

COOKING CAN BE MURDER

by Eddie McPherson



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SYNOPSIS: Arrogant James Casanova Valentino Bond is in the middle of judging a cooking contest when he (after a dramatic and quite theatrical death scene) falls over with a thud. It seems he's been unmercifully poisoned. Each contestant is suddenly a suspect who just happens to have a motive for wanting this man dead. When Detective Biddle shows up out of nowhere, he begins his investigation immediately. And as he questions the suspects, their stories come to life on stage thanks to a reenactment team that has been provided for entertainment value.

Once all the stories are told and the detective is ready to place his arrest, an unexpected suspect is brought to light and questioned as well. Once the guilty party is taken away, another murder occurs, which causes another detective to show up out of nowhere. Then he falls dead. A silly comedy chock full of all the puns, sight gags and ridiculous situations that one could only hope for in a parody murder mystery.

CAST OF CHARACTERS*(6 females, 5 males, 5-41 either)*

MASTER OF CEREMONY (m) He hosts the county bake-off.
(54 lines)

DETECTIVE RUFUS

ANNETTE BIDDLE (m) He shows up out of nowhere to solve a murder. *(125 lines)*

PROFESSIONAL WHIFFER (m) Hired to sniff the food in order to pinpoint the poison. *(8 lines)*

THE VICTIM:

MR. JAMES CASANOVA

VALENTINO BOND (m) An arrogant man who served as head cook in Remington's finest dining establishment. He had lots of enemies. *(146 lines)*

THE SUSPECTS:

HEDDA HARE (f).....	Runs a little beauty shop. (49 lines)
PAIGE TURNER (f).....	Works at the local library. (52 lines)
ROBIN BANKS (f).....	Ex con who loves to cook. (50 lines)
CARRIE OAKEY (f).....	An American Idol reject. (45 lines)
JANE SMITH (f)	A lady with a boring name. (42 lines)
ELLA MENTRY (f).....	Not the brightest bulb in the box. (63 lines)
HOWIE DIDDOT (m)	Makes his living revealing magicians' tricks. (71 lines)

THE REENACTMENT PLAYERS:

These actors reenact the flashback scenes. The following reenactment characters can be played by 41 individual actors or easily doubled using only a handful of actors (minimum of five) playing the different roles if this better suits your casting needs. Many of these characters have a small amount of lines - ranges from no lines to about 15.

BAKER (m)
 CATHY (f)
 GAIL (f)
 GRACIE (f)
 FIRST SEMINAR PARTICIPANT (m/f)
 SECOND SEMINAR PARTICIPANT (m/f)
 THIRD SEMINAR PARTICIPANT (m/f)
 FOURTH SEMINAR PARTICIPANT (m/f)
 BOY (m)
 AUNT SYLVIA (f)
 JENNIFER (f)
 TAYLOR (f)
 FIRST PROM ATTENDEE (m/f)
 SECOND PROM ATTENDEE (m/f)

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THIRD PROM ATTENDEE (m/f)
FOURTH PROM ATTENDEE (m/f)
DORA (f)
MAMA JEAN (f)
JOE (m)
FLO (f)
GENEVA (f)
ROMENA (f)
FIRST DOG WALKER (m/f)
SECOND DOG WALKER (m/f)
THIRD DOG WALKER (m/f)
FOURTH DOG WALKER (m/f)
POLICEMAN (m)
STUDENT (m/f)
LORETTA (f)
NAGGING WIFE (f)
GOOD HOWIE (f)
BAD HOWIE (m)
MISS GLASS (f)
LORI (f)
BEVERLY (f)
SHARON (f)
MONICA (f)
SYDNEY (f)
DARLENE (f)
RODNEY (m)
DETECTIVE DRAKE (m)

NOTE ABOUT CASTING THIS PLAY: It's okay to cast genders in a way that works best for your needs. For example, Detective Biddle can be played by a female, and how funny would it be to see Ella Mentry played by a guy in a blond wig? For that matter, the entire play could be played by an all male or all female cast. It's all about having fun.

With that said, this play can be produced with as few as 16 cast members or as many as 52.

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PRODUCTION NOTES

The set is simple. It's inside a tent or building at the county fair in the fictitious town of Remington. Various chairs sit about, occupied by the various spectators who eventually become part of the reenactment team. The spectators hold balloons on sticks, eat candied apples, cotton candy, etc. and hold stuffed animals they probably won at the ring toss down the midway. You may choose to hang a sign on the upstage wall that reads "Remington's 10th Annual Cook-Off." If possible, have the lights change between the present and the past as the suspects tell their stories. If light changes aren't possible, no problem. A simple music cue or sound effect would work just as effectively.

A long table sits close to the upstage wall with just enough room for someone to walk between the table and wall. A straight line of chairs stands against the upstage wall facing downstage. These chairs are where the contestants will sit once the contest begins.

Mysterious music would be fun to play before and after the show to help set the mood.

Remember, this is a silly farce and should not be taken seriously at any point. The reenactments should be played over the top much like a bad soap opera. Have fun!

COSTUMING:

The suspects can be dressed casually as though they were out for a relaxing afternoon at the county fair. Detective Biddle may wear the stereotypical trench coat and fedora. The script will suggest minimal costume additions for these characters throughout the script. It will be totally acceptable to have the audience see these costume changes take place on stage. Costumes the reenactment players wear are suggestive. These actors may choose to wear all black and put on pieces to suggest particular characters. For example Mama Jean might only wear a wig and apron over her black clothes. Prom attendees wear simple long skirts (girls) and ties (boys) on top of their black clothes etc.

PROPS

- Balloons on a stick
- Cotton candy (*Real or pretend*)
- 7 dishes of food
- Plastic spoons
- Handkerchief
- Blue ribbon
- Can of soup
- Cutout of the letter 'I'
- Sunglasses
- Piece of paper
- Business card
- Flower
- Small notebook
- Pencil
- Scarf
- White apron
- Baker's hat
- Pie (*Can be fake*)
- Tissue
- Pocket thesaurus
- Smock
- Name tag
- Signs that say:
 - A: Ground Beef
 - B: Chopped Onions
 - C: Diced tomatoes
 - D: Water
 - E: Secret Ingredient
- Fake glasses
- Small round table
- Candle
- Paper bag
- School books
- Bookbag
- Clipboard
- Comb

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- 2 cups
- Dish towel
- Cigar
- Rolling pin
- Fake cake
- Kazoo
- Small wrapped gift
- Phone
- Few stuffed toy dogs
- Leashes
- Stuffed toy monkey
- Magazine
- Newspaper
- Fishing line
- Frisbee
- Ball
- Purse
- Doll wrapped in a blanket
- Covered plate
- “Soufflé” dish
- Cup of water
- Large letter ‘F’
- Unlit cigarette
- Sheets of paper for ‘resumes’
- Tea tray with pot and cups
- Small lamp
- Cup with pens and pencils
- Flashlight
- Small bottle
- Various school books
- Bookbags

ACT ONE**AT RISE:**

It's inside a large tent at the county fair. A couple of tables set end to end covered with table cloths. The stage is decorated like the inside of a county fair tent or building. Folding chairs set about facing the tables but cheating out to the audience. Spectators sit in the chairs. They hold balloons on a stick, eat candied apples, cotton candy, etc. These spectators will double as characters in the flashback scenes throughout the play.

It's Remington's annual county fair cook-off. The contestants will soon be sitting against the upstage wall in a straight line facing the audience. For now they are standing (All but HOWIE DIDDOT.) talking. They're excited and nervous. MASTER OF CEREMONY takes center stage and quiets everyone.

MASTER OF CEREMONY: Ladies and gentlemen, may I have your attention, please? Quiet down, please. *(The contestants take their seats in the upstage chairs.)* Thank you. I'd like to welcome everyone to Remington's 25th Annual County Fair Cook-Off. *(Polite applause.)* May I introduce this year's contestants? *(Turns to the contestants.)* First, we have the owner of Remington's one and only beauty salon, Miss Heda Hare.

HEDDA HARE: *(Stands.)* I'd like to say it's nice to be here—

MASTER OF CEREMONY: *(Interrupting.)* Our next contestant is a Remington resident who has worked at our historic library for twenty years, Miss Paige Turner! *(HEDDA HARE sits as PAIGE TURNER stands, etc.)*

PAIGE TURNER: I'm so nervous. I was telling a good friend of mine—

MASTER OF CEREMONY: *(Interrupting.)* Next, an ex-con who just returned from the lockup, Miss Robin Banks from Truman County.

ROBIN BANKS: I'd like to give a shout out to—

MASTER OF CEREMONY: *(Interrupting.)* We have an American Idol reject from the last eight seasons, Mrs. Carrie Oakey.

CARRIE OAKEY: Hello, hello, hell—

MASTER OF CEREMONY: (*Interrupting.*) Then we have just plain ordinary Jane Smith from Georgetown. That name isn't funny at all.

JANE SMITH: I'm sorry. My mother's maiden name was Ophelia Payne.

MASTER OF CEREMONY: That's better. Next up is a recent graduate after seven years at a two-year college, Miss Ella Mentry.

ELLA MENTRY: 'Scuze me, but that's pronounced *Ella*. (*She pronounces it the same way he did.*)

MASTER OF CEREMONY: What did I say?

ELLA MENTRY: You said *Ella*. It's Ella. ELLA! (*The pronunciation doesn't change.*)

MASTER OF CEREMONY: Sit down! And last but not least – or at least, I don't think he's least – I don't know the man, a gentleman who has spent his life dedicated to uncovering the secrets to magicians' magic tricks, Mr. Howie Diddot!

HOWIE DIDDOT: (*Rushing in and taking his place.*) Sorry, I was in the little boy's room. Did I miss anything?

MASTER OF CEREMONY: Let's give all our wonderful contestants a hand, please. (*Polite applause as ELLA MENTRY throws kisses to the crowd.*) And now, the moment you all have been waiting for. He has won numerous cooking awards including his nationally-recognized recipe using fried potatoes and Karo syrup. His cookbook Bite Me has reached the New York Times best-selling lists. He serves as top chef at the famous five-star Chinese restaurant *Hard Wok Café*. Mr. James Casanova Valentino Bond. (*The SPECTATORS react as though a rock star has just been announced. CASANOVA enters, rather piously wearing a stern look. However, the contestants don't seem to share the enthusiasm.*)

HEDDA HARE: (*To PAIGE TURNER.*) There he is.

PAIGE TURNER: (*To ROBIN BANKS.*) It's him all right.

ROBIN BANKS: (*To CARRIE OAKY.*) Sure enough.

CARRIE OAKY: (*To JANE SMITH.*) Just look at him.

JANE SMITH: (*To ELLA MENTRY.*) Mr. High and Mighty.

ELLA MENTRY: (*To HOWIE DIDDOT.*) My sister's a ballerina.

HOWIE DIDDOT: (*To ELLA MENTRY.*) Be quiet and pay attention.

ELLA MENTRY: Yes, sir. *(She sits up straight in her chair.)*

MASTER OF CEREMONY: Mr. Casanova, is there anything you would like to say before we get started?

CASANOVA: Let's get this over with. I'm a very important man with very important things to do.

MASTER OF CEREMONY: Okey dokey, then. With no further ado, shall we begin the contest? Mr. Casanova, if you will.

MASTER OF CEREMONY waves his hand toward the food as he steps back, giving CASANOVA room. CASANOVA approaches the first dish on the table as HEDDA HARE stands signifying she's its owner. She stands in a haughty manner wearing a smile on her face. All eyes are on CASANOVA as they wait with anticipation for his response. He takes a bite of the first dish, chews and ponders.

CASANOVA: Someone forgot to add flavor, didn't one? *(He shoots an obvious smirk HEDDA HARE's way. HEDDA HARE, with contempt, has her seat. CASANOVA moves to the second dish as PAIGE TURNER stands. CASANOVA takes a bite.)* What do you call this dish?

PAIGE TURNER: Tuna Melt surprise.

CASANOVA: The surprise is it turns your dishes green and melts your silverware.

PAIGE TURNER: Well, I never.

CASANOVA: That's obvious. *(PAIGE TURNER has a seat as CASANOVA moves to ROBIN BANKS' dish and takes a bite. He looks at the SPECTATORS.)* Do we have any pet lovers in the house? *(A few people raise their hands.)* Good, after the show, take this dog food with you. *(ROBIN BANKS scowls at CASANOVA and sits. CASANOVA moves to CARRIE OAKEY's dish as CARRIE OAKEY stands. CASANOVA takes a bite and considers.)* Well, now I know whose kitchen roaches go to to commit suicide. *(He wipes his lips vigorously with a handkerchief. With contempt, CARRIE OAKEY places her hands on her hips then has a seat. CASANOVA moves to JANE SMITH's dish as she stands. CASANOVA takes a bite. He chews. Stops and ponders. Chews again. Stops and ponders. Chews again then*

calmly turns to MASTER OF CEREMONY.) Would you please call the police?

MASTER OF CEREMONY: Police? Why?

CASANOVA: *(Points to JANE SMITH.)* That woman just murdered my taste buds. Yuck! Blac! Ugh! *(JANE SMITH sits. CASANOVA move's to ELLA MENTRY's pie as she stands. He takes a bite.)* Appalling! Disgusting! Atrociously horrendous!

ELLA MENTRY: *(Clapping her hands.)* Did you hear that? He likes it!

ALL: Shhhhhh!

JANE SMITH pulls ELLA MENTRY into her chair as CASANOVA moves to the final dish. HOWIE DIDDOT stands with crossed arms and a stance that seems to say, "I dare you to say something negative." CASANOVA takes a bite and chews thoughtfully. He begins to giggle, then laughs a little, then bursts out with a howl.

MASTER OF CEREMONY: Mr. Casanova, what's so funny?

CASANOVA: *(Stops laughing abruptly.)* That dish was a joke!

MASTER OF CEREMONY: Well, distinguished and somewhat beastly Judge, it is now time to award one of these dishes with the coveted slightly-faded blue ribbon that I left on the dash of my car for two weeks. *(He hands the ribbon to CASANOVA.)* As you make your decision, I will narrate your every move the way they do at golf tournaments. *(As he watches CASANOVA carefully, he speaks for his every move.)* Mr. Casanova ponders as he looks back at the table full of dishes. He holds the slightly-faded blue ribbon high in the air. He throws the ribbon to the ground. He stomps on it. He stomps on it again. And again. He must really hate that ribbon.

CASANOVA: I don't hate the ribbon, you moron, I hate these dishes! They're all the worst I have ever tasted in my life!

MASTER OF CEREMONY: *(Continuing his narration.)* Mr. Casanova becomes so angry his face turns a strange shade of blue. He pulls at his shirt collar. He begins to sway back and forth as though he is dizzy. He brings his hand to his forehead. He drops to his knees holding out his hand as though he were begging for help. He grabs his throat as he begins to gag violently. He coughs. His eyes roll back in his head. He seems to plead for someone to come to

his rescue. He gasps for air. He makes a funny moaning sound. He slumps and falls to the floor with a loud thud. (*ALL is quiet for a moment.*)

MASTER OF CEREMONY: We must all wait patiently for the Judge's decision. (*ALL are staring at CASANOVA now lying motionless on the floor.*)

BIDDLE: (*Has entered.*) I'm afraid you'll never hear the Judge's decision, my good man.

MASTER OF CEREMONY: Who are you?

BIDDLE: I'm Detective Rufus Annette Biddle. Rufus because I was named after my father's father. Annette because I was unfortunately named after my mother's mother. Biddle because that's my last name. Detective because that's what I do. I'm afraid Mr. Casanova here has been murdered. (*Loud gasp from the spectators.*)

MASTER OF CEREMONY: Murdered?

HEDDA HARE AND PAIGE TURNER: Murdered?

ROBIN BANKS AND CARRIE OAKEY: Murdered?

JANE SMITH AND HOWIE DIDDOT: Murdered?

ELLA MENTRY: (*To HOWIE DIDDOT.*) What did he say about mustard?

MASTER OF CEREMONY: (*To BIDDLE.*) But how? Why? There are so many unanswered questions.

BIDDLE: Since Mr. Casanova died instantly after tasting seven different dishes, the only logical answer is he was POISONED!

MASTER OF CEREMONY: But how can you be sure, Detective Biddle?

BIDDLE: I have my ways. I have my ways. Which brings us to the *why*. Why would someone murder this fine, upstanding man?

HEDDA HARE: It could be because he was a grimy blackmailer!

PAIGE TURNER: A filthy thief!

ROBIN BANKS: A despicable cheat!

CARRIE OAKEY: A contemptible liar!

JANE SMITH: A malicious and maniacal murderer!

ELLA MENTRY: A man who loved to humiliate people!

HEDDA HARE: She means humiliate people. Just keep going.

HOWIE DIDDOT: He was an underhanded scoundrel!

BIDDLE: Well, it seems this gentleman wasn't so popular, now, was he?

JANE SMITH: This is just terrible. I'll run across town and call for help.

BIDDLE: (*Stopping her.*) I'm afraid no one can leave, ma'am.

CARRIE OAKEY: You can't hold us here!

BIDDLE: I'm afraid I can!

HEDDA HARE: How dare you speak to us in such a fashion.

PAIGE TURNER: This is a disgrace!

ROBIN BANKS: A farce!

CARRIE OAKEY: I concur!

JANE SMITH: Amen!

HOWIE DIDDOT: Hallelujah!

ELLA MENTRY: I'm coo coo for CoCo Puffs!

MASTER OF CEREMONY: (*To BIDDLE.*) Can we please get back to the matter at hand?

BIDDLE: These seven people are not allowed to leave the premises because these seven people are under suspicion for the murder of one Mr. James Casanova Valentino Bond. (*Mumbles.*) Now, I witnessed the entire dish-tasting activity. It was then that I noticed as interesting thing. After tasting each of the dishes, Mr. Casanova wore a strange look on his face.

PAIGE TURNER: Strange look? What do you mean?

BIDDLE: Let us go back in our memories to the point in time when the judge tastes the first dish. (*To audience.*) While we remember that point in time, we will allow you to actually see this activity in high speed HD. (*CASANOVA stands quickly, crosses to and stands behind the first dish, tasting it in extreme fast speed. He makes an awful face and then moves hurriedly down the line as he makes a different awful face for each dish. After the last one, he lies back in his original spot.*) So, you see, it seems there was something not quite right about the taste of each dish.

MASTER OF CEREMONY: Perhaps they were just bad-tasting dishes.

BIDDLE: One or two terrible-tasting dishes? Possibly. But I can't bring myself to believe that all of the finest cooks in Remington could coincidentally concoct a bad-tasting dish.

MASTER OF CEREMONY: But what other reason could there be for his making such awful faces?

BIDDLE: That's EXACTLY what I am here to figure out. You see, just moments ago, I contacted a professional ingredient-whiffer to assist me in this case.

HEDDA HARE: Professional ingredient-whiffer?

BIDDLE: From one whiff, he can tell you exactly what ingredients make up a certain dish.

HEDDA HARE: We'll not have it!

BIDDLE: Quiet and get comfortable. It may take Professional Whiffer a while to arrive since he must travel from Washington D.C. (*PROFESSIONAL WHIFFER enters wearing sunglasses, a trench coat and a hat pulled down over his eyes.*) Can we help you?

PROFESSIONAL WHIFFER: I'm Professional Whiffer from Washington D.C. Someone called?

BIDDLE: That was quick.

PROFESSIONAL WHIFFER: I was in the neighborhood. (*Crosses over to the dishes on the table, stepping over CASANOVA.*) Are these the dishes, Detective Annette Biddle?

BIDDLE: They are, sir. (*Ma'am.*)

PROFESSIONAL WHIFFER: (*Picks up the first dish and sniffs it.*) Hmmmmm. (*Sniffs the second one.*) I see. (*Third one.*) Wow. (*Fourth one.*) Uh-huh. (*Fifth one.*) I do declare. (*Sixth one.*) No comment. (*Seventh one.*) Very interesting. Well, Detective, even though each one of these dishes smells bad enough to gag a maggot, I'm afraid none of them contains poison.

MASTER OF CEREMONY: However, aren't there poisons that have no scent at all?

BIDDLE: Good point.

PROFESSIONAL WHIFFER: So my coming here today was a complete waste of time?

BIDDLE: Seems so.

PROFESSIONAL WHIFFER: Then I bid you all farewell. (*Hands BIDDLE a piece of paper.*) My bill.

BIDDLE: I'll not pay this.

PROFESSIONAL WHIFFER: (*Reaching inside his trench coat.*) Then you leave me with no other alternative. (*ALL gasp deeply and wildly.*)

HEDDA HARE: He has a gun!

PAIGE TURNER: Everyone duck! (*They do.*)

PROFESSIONAL WHIFFER: (*Pulls out a business card and hands it to BIDDLE who is also stooping.*) Here's the number of a good attorney. You'll be needing one. Oh yes, and I do have one last thing for you, Detective. (*Reaches inside his coat again.*)

ROBIN BANKS: He has a gun!

CARRIE OAKY: Everyone duck! (*They do.*)

PROFESSIONAL WHIFFER: (*Pulls out a flower.*) I just wanted to leave my calling card. Every time you look at it, remember: The best smells in life are free. (*He hands the flower to ELLA MENTRY and exits. NOTE: If Professional Whiffer is female, she may hand the flower to HOWIE DIDDOT or BIDDLE or MASTER OF CEREMONY.*)

ELLA MENTRY: What a nice professional snifferrrrr.

BIDDLE: It seems we're back to square one. I still say one of you is guilty of poisoning Mr. Casanova here with some sort of no-scent poison.

MASTER OF CEREMONY: Now what, Detective?

BIDDLE: The next step in this investigation is to determine MOTIVE. WHY would someone want to murder this fine, upstanding man? From there we will discover our murderous murdering murderer!

HEDDA HARE: Upstanding man? Poppycock!

BIDDLE: Well, Miss Hedda Hare, you're looking rather nervous today.

HEDDA HARE: With everything that has happened today, of course I'm nervous! We all are!

BIDDLE: Now, tell me what it was you said about Mr. Casanova earlier. (*Sarcastically.*) Oh, I happen to have it written down right here. (*Flips open his small notebook.*) You stated, and I quote: He was a filthy blackmailer.

HEDDA HARE: All right! All right, it's true! I did say that, because it's true! Heaven help me, it's true! But I did NOT murder that man!

BIDDLE: Please, won't you be so kind as to tell us what happened?

HEDDA HARE: (*Over-the-top ominous.*) It was a dark and stormy night. (*The SPECTATORS move quickly to their places for the first reenactment. NOTE: If you need to move the tables with the dishes on them, have the REENACTMENT TEAM move them here. If you have room, reenact in front of the tables.*) What are they doing?

BIDDLE: They will aid us by reenacting your story. Otherwise, there's a good chance we would all become somewhat bored.

HEDDA HARE: As I was saying, it was a dark and stormy night, but somehow there wasn't a cloud in the sky...and it was daytime. I had visited the corner bakery. (*As the lights change for the reenactment, she puts on sunglasses as well as a scarf on her head.*)

BAKER: (*Entering wearing a white apron and paper baker's hat.*)
Good afternoon, Miss Hedda.

HEDDA HARE: Good afternoon, Sam.

BAKER: What's with the disguise?

HEDDA HARE: I'm cold.

BAKER: It's ninety-five outside.

HEDDA HARE: Fine, you're on to me. The fact is I need your help. I'm afraid I'm in a terrible fix. (*She looks around to make sure no one is listening.*) I need to buy a pie.

BAKER: You?!

HEDDA HARE: Quiet! Do you want all of Remington to hear you?

BAKER: But, Miss Hedda, you're the most talented cook in town. You make everything from scratch.

HEDDA HARE: It's an emergency. My mother-in-law drove into town as a surprise, and I didn't have time to bake something.

BAKER: But what if she finds out you bought a pie?

HEDDA HARE: (*She grabs his shirt collars and pulls him to her.*)
She can't find out. NO ONE can find out! You must keep my secret!

BAKER: Don't worry, my lips are sealed.

CASANOVA: (*From behind the table.*) As well as mine.

HEDDA HARE: Who said that?

CASANOVA: (*Rising from behind the table.*) I did.

HEDDA HARE: (*Shocked.*) What are you doing hiding that way?

- CASANOVA:** I simply dropped a quarter and bent over to pick it up.
Sam, why don't you answer your phone?
- BAKER:** Nice try, but my phone didn't ring. (*Phone rings off stage.*)
Coming! (*He exits.*)
- CASANOVA:** So, you came in to buy a pie, huh?
- HEDDA HARE:** Only because it's an emergency. You must believe me.
- CASANOVA:** Does it really matter what I think, Miss Hedda?
- HEDDA HARE:** So you promise not to say anything?
- CASANOVA:** I didn't say that.
- HEDDA HARE:** What do you want?
- CASANOVA:** (*Hands her a piece of paper.*) I'd say this amount should cover it.
- HEDDA HARE:** You can't be serious. This is bribery. Extortion!
- CASANOVA:** Actually, it's just simple everyday blackmail.
- HEDDA HARE:** Never! Do you hear me? You'll not get a penny from me! (*CATHY, GAIL and GRACIE enter. They wear funny hats with fruit on them.*)
- CATHY:** (*Sees HEDDA HARE and puts her hand to her chest.*)
Hedda Hare?! I'm shocked!
- GAIL:** I'm amazed!
- GRACIE:** Aghast!
- CATHY:** Astonished!
- GAIL:** And STUNNED!
- HEDDA HARE:** It's not what it seems, ladies.
- CATHY:** It SEEMS you are purchasing a BAKERY item.
- GAIL:** You told us you had never purchased store-bought eats in your life.
- CASANOVA:** Ladies, ladies, please. I can explain Miss Hedda's appearance here today.
- GRACIE:** You can?
- HEDDA HARE:** You can? I mean he CAN. Go ahead, Mr. Bond, and explain.
- CASANOVA:** Did you want the FIRST explanation or the SECOND?
(*He holds up the piece of paper she handed back to him earlier.*)
- HEDDA HARE:** The SECOND explanation, of course. After all, that is the one TRUE explanation, isn't it?
- CATHY:** (*Crossing her arms.*) What's going on here?

GRACIE: (*Crossing her arms.*) Is there something you're not telling us?

GAIL: (*Crossing her arms.*) You're acting very suspicious.

HEDDA HARE: (*Crossing her arms.*) I am NOT acting suspicious.

CASANOVA: Ladies, you haven't allowed me to explain. You see, the truth of the matter is I couldn't remember the steps in order to bake a golden pecan cherry cobbler. Miss Hedda agreed to meet me here and explain the process.

CATHY: (*To CASANOVA.*) But you're a top chef.

GRACIE: And Hedda is only an amateur.

GAIL: Why would you need HER help?

CASANOVA: For the simple reason that she is the best cook in all of Remington.

CATHY: We're sorry, Hedda.

GRACIE: Can you ever forgive us?

GAIL: We buy your story completely and without question.

CASANOVA: So, what reason did you ladies have for coming into the bakery?

CATHY: We're so relieved that Hedda's not purchasing a pie, we can't remember.

GRACIE: Ta ta, everyone, we must go prepare for another reenactment.

GAIL: Ta ta and goodbye. (*They exit.*)

HEDDA HARE: (*Turns to CASANOVA.*) Thank you so much for not disclosing my secret. (*She takes the pie from him.*) I'll get the money to you by Friday.

CASANOVA: You'll get the money to me today.

HEDDA HARE: But I have so much to do.

CASANOVA: You'll get the money today, or your friends will find out the truth.

HEDDA HARE: (*Hitting him on the chest like in those old-fashioned black and white movies.*) You're a low-down, evil, callous man! No, I take that back, you're not noble enough to be called a man. You're a low-down, evil, callous, grown-up person! No, you're not human enough to be called a person. You're a low-down—

CASANOVA: (*Putting up a hand to stop her.*) You can stop now, I get the point. Besides, the reenactment is coming to a close, so if you'll excuse me. (*He lies down in his original spot as BAKER reenters.*)

BAKER: Wait, I had more lines in this scene.

CASANOVA: Sorry, but we must keep this play moving.

BAKER: You're a low-down, evil, callous MAN!

HEDDA HARE: Person!

BAKER: Person!

HEDDA HARE: I mean BRUTE!

BAKER: BRUTE! (*He turns and storms out as the lights return to normal.*)

HEDDA HARE: (*Speaking to BIDDLE.*) Yes! I said it. He was a low-down, evil and callous BRUTE!

BIDDLE: So you see, Miss Hedda Hare, you had the MOTIVE and the MEANS of murdering Mr. Casanova Bond by carefully placing the poison inside your dish.

HEDDA HARE: I didn't!

BIDDLE: You could have!

HEDDA HARE: I wouldn't!

BIDDLE: Wouldn't you?

HEDDA HARE: I'm innocent!

BIDDLE: Are you?

HEDDA HARE: Yes! Yes! Yes! (*She drops into her chair weeping into a tissue.*)

PAIGE TURNER: (*Standing.*) Stop it! Stop it! Can't you see she's upset? Leave the poor girl alone!

BIDDLE: Well, Miss Paige Turner, you're looking rather nervous today.

PAIGE TURNER: With everything that has happened, of course I'm nervous. We're all nervous.

BIDDLE: Now tell me what it was you said about the Mr. Bond earlier. (*Sarcastically.*) Oh, I happen to have written it down right here. (*He flips open his small notebook.*) You stated, and I quote: Mr. Bond was a filthy thief.

PAIGE TURNER: It's true! It's true! Oh, heaven help me, it's true! I did say that! But I did not murder that man!

BIDDLE: Why don't you let me be the judge of that? Please, won't you be so kind as to tell us your story?

PAIGE TURNER: (*Very ominous.*) It was a dark and stormy night. Black, gloomy clouds hung low in the sunny sky above. I was teaching a cooking seminar at our local community college – go Panthers! – and HE was there, (*Pointing down at CASANOVA.*) that awful, appalling, hideous, awful –

BIDDLE: You already said awful.

PAIGE TURNER: I did? (*Pulls out a pocket thesaurus and flips it open.*) Did I say 'repulsive'?

BIDDLE: No.

PAIGE TURNER: REPULSIVE thief of a man.

BIDDLE: (*The REENACTMENT TEAM reenters, grabs a chair to sit in as someone brings out a table with PAIGE TURNER's ingredients sitting on it. CASANOVA rises and sits in one of the chairs.*) Ladies and gentlemen, the Reenactment Players. (*He leads the audience in polite applause as PAIGE TURNER puts on a smock with a nametag pinned to it and the lights change.*)

PAIGE TURNER: Before we wrap up my seminar on this beautiful, sunny dark and stormy night, I wanted you all to be the first to know about my secret business venture. I have decided to produce and market my own chili and make it available nationwide. (*Polite applause.*) The ingredients are: (*As she points to each one on the table.*) Ingredient A: Lean ground beef. B: Chopped onions. C: Diced tomatoes. D: Water. E: And last but not YEAST, my secret recipe.

FIRST SEMINAR PARTICIPANT: Last but not YEAST. That's a cooking joke. Ha ha!

SECOND SEMINAR PARTICIPANT: Do we get to hear what your secret ingredient is?

PAIGE TURNER: If I told you, I would have to murder you. (*She laughs.*) But no, seriously, it is a secret, and I WOULD have to rough you up pretty good. Once my chili is on the market, I can finally retire and watch my millions come rolling PIN!

FIRST SEMINAR PARTICIPANT: HA! Rolling PIN! She's good!

PAIGE TURNER: Now, before we take a little break, are there any questions?

SECOND SEMINAR PARTICIPANT: *(Raising her hand.)* Are there a lot of virgins in the Virgin Islands?

THIRD SEMINAR PARTICIPANT: Can fat people go skinny-dipping?

FOURTH SEMINAR PARTICIPANT: How do you throw away a garbage can?

PAIGE TURNER: Are there any questions about my COOKING SEMINAR?

FIFTH SEMINAR PARTICIPANT: No, ma'am, actually so far it's been a little boring.

CASANOVA: *(Raising his hand and standing.)* Wait a minute, I have a question. *(He takes off his fake glasses.)*

PAIGE TURNER: *(Taken aback.)* Why, It's Mr. James Casanova Valentino Bond. I didn't know you were attending my humble little seminar.

CASANOVA: I was wearing a disguise. *(Puts the glasses back on.)*

PAIGE TURNER: *(Looking around.)* Wait a minute, where did that nice man go?

CASANOVA: *(Takes his glasses off again.)* Here I am.

PAIGE TURNER: *(Smitten.)* Oh, Mr. Bond, you are soooooo clever. But why would someone as successful as yourself ever seek to ask ME a question?

CASANOVA: Let's just say I am smitten by your collards, infatuated by your radishes and extremely impressed by your melons.

PAIGE TURNER: *(Flattered.)* Mr. Bond, the things you say. *(Notices the PARTICIPANTS staring at them.)* Break time, everyone. GO! *(The PARTICIPANTS rise, scatter and exit.)*

CASANOVA: Why, Miss Turner, I do believe you're blushing.

PAIGE TURNER: It's a little warm in here, don't you think?

BIDDLE: *(Looking at his watch as CASANOVA freezes.)* I hate to interrupt, Miss Turner, but the story is getting a little wordy, would you mind condensing it a bit? Thank you. *(CASANOVA unfreezes as he takes PAIGE TURNER's arms and forces her to look at him eye to eye.)*

CASANOVA: Question.

PAIGE TURNER: Yes?

CASANOVA: Dinner?

PAIGE TURNER: Dinner?

CASANOVA: Us.

PAIGE TURNER: When? *(The REENACTMENT TEAM brings in a small, round table, two chairs and a candle that sits in the middle of the table. Remember, the following scene is to be played cheesy.)*

CASANOVA: Now. *(He shows her the table. The REENACTMENT TEAM exits.)*

PAIGE TURNER: *(Excited, clapping her hands.)* Casanova!

CASANOVA: Happy?

PAIGE TURNER: *(Nods her head.)* Surprised.

CASANOVA: Romantic.

PAIGE TURNER: Very. *(CASANOVA snaps his fingers and soft music begins to play.)*

CASANOVA: Nice?

PAIGE TURNER: Veeeeeeeery.

CASANOVA: Dance?

PAIGE TURNER: *(Points to herself and shakes her head.)* Clumsy.

CASANOVA: *(Reassuringly as he holds his hand out to her.)* Dance. *(She takes his hand, brings her close to him as they dance to the slow music. He looks into her eyes.)* Beautiful.

PAIGE TURNER: *(Blushing, drops her head.)* Stop.

CASANOVA: *(Lifts her head with his finger.)* Really.

PAIGE TURNER: *(Bigger, giggling.)* Stop. *(He sits her in a chair with her back to the table of ingredients. The music continues to play.)*

CASANOVA: Rest.

PAIGE TURNER: *(Shakes her head.)* Busy.

CASANOVA: *(Very sharp and slips into rudeness.)* REST!

PAIGE TURNER: *(Sitting quickly.)* Okay.

CASANOVA: *(Calmer.)* Relax. *(He secretly crosses to the table of recipes, pulls a bag from inside his jacket and starts to grab the secret recipe.)*

PAIGE TURNER: *(She stands quickly and turns to CASANOVA just short of seeing him. He acts quickly innocent.)* CASANOVA!

CASANOVA: *(Throwing the bag down and approaching her quickly.)* Yes?

PAIGE TURNER: Dance! *(The music changes quickly to a salsa as he grabs her and they dance a salsa-style dance. The music changes to bluegrass and they two-step. The music changes to hip-hop and they dance accordingly. The music fades out leaving PAIGE TURNER out of breath.)* That's what I call dancing!

CASANOVA: I insist you sit here and rest.

PAIGE TURNER: There's no time. Everyone is returning from break. *(The REENACTMENT TEAM reenters like a stampede hiding CASANOVA and the secret ingredient. During the rush, CASANOVA grabs the secret ingredient and disappears behind the table.)* All right, ladies and gentlemen, have a seat, please. Everyone, be seated. *(They do.)* Before the break, we were discussing the ingredients of my soon-to-be best-selling chili. *(She looks back at the table and sees the empty spot.)* Wait a minute, my secret ingredient! It's missing! *(Mumbling among the crowd.)*

FIRST SEMINAR PARTICIPANT: When was the last time you saw it?

PAIGE TURNER: When Mr. Bond and I were talking. *(Looking around.)* Where is he? Where did he go?

SECOND SEMINAR PARTICIPANT: *(Raising her hand and standing.)* I saw him leave with what looked like something he was hiding under his arm.

PAIGE TURNER: *(Shocked.)* CASANOVA? It can't be so. I must find him at once. Class dismissed. *(Lights change as she approaches DETECTIVE BIDDLE and the REENACTMENT TEAM takes the table and chairs off.)* And I ran after him. Out into that dark and stormy yet nice and warm, sunny afternoon. I ran. But he had disappeared. That low-down, evil, callous brute disappeared with MY secret recipe, made his own chili, and made millions! Millions that were SUPPOSED to be MINE! MINE, I tell you!

BIDDLE: So, you see, Miss Paige Turner, you had the motive and the means of murdering Mr. Bond by carefully placing the poison inside your dish.

PAIGE TURNER: I didn't!

BIDDLE: You could have!

PAIGE TURNER: I wouldn't!

BIDDLE: Wouldn't you?!

PAIGE TURNER: I'm innocent!

BIDDLE: Are you?

PAIGE TURNER: Yes! Yes! Yes! (*She drops into her chair weeping into a tissue.*)

ROBIN BANKS: (*Standing.*) Stop it! Stop it! Can't you see she's upset? Leave the poor girl alone!

BIDDLE: Well, Miss Robin Banks, you're looking rather nervous today.

ROBIN BANKS: With everything that has happened, of course I'm nervous. We all are!

BIDDLE: Now, tell me what it was you said about Mr. Casanova Bond earlier. (*Sarcastically.*) Oh, I happen to have it written down right here. (*Flips open his small notebook.*) You stated, and I quote: He was a despicable cheat!?

ROBIN BANKS: All right, all right, it's true! I did say that, because it's true! Oh, Heaven help me, it's true! But I did NOT murder that man!

BIDDLE: Why don't you let me be the judge of that? Please, won't you be so kind as to tell us what happened?

ROBIN BANKS: (*Out to the audience, dramatically.*) I was in high school. It was a dark and stormy night one week from our senior prom – the most anticipated night of the year. A boy hadn't asked me yet, and I was becoming desperate. (*A male member of the REENACTMENT TEAM enters, and ROBIN BANKS turns to him.*) Hey, you!

BOY: (*Stopping in his tracks.*) What?

ROBIN BANKS: Do you have a date to the prom? And if you don't, I want you to know I'm available. So, what do you say? Huh? What's your answer?

BOY: (*Noticeably uncomfortable.*) Uh – I would, but my best friend is in the hospital.

ROBIN BANKS: Who?

BOY: Uh – Robbie.

ROBIN BANKS: I just saw Robbie in math class.

BOY: I meant Andrew.

ROBIN BANKS: (*Pointing to offstage.*) Andrew is standing right over there.

BOY: I meant my great aunt Sylvia. You haven't seen HER today, have you?

ROBIN BANKS: No.

BOY: Poor Aunt Sylvia, she's on her last leg. (*AUNT SYLVIA enters.*)

AUNT SYLVIA: (*Sees BOY.*) Nephew, is that you? Is that my little , wittle nephew?

BOY: Aunt Sylvia? What are you doing here?

AUNT SYLVIA: Was in the neighborhood and wanted to stop by and say 'hello' to my favorite nephew. Bye! (*She exits. BOY turns back to ROBIN BANKS as she gives him a look and crosses her arms.*)

BOY: Okay, I lied. No one is in the hospital. I just said that because I can't go to the prom with you since I'm going to be out of town that weekend. (*JENNIFER enters.*)

JENNIFER: (*Crosses to BOY.*) Heeeeeeey, Joseph. I can't wait until the proooooom. My dad says he will rent us a limoooooo.

BOY: Sounds great.

JENNIFER: Byeeeeeeeeeeee. (*She exits.*)

BOY: (*After uncomfortable pause.*) See ya! (*Runs out as TAYLOR enters carrying schoolbooks.*)

TAYLOR: Hey, Robin.

ROBIN BANKS: Hey, Taylor, my best friend in the whole wide world who would never hurt me for anything, especially for a boy who is confident and somewhat conceited.

TAYLOR: Has anyone asked you to the prom yet?

ROBIN BANKS: Not yet, (*Holds up a clipboard and checks off a name.*) and there went the last available boy in school.

TAYLOR: Remember what we promised each other?

ROBIN BANKS: If we couldn't find a date, we would go together. (*CASANOVA enters, faces the audience and combs his hair. He's wearing a jacket with the collar turned up.*)

TAYLOR: Hey, who's the new kid over there combing his hair as though he were a stereotypically confident, but probably conceited, high school boy?

ROBIN BANKS: I don't know but he sure is cool what with combing his hair and wearing a jacket with the collar turned up and all.

TAYLOR: He's coming this way. Talk to him.

ROBIN BANKS: I don't know what to say.

TAYLOR: Ask him to the prom. I'll be right over here. (*TAYLOR crosses to the other side of the stage.*)

CASANOVA: (*Crosses to ROBIN BANKS.*) What's up?

ROBIN BANKS: *(Nervous.)* Huh?

CASANOVA: I said, “what’s uuuuuuuup?”

ROBIN BANKS: Nothing much, stereotypically confident, but probably conceited high school boy. *(She looks over at TAYLOR and they both grin and bite their nails.)*

CASANOVA: *(He continues to comb his hair as he talks to her.)* Do you have a date to the prom?

ROBIN BANKS: No.

CASANOVA: Want to go with me?

ROBIN BANKS: Sure.

CASANOVA: Pick me up at seven, and don’t be late.

ROBIN BANKS: Okay, bye.

CASANOVA: Later. *(He exits combing his hair. TAYLOR rushes over to ROBIN BANKS.)*

TAYLOR: What was he like? What was he like?

ROBIN BANKS: He was your stereotypically confident and terribly conceited high school jerk, but he asked me to the prom! *(They squeal and hug each other then exit. Slow music begins to play. CASANOVA enters wearing a leisure suit-type jacket. ROBIN BANKS reenters wearing a fluffy skirt wrapped around her waist. She carries two punch cups.)*

ROBIN BANKS: *(Crosses to CASANOVA. *Note: You may choose to have the REENACTMENT TEAM MEMBERS slow dancing in the background.)* Here’s your punch, Casanova. Isn’t this a SWELL prom?

CASANOVA: *(Looking inside his cup.)* There’s no ice in my punch.

ROBIN BANKS: But –

CASANOVA: Take it back.

ROBIN BANKS: Okay. *(She takes his cup and exits quickly then returns immediately and crosses to him.)* Here you go.

CASANOVA: Took you long enough.

ROBIN BANKS: Are you having fun?

CASANOVA: I’m bored.

ROBIN BANKS: Want to dance?

CASANOVA: Might as well. *(They put their punch down and begin to slow dance. She tries to stand close to him but he keeps her at arm’s length. She tries again to no avail. TAYLOR enters also wearing a skirt around her waist.)*

TAYLOR: *(Waving wildly.)* ROBIN BANKS! ROBIN BANKS!
Heeeeeey!

CASANOVA: *(Stops dancing abruptly.)* Who's that?

ROBIN BANKS: My best friend in the whole wide world who would never hurt me for anything, especially for a boy who is confident and somewhat conceited.

CASANOVA: I want more punch.

ROBIN BANKS: But you haven't drunk the other I brought.

CASANOVA: *(He takes his cup and gulps down his punch.)* I'm thirsty.

ROBIN BANKS: *(Calling out.)* Taylor, my best friend in the whole wide world who would never hurt me for anything, especially for a boy who is confident and somewhat conceited, would you mind keeping Casanova company until I get back with some punch? *(She pulls TAYLOR over to CASANOVA then exits.)*

TAYLOR: *(To CASANOVA.)* I can tell Robin is having a very good time with you.

CASANOVA: You talk too much. Shut up and dance with me.

TAYLOR: Oh, no, I could never do that. You're Robin's date.

CASANOVA: She asked you to keep me company.

TAYLOR: Good point. *(As they begin to slow dance, he tries to pull her close but she keeps him at arm's length. He tries again, but she pushes him away.)*

CASANOVA: Don't you like me? *(He finally pulls her in closer as they dance to the soft music. He starts singing to the tune making up his own words. ROBIN BANKS enters with a VERY large cup of punch. She's shocked.)*

ROBIN BANKS: Casanova? *(He doesn't acknowledge her, but keeps dancing.)* Taylor? *(TAYLOR is lost in the moment, swaying back and forth, smiling with her eyes closed.)*

FIRST PROM ATTENDEE: Look, Robin Bank's date is dancing with another girl. *(PROM ATTENDEES laugh.)*

SECOND PROM ATTENDEE: Tossed aside like a used piece of gum after the flavor has worn out. *(Everyone surrounds ROBIN BANKS and laughs.)*

THIRD PROM ATTENDEE: Hey, Robin, why are you holding that large cup of punch? Are you thirsty? *(Everyone laughs.)*

FOURTH PROM ATTENDEE: (*CASANOVA and TAYLOR have been off to themselves dancing this whole time.*) Look, her date doesn't know she's in the room. (*They laugh. ROBIN BANKS is humiliated and runs out. CASANOVA and TAYLOR stop dancing.*)

TAYLOR: What's everyone laughing about? (*Looks around.*) Is Robin not back yet?

CASANOVA: I gotta run. Need more grease for my hair. (*He starts to exit.*)

TAYLOR: You can't leave! What about Robin? She's gone to get you some punch. (*Everyone laughs. So does CASANOVA as he shakes his head and exits followed by everyone else as they continue to laugh.*) But I still didn't hear the joke. (*She shrugs and exits as ROBIN BANKS reenters, crosses to BIDDLE and the lights change.*)

ROBIN BANKS: I vowed that night I would get even with him.

BIDDLE: And what about your best friend in the whole, wide world who would never hurt you for anything, especially for a boy who is confident and somewhat conceited? Did SHE explain what happened?

ROBIN BANKS: She tried, but I didn't believe her. I was wrong. Because of him, I lost my best friend for life. The next day, I left a note taped to his locker.

BIDDLE: And what did the note say?

ROBIN BANKS: It said, Casanova Bond, you're a low-down, evil and callous brute! There, I said it – he was a low-down, evil and callous brute!

BIDDLE: (*Shouting.*) So you see, Miss Banks, you had the motive and the means of murdering Mr. Bond by placing the poison inside your dish!

ROBIN BANKS: I didn't!

BIDDLE: You could have!

ROBIN BANKS: I wouldn't!

BIDDLE: Wouldn't you?

ROBIN BANKS: I'm innocent!

BIDDLE: Are you?

ROBIN BANKS: Yes! Yes! Yes! (*She drops into her chair weeping into a tissue.*)

CARRIE OAKEY: Stop it! Stop it! Can't you see she's upset? Leave the poor girl alone!

BIDDLE: Well, Miss Carrie Oakey, you're looking rather nervous today.

CARRIE OAKEY: With everything that has happened, of course I'm nervous. We all are!

BIDDLE: Now, tell me what it was you said about Mr. Bond earlier. (*Sarcastically.*) Oh, I happen to have it written down right here. (*Flips open his small notebook.*) You stated, and I quote: He was a contemptible liar.

CARRIE OAKEY: All right, it's true! I did say that because it's true, but I did NOT murder that man!

BIDDLE: Why don't you let me be the judge of that? Please tell us your story.

CARRIE OAKEY: Mr. Bond and I worked together for a time at a little greasy spoon called Mama Jean's Country Kitchen. (*As the REENACTMENT TEAM enters.*) It was a dark and stormy night around eight in the morning. Mama Jean explained to the staff that she had just hired a young man as head cook and wanted us all to meet him.

MAMA JEAN: (*With a hick accent.*) You probably was a wonderin' why I called y'all together this dark and stormy night so early in the morning.

DORA: I heard someone just say it was because you hired a young man as head cook and wanted all of us to meet him.

MAMA JEAN: Shut up, smart aleck. He comes to us all the way from the other side of town. I'd like to introduce to you Mr. James Casanova Valentino Bond. (*Everyone applauds as CASANOVA enters rather piously wearing a white cook's hat and a white apron.*) Casanova, do you have anything to say to your fellow staff?

CASANOVA: Stay away from my grill, and we should get along just fine.

JOE: Excuse me, Mama Jean, I hate to bring it up, but I have been assistant cook for five years. I understood I was next in line for head cook.

MAMA JEAN: Sorry, Joe, but I'm afraid that's the way the cookie crumbles. You just couldn't cut the mustard. Sometimes we get tossed around in the salad of life. There's more cooking metaphors but I think you get the point.

JOE: (*Pitifully.*) But when Mel left, you said I could wear the hat.

MAMA JEAN: (*Ignoring JOE.*) Come, Casanova, I'll show you around the kitchen. (*She and he exit as she holds on to his elbow. JOE sits sadly into a chair.*)

DORA: Did you see that?

FLO: He's soooo handsome.

GENEVA: And did you notice he wasn't wearing a ring?

DORA: Carrie, this is your big chance.

CARRIE OAKEY: My chance for what?

ROMENA: You're the only single girl here. You should get to know him.

FLO: Yeah, get to knooooow him, if you knooooow what we meeeeeean.

CARRIE OAKEY: Someone like Casanova would never go for a girl like me.

ROMENA: You won't know until you ask him.

CARRIE OAKEY: (*As the GIRLS freeze, CARRIE OAKEY turns to BIDDLE.*) They kept after me to ask him out. Day after day, night after night.

BIDDLE: Until...?

CARRIE OAKEY: Until I gave in. (*Turns as CASANOVA enters wiping his hand on a dishtowel.*) I heard all the customers say how much they loved your Tuna Surprise. We have never sold so many lunch specials since we've been open.

CASANOVA: (*Removing the cigar and blowing "smoke" into the air.*) Tuna Surprise is my specialty.

GENEVA: (*Pops up from somewhere.*) Ask him. (*Ducks quickly.*)

CASANOVA: What was that?

CARRIE OAKEY: I didn't hear anyone say anything. What was I saying? I overheard Mama Jean say she's about to give you a big raise soon.

FLO: (*Popping up.*) Ask him! (*Ducks again.*)

ROMENA: (*Popping up.*) Ask him! (*Ducks again.*)

CASANOVA: I won't need some penny-ante raise because I won't be staying around that long.

CARRIE OAKY: You won't?

CASANOVA: This greasy spoon was just a stepping-stone to bigger and better things.

CARRIE OAKY: You mean you're leaving us?

CASANOVA: And if you knew what was good for you, you'd get out, too. My ultimate goal is to become head chef over at the Hard Wok Café.

CARRIE OAKY: The Hard Wok? That's the most exclusive restaurant in the county. You can't even wear flip-flops in there.

CASANOVA: That's right, and if you play your cards right, once I get to know everyone over there, I could send for you.

CARRIE OAKY: Me? Work at the Hard Wok Café? (*Smitten.*) With yooooou?

CASANOVA: You're much too classy to work in a place like this.

CARRIE OAKY: (*Extremely flattered.*) I don't know what to say.

CASANOVA: Think about it.

CARRIE OAKY: I will. (*JOE runs in holding a rolling pin.*)

JOE: (*Stops and points at CASANOVA.*) Hold it right there, mister!

CARRIE OAKY: Joe, what are you doing with that rolling pin?

JOE: Quiet! I'm in charge of this conversation. Mr. Bond, in case you haven't noticed, I haven't been very happy with your taking my job away from me.

CASANOVA: I beg your pardon?

JOE: It's too late to beg! I've been working here for five years, (*Holds up four fingers.*) and I was up for the head cook position. I missed out on the head janitor position, I WON'T miss out on this. I will fight for my job and my dignity. (*Starts dancing around CASANOVA like a boxer.*) Come on! You afraid? Come on! Come on!

CARRIE OAKY: Joe, you don't have to do this.

JOE: (*Still dancing.*) You like this fancy footwork, don't you? Huh? You like that? You like that, Mr. High and Mighty?

CARRIE OAKY: Casanova is taking another job, so you will get your promotion!

JOE: (*Stands still.*) Aha! You saw the light, did you? I came this close to knocking you out.

CARRIE OAKY: He's leaving because he got a better offer somewhere else. When he gets settled there, he's going to call for me.

JOE: *(Kicks his heels.)* Yippee! Thank you, Casanova, and good luck! *(He grabs the chef's hat off CASANOVA'S head and runs out.)*

CARRIE OAKY: *(Shouting after him.)* But don't tell the girls yet! I want to wait until the time is right! *(Turns to BIDDLE as CASANOVA exits.)* But Joe did tell them, so I had no choice but to admit the whole thing.

GENEVA: *(Running in.)* Joe just told us! Are you really leaving?

CARRIE OAKY: Yes, it's true.

GENEVA: We wish you all the luck in the world.

FLO: It's such a great opportunity for you!

CARRIE OAKY: It's been wonderful working with all of you. And I know Joe will make the best head cook Mama Jean's Kitchen has ever seen.

MAMA JEAN: *(She enters carrying a cake as JOE marches in wearing his cook's hat and playing the kazoo. Everyone sings.)* For she's a jolly good woman, for she's a jolly good woman, *(All join in.)* For she's a jolly good woman! That nobody can deny! *(Everyone applauds.)*

ALL: Speech! Speech!

CARRIE OAKY: I don't know what to say. I will miss all of you ever so much.

MAMA JEAN: *(Holding up a small wrapped gift.)* And we all pitched in and bought you a little gift. Do you remember that diamond necklace you always dreamed of?

CARRIE OAKY: *(Clasping her hands together.)* YES!

MAMA JEAN: We bought you some panty hose. *(Hands her the gift.)*

GENEVA: So when's the big day?

FLO: When is Casanova going to be calling you up to go work with him?

CARRIE OAKY: He said that as soon as the time was right, he will call me up and tell me to come on over. *(Applause.)*

DORA: *(Straight out to the audience.)* Day one.

CARRIE OAKY: *(Turns to BIDDLE.)* Time began to pass.

FLO: *(Out to the audience.)* Day two.

ROMENA: Day three.

JOE: Day four.

CARRIE OAKY: *(To BIDDLE.)* Days turned to weeks. Weeks to months.

MAMA JEAN: *(Unfreezing and turning to CARRIE OAKY.)* Carrie, it's been three doggone months. You have got to face the facts that that man ain't goin' to call you, sugar pie.

CARRIE OAKY: You're wrong! He promised! He just needs more time, that's all!

MAMA JEAN: Honey child, you got a customer.

CARRIE OAKY: I must stay close to the phone in case he calls! *(Picks up the phone receiver.)* Hello? Hello?

MAMA JEAN: Cupcake, that there phone didn't ring a tall.

DORA: Five months.

GENEVA: Six months.

JOE: Seven.

CARRIE OAKY: *(Back into the phone.)* Hello? Casanova, is that you? HELLO? *(She pauses, realizes and slowly hangs up the phone. She looks around and sees everyone looking pitifully at her.)* He's not going to call, is he? *(She bursts into tears as EVERYONE exits and CARRIE OAKY turns back to BIDDLE.)* On top of the humiliation, I lost my job at Mama Jean's since I never did any work. He promised. He promised! But he lied! He humiliated me in front of all my friends! And did I mention he lied? He was a low-down, evil and callous brute! There, I said it. He was a low-down, evil and callous brute!

BIDDLE: So you see, Miss Oakey, you had the motive and the means of murdering Mr. Bond by placing the poison inside your dish.

CARRIE OAKY: I didn't!

BIDDLE: You could have!

CARRIE OAKY: I wouldn't!

BIDDLE: Wouldn't you?

CARRIE OAKY: I'm innocent!

BIDDLE: Are you?

CARRIE OAKY: Yes! Yes! Yes! *(She drops into her chair weeping into a tissue.)*

JANE SMITH: Stop it! Stop it! Can't you see she's upset? Leave the poor girl alone!

BIDDLE: Well, Miss Jane Smith, you're looking rather nervous today.

JANE SMITH: With everything that has happened, of course I'm nervous! We all are!

BIDDLE: Now, tell me what it was you said about Mr. Bond earlier? (*Sarcastically.*) Oh, I happen to have it written down right here. (*Flips open his small notebook.*) You stated, and I quote: He was a malicious and maniacal murderer! Nice use of alliteration, by the way.

JANE SMITH: Thank you. All right, it's true! I did say that, because it's true! But I did NOT murder that man!

BIDDLE: Why don't you let me be the judge of that? Please, won't you be so kind as to tell us what happened? (*The REENACTMENT TEAM brings out a bench.*)

JANE SMITH: It was a dark and stormy night in the late afternoon. I was taking my dog Roger for a walk in the park. (*She is handed a stuffed dog on a leash as she approaches the park bench. FIRST DOG WALKER enters and crosses by JANE SMITH. He is dragging a large stuffed dog on a leash behind him.*)

FIRST DOG WALKER: (*To JANE SMITH.*) Afternoon. (*He exits. SECOND DOG WALKER enters pulling a very tiny stuffed dog behind her.*)

SECOND DOG WALKER: (*To JANE SMITH.*) Afternoon.

She exits. JANE SMITH holds the magazine up in front of her face. CASANOVA enters with his own dog on a leash. He notices the empty spot on the bench and has a seat beside JANE SMITH. He takes his newspaper and holds it up in front of his face. After a few seconds, JANE SMITH slyly drops her magazine, peers over the top of it at CASANOVA. CASANOVA turns his page, and she quickly places the magazine back in front of her face. Next, CASANOVA slyly lowers the newspaper as he peers over the top of it, glancing over at JANE SMITH. She coughs, and he quickly places the newspaper up in front of his face again. After a second, they both lower their reading material simultaneously, glance at one another over the top of their material, see that the other one is looking and quickly hold the material up in front of their faces again. JANE SMITH makes a

barking noise from behind her magazine. She drops the magazine to her lap.

JANE SMITH: Hush, Roger. Now, be quiet. *(She returns the magazine in front of her face. CASANOVA makes a barking sound for his dog and drops his newspaper to his lap and speaks to his dog.)*

CASANOVA: Quiet, FiFi! Do you want the lady to think we don't have any manners? I apologize for my dog, ma'am.

JANE SMITH: *(Again dropping her magazine to her lap.)* Oh, hello, I didn't notice anyone sitting there. *(She quickly returns the magazine in front of her face.)*

CASANOVA: Does he do any tricks?

JANE SMITH: *(Drops the magazine.)* I don't think so. Let's see. *(Speaks to her dog.)* Roger, beg. *(Nothing happens.)* Roger, roll over. *(Nothing.)* Roger, just lie there and do nothing. *(ROGER does. JANE SMITH looks at CASANOVA.)* Just one trick. *(She returns to her magazine.)*

CASANOVA: Not bad. I just finished teaching my FiFi a few tricks. Would you like to see?

JANE SMITH: *(She's pretty sure he's flirting with her.)* I would love to.

CASANOVA: FiFi, stand. *(With a string, he raises FIFI up on her hind legs.)* Sit, FiFi, sit. *(He lowers the string and FIFIF "sits".)* FiFi, what's two plus two? *(As CASANOVA jerks the string five times, CASANOVA barks behind his hand.)* Arf, arf, arf, arf. *(To JANE SMITH.)* She's still working on her numbers.

JANE SMITH: What a wonderfully smart dog you have. Can she do anything else?

CASANOVA: *(Stands.)* FiFi, how does a bunny rabbit go? *(With help from the string, FIFI hops.)* Play dead. *(FIFI suddenly lies still and lifeless on the ground.)* Good job, girl. Good job. *(With the help of the string, FIFI jumps into JANE SMITH's lap.)* No, FiFi! Bad dog! Bad!

JANE SMITH: Oh, that's all right. *(Pets FIFI.)* She's just being friendly.

CASANOVA: Look at that. She likes you.

JANE SMITH: Well, I do have a way with dogs. My little Roger and I have been together fifteen years. He's my only friend in the world.

CASANOVA: It's hard to replace the love of a dog.

JANE SMITH: It's unconditional. *(They're looking deeply into each other's eyes now. JANE SMITH breaks out of her fog and hands CASANOVA his dog.)* Here's your dog. I do need to get back to my magazine. *(She holds it up but this time it's upside down.)*

CASANOVA: I apologize for disturbing you. *(He holds the paper up in front of his face. After about five seconds, he slowly moves toward her. She slowly moves toward him. He leans toward her. She takes the corner of the newspaper closest to her and pulls it in front of her face. Because of the size of the newspaper, it covers both of them from the waist up. THIRD DOG WALKER runs in with his own stuffed dog and a Frisbee.)*

THIRD DOG WALKER: Here we go, boy! Here we go! *(JANE SMITH and CASANOVA quickly drop the newspaper. She's wearing his hat and he wears her earrings.)* Fetch the Frisbee! See the Frisbee? Fetch the Frisbee! *(He throws the Frisbee to offstage then throws the dog to offstage after the Frisbee. THIRD DOG WALKER barks for the dog behind his hand.)* Arf, arf, arf, arf!! Good boy!! *(He rushes off stage toward his dog.)*

JANE SMITH: *(Quickly stands.)* I must go.

CASANOVA: *(Quickly stands.)* Must you?

JANE SMITH: Yes, I must. *(Stands, holding her dog.)*

CASANOVA: But I wanted so much the chance to impress you.

JANE SMITH: Perhaps another time.

CASANOVA: But if I impressed you, I thought there might have been a chance you would allow me to take you to dinner.

JANE SMITH: Dinner? With you?

CASANOVA: I shall teach your dog Roger to fetch right before your very eyes. You will be so impressed you won't be able to resist going to dinner with me.

JANE SMITH: *(Hands ROGER to CASANOVA.)* All right.

CASANOVA: (*Holding Roger in one hand, he pulls a small ball out of his pocket with the other.*) See the ball, Roger? See the pretty ball? Fetch the ball, Roger. Fetch the ball. (*He throws the ball to offstage. CASANOVA makes the barking sound for Roger.*) Arf! Arf! Arf! (*He then throws the stuffed dog to offstage after the ball.*) ARF! ARF! ARF!

JANE SMITH: He did it! He's chasing the ball! (*Looking in the direction the stuffed dog was thrown.*) Roger, look out for that – (*We hear the screeching of a car's tires then a thud offstage followed by someone offstage shouting YELP for Roger. Roger is thrown back onstage and is caught by JANE SMITH.*) My little Roger! Are you all right? (*She hugs the stuffed dog tightly.*) Speak to me, Roger! Speak to me!

CASANOVA: I'm so sorry!

JANE SMITH: He's dead! My Roger is dead!

CASANOVA: Oh my.

JANE SMITH: This is your fault! (*Shouting.*) Police! Police!

POLICEMAN: (*Running in.*) What seems to be the problem?

JANE SMITH: (*Pointing to CASANOVA.*) He murdered my little innocent dog!

POLICEMAN: (*Standing between CASANOVA and JANE SMITH.*) Is that right, sir?

CASANOVA: It was an accident.

POLICEMAN: Is that right, ma'am?

JANE SMITH: I told him my Roger didn't do tricks.

POLICEMAN: Is that right, sir?

CASANOVA: She gave me permission.

POLICEMAN: Is that right, ma'am?

JANE SMITH: He invited me to dinner.

POLICEMAN: Is that right, sir?

CASANOVA: I'm a lonely man.

POLICEMAN: Is that right, ma'am?

JANE SMITH: How should I know?

POLICEMAN: Is that right, sir?

CASANOVA: That's right, how should she know?

POLICEMAN: (*Wipes his forehead with a handkerchief.*) Well, glad that's settled. Pleasure to be of service. (*He tips his hat and exits.*)

JANE SMITH: (*Pointing to CASANOVA.*) You murdered my dog!
What do you intend to do about this?

CASANOVA: Please! You're upsetting FiFi.

JANE SMITH: You'll pay for this. Some day. Some way you WILL pay!

CASANOVA: (*Picking up his tiny stuffed dog and holding it up to his chest.*) It's okay, FiFi, I will drive you far, far away from this crazy woman. (*Tips his hat to JANE SMITH.*) I bid you good afternoon. I enjoyed our time behind the newspaper. (*He exits quickly.*)

JANE SMITH: (*Shouting after him.*) You know what you are? You're a low-down, evil and callous brute!

BIDDLE: (*Lights change.*) So you see, Miss Smith, you had the motive and the means of murdering Mr. Bond by placing the poison inside your dish.

JANE SMITH: I didn't!

BIDDLE: You could have!

JANE SMITH: I wouldn't!

BIDDLE: Wouldn't you?

JANE SMITH: I'm innocent!

BIDDLE: Are you?

JANE SMITH: Yes! Yes! Yes! (*She drops into her chair weeping into her tissue.*)

ELLA MENTRY: Stop it! Stop it! Can't you see she's upset? Leave the poor girl alone.

BIDDLE: Well, Miss Ella Mentry, you're looking rather nervous today.

ELLA MENTRY: With everything that has happened, of course I'm nervous. We all are!

BIDDLE: Now, tell me what it was you said about Mr. Bond earlier. (*Sarcastically.*) Oh, I happen to have it written down right here. (*Flips open his small notebook.*) You stated, and I quote: He loved to humidify people.

ELLA MENTRY: That's right.

BIDDLE: When, in fact, you meant to say, "He loved to humiliate people!"

ELLA MENTRY: All right, all right, it's true! I did say that because it's true! Oh, Heaven help me, it's true! But I did NOT murder that man!

BIDDLE: Are you sure, Miss Mentry? Are you sure you didn't pull his curtain? Cut his cord? Kick his bucket? Didn't you indeed take Mr. Bond out?

ELLA MENTRY: *(Breaking down.)* Yes! Yes! Yes! I did it! I admit it! I did it! Is that against the law? *(Everyone is in shock. They gasp in unison.)*

BIDDLE: Of course it's against the law!

MASTER OF CEREMONY: Detective, do your duty and arrest that woman!

ELLA MENTRY: No! I can't go to jail! I just had my nails done! *(Points to the sky.)* Look, a dead bird! *(Everyone looks up, and she exits running.)*

BIDDLE: Wait a minute, there's no dead bird up there. The murderer, she's escaped! *(He runs out then immediately back on and points to the suspects.)* Nobody goes anywhere! *(He turns and runs out again.)*

HEDDA HARE: We're never getting out of here.

PAIGE TURNER: I think she's too dumb to murder anyone.

ROBIN BANKS: *(Points to CARRIE OAKY.)* After hearing your story, I think it's you.

CARRIE OAKY: I was thinking the same thing about you.

ROBIN BANKS: *(Points to JANE SMITH.)* I think YOU did it!

MASTER OF CEREMONY: Ladies! Ladies! *(Everyone settles down. MASTER OF CEREMONY looks at HOWIE DIDDOT who's sitting off to himself.)* You're acting rather calmly, Mr. Diddot.

HOWIE DIDDOT: We just heard the confession that lets the rest of us off the hook. Why should I be worried? *(Everyone surrounds HOWIE DIDDOT.)*

HEDDA HARE: What's YOUR story, Howie Diddot?

PAIGE TURNER: Yes, what's YOUR story?

HOWIE DIDDOT: *(Stands and strolls downstage center.)* You want to know MY story? I'll tell you MYYYYYY story! *(Long pause then he points to the audience.)* After this short intermission break. *(Everyone turns and looks at the audience as the lights quickly...)*

BLACKOUT.

ACT TWO**AT RISE:**

Everyone is still in his original spot. BIDDLE and ELLA MENTRY are offstage. HOWIE DIDDOT is standing acting out a charade as the others are trying to guess what it is. He's pretending to play an electric guitar like an old rocker would.

PAIGE TURNER: Elvis Presley!

JANE SMITH: Grandma Moses!

CARRIE OAKEY: Oprah!

ROBIN BANKS: Justin Bieber!

MASTER OF CEREMONY: *Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree!*

HEDDA HARE: Is it *Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree?* (HOWIE DIDDOT shakes his head.)

MASTER OF CEREMONY: (Notices the audience and speaks to the others.) Hey, guys! (Everyone looks at him as he points to the audience. Everyone straightens up and becomes their characters once again as HOWIE DIDDOT sits and everyone surrounds him.) So, Howie Diddot, before the intermission break, you were about to tell us your story. You may proceed.

HEDDA HARE: He can't tell us his story until Detective Annette gets back.

MASTER OF CEREMONY: That could be hours!

BIDDLE: (Entering.) Or it could be right now.

PAIGE TURNER: (Hands on her hips.) It's about time.

MASTER OF CEREMONY: Did you catch that nasty murderer?

BIDDLE: Yes and no.

MASTER OF CEREMONY: What does that mean?

BIDDLE: I didn't quite catch her. When she ran out, she became lost and approached me for directions to Waffle House.

MASTER OF CEREMONY: And?

BIDDLE: I gave her directions and she thanked me.

ROBIN BANKS: You mean you let her go?

BIDDLE: Not quite. I only pretended to give her directions to Waffle House. In reality I gave her directions to this very tent (Or building.).

JANE SMITH: That's ridiculous. No one can be that dumb.

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BIDDLE: Can't they? (*ELLA MENTRY enters quickly wearing her purse on her shoulder.*)

ELLA MENTRY: (*To MASTER OF CEREMONY.*) Excuse me, but do you have a table for one?

MASTER OF CEREMONY: Why, yes we do, right over here. (*He sits her in a nearby chair.*)

ELLA MENTRY: Thank you, it's been a very trying day. I wish I could run off to Waikiki or some other island in Haiti.

MASTER OF CEREMONY: Hawaii. (*Sounds like "how are ya."*)

ELLA MENTRY: I'm fine.

BIDDLE: So, Miss Ella Mentry, we meet again.

ELLA MENTRY: (*Jumps up.*) Detective Annette, how did you find me?

BIDDLE: The important thing is you just confessed to a murder.

ELLA MENTRY: Murder? I would never do such an awful thing.

MASTER OF CEREMONY: Then why did you say – (*He's stopped by BIDDLE putting up a hand.*)

BIDDLE: Then why did you say you were guilty of the murder?

ELLA MENTRY: I never said any such thing, Annette!

BIDDLE: PLEASE call me Detective!

ELLA MENTRY: I never said any such thing, Defective!

BIDDLE: Of course you did.

ELLA MENTRY: No, sir, I didn't. Cross my heart.

BIDDLE: Everyone in the room heard you tell me that you murdered Mr. Bond!

ELLA MENTRY: No, sir. If you would care to rewind the scene, you'll remember otherwise.

BIDDLE: All right, then. Rewind. (*Everyone walks and talks backward until they're standing in the right spot.*) Are you sure, Mrs. Mentry? Are you SURE you didn't pull his curtain? Cut his cord? Kick his bucket? Didn't you indeed take Mr. Bond out?

ELLA MENTRY: (*Breaking down.*) Yes! Yes! I did it! I admit it! Is that against the law?

BIDDLE: (*Everyone runs back to his original spot.*) There, you see? Everyone heard you. You admitted it right THERE!

HEDDA HARE: Wait a minute, Detective Annett-

BIDDLE: BIDDLE!

HEDDA HARE: She never confessed to murdering Casanova. She confessed to taking him out.

BIDDLE: (*Becoming frustrated.*) Another term for murder is TAKING HIM OUT!!

HEDDA HARE: To most people with an IQ higher than five, yes. But not to this poor, dumb, innocent and pathetic blonde it isn't. "Taking him out" means just that. She took him out...on a date.

BIDDLE: Took him out on a date? (*Turns to ELLA MENTRY.*) Is this true, young lady?

ELLA MENTRY: That's right, I took him out...on a date...to a restaurant...but he paid.

BIDDLE: Is this where your story begins?

ELLA MENTRY: No, sir. My story begins in a hospital in upstate New Hampster. (*They enter with a baby doll wrapped in a blanket.*) I was a beautiful baby. Blue eyes, lots of blonde hair – my mother told me I came out wearing a sequin gown and earrings.

BIDDLE: And you believed her?

ELLA MENTRY: What do you take me for, a dummy? (*Looks around.*) Where's my waitress!! (*They take the doll out.*)

BIDDLE: She'll be along shortly. So, you took Mr. Bond out on a date?

ELLA MENTRY: Yes, sir. But he never called me back. He told me I was too dumb for him. Imagine that. ME too dumb for HIM. When I saw he was teaching a Culinary Arts class, I signed up at once hoping I would get the chance to ask him out again.

BIDDLE: You stated that Mr. Bond humiliated you. Would you mind starting your story with that moment?

ELLA MENTRY: It was a dark and stormy night—

BIDDLE: (*Interrupting.*) But somehow in the middle of the day?

ELLA MENTRY: No sir, it was at nighttime, and it was thundering and lightning.

BIDDLE: (*Taken aback.*) Oh.

ELLA MENTRY: I was a student at the university taking a class in Culinary Arts...

BIDDLE: (*Correcting her.*) Culinary Arts. Please continue. (*The REENACTMENT TEAM takes its place.*)

ELLA MENTRY: Mr. Casanova Bond was my Culinary Arts professor at the time.

CASANOVA: All right, students, everyone please have a seat so we may get started. My name is Professor Bond. You may call me Your Highness. (*ELLA MENTRY raises her hand.*) Yes, the dumb-looking blonde right there.

ELLA MENTRY: (*Standing with a covered plate.*) Mr. Bond, I just wanted to say it is truly a privilege to be taking your Culinary Arts class, and that I have brought chocolate brownies for everyone.

CASANOVA: Young lady, this is a serious college class, not a sorority mixer. Please put the brownies away.

ELLA MENTRY: Yes sir. (*She sits.*)

CASANOVA: Students, I need to be honest with you. My course is tough. So those of you who thought you would take my class for an easy 'A' have another thought coming.

ELLA MENTRY: (*Standing.*) I have another thought coming. (*Thinks a second then a thought comes to her.*) Change will surly come...except from a vending machine.

CASANOVA: You can't be serious.

ELLA MENTRY: No sir, Serious is my sister who is now a professional stand-up coma.

CASANOVA: You mean stand-up comic.

ELLA MENTRY: Comic, coma, same difference.

CASANOVA: Touché. (*ELLA MENTRY sits. CASANOVA turns back to the class.*) Your first homework assignment is to bake a soufflé and bring it to class tomorrow.

STUDENT: But, Mr. Bond, this is our first day of class.

CASANOVA: If a cow had wheels it would be a milk truck, what's your point?

ELLA MENTRY: (*Raising her hand and standing.*) Excuse me, Your Hiney – I'm thinking it would be hard to put wheels on a cow... Where would the axel go? (*Everyone laughs.*)

CASANOVA: Quiet! I'm afraid that's the last outburst I will allow from you, young lady. You do that one more time, and you'll get your walking shoes.

ELLA MENTRY: Yaaaay! Prada! Prada!

CASANOVA: (*Pointing to the door.*) Out! Out with you! And you had better bring in a top-notch soufflé tomorrow or you're out of my class for good!

ELLA MENTRY: Oh, mine will be a good dish, sir. I'm the best kook in town.

CASANOVA: I'LL buy that. Now, get out!

ELLA MENTRY: I'll see all of you nice people tomorrow. I'll leave the brownies here. Help yourselves. (*CASANOVA and STUDENTS freeze as ELLA MENTRY approaches BIDDLE.*)

BIDDLE: And did you return the next day with your soufflé?

ELLA MENTRY: Oh, yes, I did. I stayed up all that dark and stormy night preparing it so that it would be just right and I could earn my degree and land a good job and support my boyfriend's leisure suit habit.

BIDDLE: Did Mr. Bond like your dish?

ELLA MENTRY: Wait, I haven't gotten to that part yet. (*Looking around and shouting.*) Where are my hash browns?!! (*Back to BIDDLE.*) So, anyway, the next morning it was a dark and stormy night, and I brought my masterpiece dish into the Culinary Arts class. I was so nervous, but I knew I had done the very best I could.

CASANOVA: (*Unfreezing.*) All right, students. Take your seats. I see everyone has brought your soufflés. Loretta Swatt, why don't we start with you?

LORETTA: Well, all right. (*She approaches CASANOVA with her dish and holds it in front of him.*)

CASANOVA: Let's see what we have here. (*He takes a bite.*) Mmmmm, sweet, yet tart. Grainy, yet smooth. Chocolatey yet pure vanilla. For your first attempt, I will give you an A. (*Applause.*)

LORETTA: I don't know what to say.

CASANOVA: "Thank you, your highness."

LORETTA: Thank you, your highness.

CASANOVA: Take your seat, please. (*She does.*) Let's see, who else do we have here?

ELLA MENTRY: (*Standing, raising her hand.*) I would like to volunteer to go next, your sinuses.

CASANOVA: Very well. (*She approaches him and holds her dish in front of him.*)

ELLA MENTRY: This is my very own special recipe.

CASANOVA: Let's see here. *(He takes a bite, chews thoughtfully, calmly takes a nearby napkin and spits the food into it. He then takes a drink of water trying to get the taste out of his mouth.)*

ELLA MENTRY: Well?

CASANOVA: Wretched. Atrocious. Odious. The most nauseating dish I have ever tasted in my life.

ELLA MENTRY: Yaaaaay! *(She hugs him while everyone laughs.)*

CASANOVA: I'm afraid you have misunderstood. This dish isn't good enough to feed my dog FiFi. It's the worst thing I have ever tasted in all my life. I wish I could gag until I could taste it no more. *(This crushes her.)*

ELLA MENTRY: Does that mean you don't like it?

CASANOVA: Like it? I LOATHE it.

ELLA MENTRY: Make up your mind, either you like it or you don't.

CASANOVA: Perhaps this will answer your question. I'm giving you a big, fat F. The F stands for flat, unFortunate and flavorless. And to prove to you just how bad it is, you must wear this humiliating "F" for the rest of the semester. *(He sticks a large F on her forehead.)* Now, please take your seat. *(The other students snicker as she takes her seat sadly.)* And I mean take it into the hall and think about how you have offended my taste buds.

ELLA MENTRY: Yes, sir. *(She takes her chair and crosses to BIDDLE as the lights change.)* I was too humidified to return to class, so I didn't. And he gave me an F for the semester, which drastically brought down my PDA.

BIDDLE: *(Removing the F from her forehead.)* Even I have to admit that was a low-down, evil and callous thing to do.

ELLA MENTRY: You said it, Annette, he was a low-down, evil and callous brute. WHERE'S MY MILKSHAKE!!?

BIDDLE: So, you see, Miss Ella Mentry, you had the motive and the means of murdering Mr. Bond by placing the poison inside your dish.

ELLA MENTRY: I didn't!

BIDDLE: You could have!

ELLA MENTRY: I wouldn't!

BIDDLE: Wouldn't you?

ELLA MENTRY: I'm inocente!

BIDDLE: *(Shouting.)* WHY ARE YOU SPEAKING SPANISH?



Thank you for reading this free excerpt from:

COOKING CAN BE MURDER

by Eddie McPherson.

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