *(To Audrey.)* Hildie will be right back with a Coca-Cola or something. Will that be all right?

AUDREY. I guess ...

KARL. *(Going to Audrey.)* And do you remember my name?

AUDREY. You're Karl Von Brandt, Lucille's husband.

KARL. Very good.

AUDREY. You're an actor too. I saw you in a couple of movies when I was little.

FREDDY. As opposed to the all-grown-up lady you are now, huh?

AUDREY. I'm practically a teenager.

HAZEL. Oh, no, you aren't, dear.

AUDREY. I said "practically." In just a couple of weeks, I'll be –

HAZEL. *(Interrupting.)* You'll be the same sweet little girl you've always been. *(Quickly changing the subject as she notices Anita.)* Ah, Miss...um ...

AUDREY. *(Informing her mother.)* Stanley.

HAZEL. *(To Audrey.)* Yes, thank you, dear. *(Then to Anita.)* I wasn't expecting to see you here tonight, Miss Stanley.

ANITA. Neither was I, to tell you the truth. *(Hazel reacts.)* What I mean is, I'm not used to getting invited to these kinds of parties.

HAZEL. And what kinds of parties are you *usually* invited to?

ANITA. I just mean ... well, I suppose my usual crowd isn't quite so starry.

HAZEL. *(Dismissively.)* I would imagine. *(Hildie, carrying a soda poured in a glass, delivers it to Audrey.)*

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HILDIE. Here you are, Miss.

AUDREY. What is it?

HILDIE. It's Coca-Cola, Miss.

AUDREY. You didn't have the other one?

HILDIE. This is what we have, Miss.

AUDREY. Then I don't want it.

LUCILLE. That's all right, Audrey. Hildie, do you think you might make Miss O'Rourke some lemonade?

HILDIE. But Missus, I do not know if we –

LUCILLE. (*Interrupting.*) Just do your best, Hildie, all right?

HILDIE. (*Leaving.*) *Ser guht* [Very good], Missus.

HAZEL. And what are the adults drinking?

ANITA. Karl made me a martini. Perfectly yummy.

KARL. (*To Hazel.*) Shall I make you one?

HAZEL. Oh, heaven forbid – not a martini! Don't you have any bubbly?

LUCILLE. I'm sure we do. Karl, would you mind going down to the cellar to get some?

KARL. Not at all, darling, but first – heaven forbid! – another martini for the road. (*Karl crosses to the cocktails table and starts to pour.*)

FREDDY. (*Bringing his empty glass to Karl.*) Well, as long as you're pouring.

KARL. Sorry, *mein Kumpel* [my friend] – all out. (*As he starts to go towards the cellar door.*) I'll make more when I get back. *Auf wiedersehen* [Goodbye]. (*Karl exits to the cellar with his martini.*)

ELOISE. (*Moving to the cocktails table.*) No need to wait. I make a pretty mean martini myself.

FREDDY. Where'd you learn to do that?

ELOISE. (*Joking.*) None of your beeswax.

ANITA. Oh, Freddy, leave her alone.

FREDDY. Say, El, didn't you spend some time in speakeasies back in New York?

ELOISE. Let's just say I headlined in a wide variety of establishments.

LUCILLE. And, of course, a lady never tells her secrets, isn't that right, Audrey?

AUDREY. I know a secret about someone.

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LUCILLE. (*Caught by surprise.*) As I said, sweetheart, a lady never tells

—

FREDDY. (*Interrupting, wanting in on the gossip.*) Unless it's a really juicy one! Come here, kid, and spill to your Uncle Freddy.

AUDREY. (*Unsure.*) Um ... I don't know ...

FREDDY. Aw, come on. It'll be just between us. (*Audrey goes to Freddy and whispers in his ear. When she's finished telling her secret, Audrey giggles, but Freddy is visibly shaken. He tries to cover with joviality but doesn't succeed.*) Ha! That's a good one! Where'd you come up with that, huh?

AUDREY. I didn't come up with it. I heard some of the hair and make-up guys whispering.

FREDDY. Well, you must've heard wrong, okay?

AUDREY. No, I didn't.

HAZEL. She has a photographic memory, Mr. Castle —

FREDDY. (*Interrupting.*) Yeah, well ... you know what? This time, the photograph didn't develop, okay? (*Covering again.*) Ha! Get it? That's pretty good, huh?

ELOISE. (*Coming to Freddy's rescue.*) Who's ready for another martini? Freddy?

FREDDY. Don't mind if I do. (*Eloise pours martinis for herself and Freddy, just as Hildie enters with a glass of lemonade for Audrey. The doorbell rings.*)

HILDIE. (*Handing the glass to Audrey.*) I've got your lemonade, Miss.

HAZEL. And what do you say, Audrey?

AUDREY. (*Flatly.*) Thanks.

LUCILLE. And the door, Hildie?

HILDIE. I heard, Missus.

LUCILLE. I'm sorry, Hazel. I can't imagine what's keeping Karl. (*Leaving through the cellar door to go check on Karl.*) Excuse me, everyone — I won't be a sec.

FREDDY. (*Having downed the drink he was just given, heading to Eloise at the cocktails table, a la "cowboy."*) Hey, barkeep — gimme another one o' them whaddaya-callems!

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ELOISE. (*Playing along with Freddy's "cowboy" bit.*) What's the matter, pardner? You got a hollow leg or something?

FREDDY. (*Filling his glass.*) Not for long! (*VIVIENNE DE VRIES and ABE AARONS enter, followed by Hildie.*) Ah, lookie there – it's our illustrious leader! How's tricks, Abe?

ABE. Just fine, Freddy.

FREDDY. (*Slapping Abe on the back.*) Glad to hear it, Abie, glad to hear it!

ABE. (*Noticing Freddy's apparent inebriation.*) I see you're feeling fine yourself.

FREDDY. Yes, indeedy, sweetie. And Vivi, you sure are putting on the dog tonight. What's the skinny? You got a hot date after our little shindig here?

VIVIENNE. What in the world are you saying, Freddy? Might someone please translate?

ELOISE. (*Going to greet the new arrivals.*) Never mind him, Vivienne. He's pretty well lubricated, if you get my drift.

FREDDY. And this beautiful young lady is – (*He looks around for Anita.*) – Hey, where'd she go? Anita? (*Calling drunkenly.*) Anita, baby! Come out, come out, wherever you are! (*Anita approaches.*) Aha! Found you! Abe, this is Anita ... (*He drunkenly gestures with the hand in which he has his martini and sloshes some of its contents on Anita.*)

ANITA. (*Overlappping.*) Oh, my God, Freddy!

FREDDY. (*Overlappping.*) Alley-oopsy-daisy! Look what I've gone and done ...

VIVIENNE. (*To Eloise.*) I see what you mean ...

FREDDY. (*Getting out his handkerchief to dab on Anita's dress.*) Oh, gee whiz! I'm sorry, honey – but just never you mind. I've got a little hankie right here somewhere ...

ANITA. (*Getting more perturbed.*) Freddy, stop! You're just making it worse ...

HILDIE. Excuse me, Miss. If you would please follow me to the kitchen

...

ANITA. (*Following Hildie off to the kitchen, glaring at Freddy.*) Sure, yeah. Thanks.

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FREDDY. *(Calling to Anita as she leaves.)* Just a little accident, right, sweetie?

VIVIENNE. *(As Hildie is leaving.)* And where are our hosts?

AUDREY. Mr. Von Brandt went down to the cellar to get some champagne for Mother, and when he didn't come back, Lucille went down to find him.

ELOISE. I'm sure they'll be back in a jiff.

VIVIENNE. How long have they been gone?

HAZEL. Long enough to be back here with a bottle of bubbly, if you ask me. *(The sound of Lucille and Karl arguing while coming up from the cellar becomes apparent. Hazel continues.)* Oh, my – you don't think anything's wrong, do you?

FREDDY. I don't know – sounds like the U.S. of A. may have declared war on Germany.

ELOISE. I'm putting my money on the Yank. *(Suddenly, there is a loud noise, almost like a gunshot, emanating from the cellar. The group reacts with "Oh, my God!" "What was that?" "Was that a gun?" etc. Hearing all the commotion, Hildie enters hurriedly from the kitchen vestibule. Eloise swings open the cellar door to discover Karl about to enter with an open bottle of champagne. Eloise, not expecting what she sees, continues.)* What the ...?

FREDDY. Where's Lucille?

KARL. What do you mean, "Where's Lucille?"

AUDREY. Did you shoot her?

KARL. *(Amusedly shocked.)* Did I what? *(Lucille enters from the cellar with another unopened bottle in hand.)*

ELOISE. Honey, you're sure you're all right?

LUCILLE. *(Utterly confused.)* What on earth is going on ... ?

HAZEL. The gunshot!

FREDDY. We all heard it!

LUCILLE. Of course, I'm all right!

HAZEL. But we heard you arguing – and then that gunshot –

KARL. There was no gunshot! *(Brandishing the open champagne bottle.)* It was this!

ELOISE. Oh, for heaven's sake, Karl – you scared us all to death!

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FREDDY. Ha! That's a pretty good gag for a picture, huh, Abe?

ABE. (*Implying it's been done before.*) Yeah, Mack Sennett thought so, too.

AUDREY. So, nobody got shot?

HAZEL. No, thank God.

KARL. But the night's still young.

LUCILLE. (*Miffed and embarrassed.*) Oh, my God, Karl, really?

KARL. Just a little joke, darling. (*Hildie, still concerned, leaves.*)

VIVIENNE. Anyway, we've got champagne.

LUCILLE. (*Taking the opened bottle of champagne.*) Who'd like some? Hazel? (*Hazel goes to the cocktails table to get a champagne glass. Lucille follows.*)

HAZEL. After that, I could use a glass.

LUCILLE. Vivi?

VIVIENNE. I never say no –

FREDDY. (*Interrupting, insinuatingly.*) So I've heard.

VIVIENNE. (*Continuing with a withering look to Freddy.*) – to champagne.

HAZEL. Ah, Vivienne! I knew you were a kindred spirit.

VIVIENNE. (*As Karl is pouring.*) At least when it comes to spirits.

LUCILLE. I don't have to ask what you'd like, Abe.

AUDREY. A sidecar! (*The guests laugh at Audrey's exclamation.*)

ELOISE. Well, how about that?!

HAZEL. Audrey?!

ABE. And just how did you know that?

AUDREY. That's what you always have, Mr. Aarons.

FREDDY. She's got you there, Abe. (*Anita enters. Freddy approaches her.*) Ah, there she is. Good as new. (*He leans in to give Anita a kiss, but she dodges it, still angry at Freddy for embarrassing her in front of the others.*)

LUCILLE. (*At the cocktails table pouring the sidecar ingredients into a shaker.*) Anyone else want to jump on a sidecar with Abe and me?

FREDDY. How about it, honey? Wanna try a sidecar?

ANITA. (*Peevish.*) I don't know. What's in it?

AUDREY. Cognac, Cointreau, and lemon juice.

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ABE. Ha! You're getting a little too big for britches, young lady!

HAZEL. Nonsense! She's just a precocious child.

VIVIENNE. *(With some vitriol.)* But for how long?

FREDDY. *(To Anita.)* What do you say, toots? It's the latest poison!

ANITA. *(Putting her anger aside.)* Well ... why not? If it's all the rage, I guess I'll try one. *(Lucille pours one for Anita.)*

LUCILLE. *(Offering to pour a sidecar.)* Eloise?

ELOISE. No, thanks – still nursing my martini. *(Lucille is pouring the sidecars for Abe, Anita, and herself. Vivienne assists in delivering them to Abe and Anita.)*

FREDDY. And she pours a meaty mine marti – *(Correcting himself.)* – that is, a mighty mean martini, believe you me!

ELOISE. Easy for you to say.

ABE. Is that right, Eloise?

ELOISE. I'm a woman of many talents, Abe.

ABE. You don't have to tell me. You're one of our most reliable stock players on the lot – you know that –

ELOISE. *(Interrupting, biting her tongue.)* Oh, I know, I know ...

ABE. *(Continuing.)* – and there just might be quite a juicy part coming your way in what could be our biggest picture yet.

ELOISE. *(Interested, but skeptical.)* Is that right?

VIVIENNE. That wouldn't be *Forever in My Heart*, would it?

ABE. This is strictly off the record, Vivi. You can't print this.

LUCILLE. *(Genuinely surprised.)* *Forever in My Heart*? Has casting started already?

ABE. *(Cagily acknowledging the question, setting down his drink.)* Uh ... we're talking.

VIVIENNE. Didn't you read my column this morning? *(While the next bit of dialogue occurs, Vivienne sets her champagne glass near Abe's drink. She then opens her purse and takes out a lipstick and compact. She sets her purse down in front of the two glasses, checks her make-up, and reapplies her lipstick. Very surreptitiously, and without drawing the attention of the audience, she removes a small paper sleeve of a powdery substance from her gloved hand and slips the powder into Abe's glass. She then puts her*

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lipstick and compact back into her purse, picks up her purse, and moves away by the time Karl later says “Charming.”)

LUCILLE. *(Annoyed with herself.)* I must have missed that bit. *(Now brightly changing the subject.)* Anyway, we’re here to celebrate the completion of *Little Miss Miracle*, aren’t we?

FREDDY. Which, no doubt, will be a *box office* miracle thanks to Little Miss you-know-who.

HAZEL. The top box office draw in the country for the last two years!

ABE. *(Laughing.)* Oh, yes, our little girl here is quite the sensation, that’s a fact.

FREDDY. *(To Audrey.)* Hey, kiddo, how’s about let’s have a go at that soft shoe number we did together in the picture? What do you say, huh?

AUDREY. I don’t perform at parties, Freddy.

FREDDY. Aw, come on.

AUDREY. Unless I’m getting paid. Right, Mother?

HAZEL. That’s right, dear.

KARL. *(Sarcastic.)* Charming.

LUCILLE. *(Brightly changing the subject once again.)* All right, everyone. Let’s raise our glasses and toast to the success of 1937’s most heartwarming comedy *Little Miss Miracle*.

ABE. Hold it, hold it – let me get mine.

VIVIENNE. *(Handing Abe his glass.)* Here you go, Abe. *(Everyone toasts and ad libs “Hear, hear,” “Little Miss Miracle,” “To miraculous box office!” etc.)*

ABE. And to our two stars: our hostess, the beautiful and talented Miss Lucille Meadows – *and* the beautiful and talented Miss Audrey O’Rourke!

LUCILLE. *And* to the beautiful and talented Miss Eloise Raleigh ...

FREDDY. *(Drunkenly playing up the camp.)* Not to mention the beautiful and talented Freddy Castle!

VIVIENNE. And here’s to Paragon Studios’ executive-in-chief Abe Aarons. May he get everything coming to him – *(Raising her glass.)* – with *Little Miss Miracle* and with *Forever in My Heart*.

HAZEL. That *Forever in My Heart* has been on the bestseller list for months on end. Anyone read it? *(Abe is about to drink from his glass, but*

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Lucille stops him from doing so by launching her campaign to persuade Abe.)

LUCILLE. *(Back to business.)* I have, and let me tell you, I could not put it down. Karl can vouch for that. *(Abe sets his drink down and moves to grab a handful of nuts from a dish to avoid Lucille.)*

KARL. Indeed. That book has spent more time in bed with Lucille than I have.

LUCILLE. *(Ignoring Karl, following Abe.)* And that story – ! *(Gasping.)* – I just adored it!

ANITA. Oh, me, too! It was just so ...

FREDDY. *(To Anita.)* So what?

ANITA. You know ... just so ... *(Anita seems at a loss for words. She sets her drink down near Abe's.)*

FREDDY. *(With mocking laughter.)* So many pages?

ANITA. *(Offended.)* Just what are you inferring, Freddy, as if I couldn't guess.

KARL. I don't believe he's *inferring* anything, my dear.

ANITA. I know a crack when I hear one! *(To Freddy.)* And I definitely don't have to take that from the likes of you!

FREDDY. Anita, come on! I didn't mean anything by it, honey –

ANITA. *(Interrupting.)* And quit calling me “honey”! I ain't your “honey,” that's for sure.

FREDDY. Now, take it easy, sweetie –

ANITA. *(Nastily mocking Freddy in a stereotypical effeminate voice.)*

“Now, take it easy, *sweetie!*” Ha! I bet there are a few chorus boys down at the studio who've heard *that* from you before! In fact, I can name half a dozen right off the top of my head! How'd you like *that*, huh? *(All are stunned with Anita's outburst. Abe picks up Anita's drink thinking it's his.)*

FREDDY. *(Trying to laugh it off to the others.)* She's so stewed, she's cockeyed!

AUDREY. Actually, Mr. Von Brandt's right, Miss Stanley. Freddy wasn't inferring. He was *implying*.

FREDDY. *(Still trying to make light, referring to Audrey.)* Yeah – what *she* said!

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ANITA. (*Embarrassed and angry.*) Oh, is that right, kid? Well ... potato, potahto. (*Getting her purse.*) Now if you'll excuse me, I need to use the little girl's room. (*Mistakenly grabbing Abe's drink as she exits into the main hallway.*) And I'll have you know I *did* read that goddamn book – every goddamn word!

FREDDY. (*Trying to joke after Anita's gone.*) I bet she had to read some of 'em *twice*! (*Freddy laughs, but no one else does.*)

VIVIENNE. Well, well, well ...

LUCILLE. (*Desperately trying to ignore what's just happened and get back to the subject at hand.*) Anyway, I thought *Forever in My Heart* was absolutely thrilling! Didn't you think so, El?

ELOISE. Oh, yeah ...

LUCILLE. And that Rose McNamara – oh, my God! What a part!

ELOISE. And just exactly which part did you have in mind for me, Abe?

ABE. (*Befuddled – it's obvious to him.*) I beg your pardon?

ELOISE. (*Under her breath.*) As if I couldn't guess.

VIVIENNE. (*Smelling another juicy story.*) Well, well, well ...

ABE. (*Getting defensive.*) Now, listen here, Eloise – you know we value your contribution to the studio.

ELOISE. I appreciate that, Abe. I really do.

ABE. Well, then –

ELOISE. So, those scripts I sent you a while back ...?

ABE. Oh, yes, the scripts ...

ELOISE. What did you think?

ABE. Well, actually, I haven't had a chance to –

ELOISE. (*Interrupting.*) Because they're good, Abe – I mean it. Really good.

ABE. I don't doubt that, but –

ELOISE. (*Interrupting.*) And I promise you there's an audience for films with Negro actors in leading roles, if you'd just take the chance.

ABE. With this Depression, my dear, Paragon Studios is not in the business of taking chances.

ELOISE. (*After a pause, deflated but saving face.*) I see. I guess it isn't the right time for this conversation, is it?

ABE. Why don't you try setting up a meeting with my girl?

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FREDDY. It's a party, El! How's about another martini?

ELOISE. *(Needing to leave the tense situation, she exits to the main hallway.)* Excuse me.

VIVIENNE. And *again* I say, "Well, well, well ..."

LUCILLE. *(Deflecting Vivienne's innuendo.)* Well, I know I'd be perfectly thrilled to be part of *Forever in My Heart*.

FREDDY. And just which *part* would that be, Luce?

LUCILLE. All right – why beat around the bush? I'll say it: I would kill to play Rose McNamara.

VIVIENNE. You and every other leading lady in Hollywood. *(All on stage are alarmed as we hear Eloise running in from the main hallway, calling as she runs.)*

ELOISE. *(Entering, obviously upset.)* Lucille! Karl! Come here! Hurry! *(Eloise quickly exits into the main hallway again, with Lucille and Karl following.)*

LUCILLE. *(Exiting, following Eloise.)* Eloise, what's the matter? What's happened?

HAZEL. *(Following them to the main hallway and calling after them.)* What is it? Is everything all right?

FREDDY. *(Going to the cocktails table.)* Say – anyone else need a refill? *(The others just look at him. He continues as if talking to himself.)* Why, sure, Freddy, don't mind if I do. *(Freddy starts to make himself another martini, as Lucille suddenly rushes in through the main hallway door.)*

LUCILLE. *(Crossing to the kitchen vestibule door, calling urgently.)* Hildie! Hildie! *(Lucille rushes back towards the main hallway door. Hildie enters quickly.)*

HAZEL. *(Trying to stop Lucille as she exits to the main hallway again.)* Lucille! What's wrong? What's the matter?

LUCILLE. *(Exiting.)* Not now, Hazel. *(Hildie exits following Lucille. Hazel starts to follow, but she's stopped by Eloise who is entering from the main hallway.)*

HAZEL. What the hell is going on in there?

AUDREY. *(Pointing to Hazel.)* You said "h-e-double-hockey-sticks"!

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ELOISE. It's Anita. She's – *(Suddenly becoming aware of Audrey's presence.)* Audrey, why don't you go on out to the kitchen and get yourself some more lemonade?

AUDREY. Just when things are getting good around here?

HAZEL. *(Shocked and stern.)* Audrey! *(Lucille, stunned, enters.)*

AUDREY. She's dead, isn't she?

LUCILLE. How did you – ?

FREDDY. *(Interrupting.)* Who?

AUDREY. Your date.

FREDDY. Huh?

LUCILLE. *(After a pause.)* Yes. It appears she is.

FREDDY. *(Disbelieving.)* What? *(Abe rushes to Lucille, as she appears a bit faint. He escorts her to a seat.)*

ABE. Oh, my God, Lucille! What happened?

LUCILLE. I don't know. She's just lying there ...

ABE. Where?

ELOISE. In the powder room.

ABE. And she's ... *(Abe doesn't want to say it. Lucille nods vaguely.)* I'm going to need another drink.

VIVIENNE. I'll join you. *(During the following dialogue, Vivienne picks up Anita's former glass and heads to the cocktails table where she pours straight cognacs for herself and Abe. When she does so, she places the glasses out of view of the rest of the guests so that she can again remove the hidden sleeve of poison from her glove to slip some into Abe's drink.)*

HAZEL. *(To Lucille.)* Are you sure?

LUCILLE. Yes, I ... I think so.

FREDDY. *(In denial.)* No, that can't be right. She's just pulling some kinda prank or something. *(Karl and Hildie enter.)* Isn't that right, Karl?

KARL. What?

FREDDY. Anita – I mean, she's a cut-up, right? Always playing some gag.

KARL. I'm afraid not, Freddy.

ELOISE. When I went to the powder room, the door was closed. I knocked. No one answered, so I tried the doorknob – it wasn't locked – and when I opened the door, I saw her.

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KARL. On the floor? Just as she is now? (*Eloise nods.*)

VIVIENNE. (*Crossing to Abe with his drink.*) And she was dead?

ELOISE. (*Shrugging her shoulders.*) I came right back here.

ABE. But she *is* dead – right, Karl?

KARL. I'm afraid so.

FREDDY. Oh, my God! How? *How?*

LUCILLE. I feel like someone should be in there with her.

AUDREY. (*Starting to go to the doorway.*) I wanna see.

HAZEL. (*Warning.*) Audrey ... !

ELOISE. (*Stopping her.*) Oh, no you don't, Missy.

AUDREY. Why? Is there a lot of blood?

HAZEL. Audrey!!

LUCILLE. Actually, no. I didn't see any. (*Looking to Karl and Hildie.*)
Did you?

HILDIE. No, Missus.

KARL. None.

ABE. Well, that's a relief.

LUCILLE. (*Shocked.*) What?

ABE. I just mean it's not as messy that way.

ELOISE. (*Incredulous.*) Messy?

ABE. Of a clean-up. (*To Lucille.*) May I use your phone?

LUCILLE. Hildie, would you show Mr. Aarons to the phone? (*To the others.*) We've got to call the police, obviously.

ABE. The hell we do!

LUCILLE. And just whom do you plan on calling?

ABE. Norm Stratton – that's "whom."

KARL. The studio fixer?

ELOISE. The girl is dead, Abe.

ABE. And I'm gonna take care of it, all right? (*Taking a big swig of his cognac and wincing a bit.*) What? You want the cops should show up with all of us here and a would-be starlet dead in the bathroom? How's that gonna play in the papers, huh? (*No one responds, but most look at Vivienne.*)

VIVIENNE. Don't look at me. I don't want any part of this either.

ABE. All right, then. I'm calling Stratton.

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HAZEL. (*Moving toward Audrey.*) Audrey, we don't need to be here. Let's go, sweetheart.

ABE. Oh, no, you don't.

HAZEL. (*Ignoring Abe, to Hildie.*) My coat, please? (*Hildie, not knowing what to do, looks to Lucille.*) Well, don't just stand there, woman – get my coat!

ABE. No one's going anywhere, understand? Not until we get our stories straight.

HAZEL. Our *stories*? What stories? I don't have a *story*, Mr. Aarons. I'm just a guest here.

ABE. *And* a suspect.

HAZEL. I beg your pardon?

ABE. We've got a dead girl in there.

HAZEL. Are you saying that one of us killed her?

ABE. I'm not saying anything. But whatever it turns out to be, all of us are gonna be questioned, and I'm not taking any chances. You get me? (*Hazel doesn't move or respond.*) So, here's what's gonna happen. I'm gonna call Norm Stratton, and we're all gonna sit tight 'til he gets here. What we've got here, my friends, is a very delicate situation. Careers – not to mention entire *studios* – have been ruined over less. Do I make myself clear? (*All silently respond affirmatively. Abe takes another big swig to finish off his drink and sets it down.*) Now where's the phone? (*Lucille looks at Karl.*)

KARL. Hildie, take Mr. Aarons to my study. He can use the telephone in there.

HILDIE. Follow me. (*Hildie leads Abe out the main hallway. There is a pause in which no one seems to know what to say.*)

FREDDY. My God. Anita. What do you think happened?

LUCILLE. I can't imagine.

ELOISE. Maybe a heart attack? Or a stroke?

VIVIENNE. Maybe she was ... (*Vivienne indicates sniffing cocaine.*)

HAZEL. So many of these young girls do, from what I hear.

FREDDY. Well, yeah, I guess she was kind of a party girl, but I never heard anything about *that*.

AUDREY. About what?

KARL. Nose candy, my dear.

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AUDREY. Can I have some?

FREDDY. It ain't for kids, kid.

ELOISE. I just don't think that was it.

VIVIENNE. Why not?

ELOISE. Well, let's just say she just didn't act like someone who was ... doing that.

VIVIENNE. You have personal experience in that area, Eloise?

ELOISE. No, Vivienne, I don't – but I've been in this business long enough to have seen a few things. And I'm telling you, I don't think that's what happened to Anita. *(Suddenly, we hear a thud and scream from down the hall. All react with confusion and shock. We hear Hildie calling out before she enters frantically from the main hallway.)*

HILDIE. *(Off at first, then entering.)* Auch du lieber! Gott hilf mir! [Oh, my God! God help me!] Herr Von Brandt! Missus!

LUCILLE. *(Grabbing Hildie.)* What is it? What's happened?

HILDIE. Mr. Aarons! *Er ist tot! Er ist tot!* [He is dead!]

LUCILLE. What? What are you saying?

KARL. *Wer?* [Who?]

HILDIE. Herr Aarons! I think ...

LUCILLE. Hildie!

HILDIE. I think he's dead! *(Just at that moment, Abe, in the grip of some terrible pain, stumbles through the main hallway door and into the living room. Karl rushes to Abe to help him. Abe is trying to communicate something but can't speak clearly.)*

KARL. What is it, Abe? What's happened? *(Karl is unable to support Abe's weight, and Abe falls to the floor. Karl bends down to listen.)*

ABE. It's ... it's ... *(Abe loses consciousness. The rest of the guests stand stunned as the curtain quickly falls.)*

END OF ACT I

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
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LITTLE MISS MURDER