# JUST DESSERTS

*An Audience Participation Mystery*

by

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## STORY OF THE PLAY

Here's an hour-long audience participation mystery that's great fun for dinner theatre. Judge Reginald P. Cogsworth, a curmudgeon who hates sweets, is judging a charity bakeoff, albeit grudgingly. Countless entries have been whittled down to three -- a raspberry tart submitted by Lucy "Scooter" Bright, owner of a nail salon; a cake from a Depression-era recipe baked by Edna Mae Carter, the local librarian; and a rich chocolate torte created by Margaret Mason, a local society lady.

In the middle of tasting all the goodies, sour Judge Cogsworth drops dead, and it's up to Miss Peabody, head of the contest, and the audience to determine the murderer. There are clues in the theatre, some hidden and some quite obvious, to help. The audience also gets to question the three contestants, all of whom had some unhappy dealings with the judge in the past.

Practically no set and very few props are needed. Sell your own desserts during intermission or after the show to make one sweet evening.

## Cast of Characters

*1 m, 4 w*

JUDGE REGINALD P. COGSWORTH
...a grouchy old jurist.
EDNA MAE CARTER
...the frosty local librarian.
LUCY "SCOOTER" BRIGHT
...a sprightly Southern belle.
MARGARET MASON
...the richest lady in town.
MISS PEABODY
...a retired teacher, head of contest.

## The Scene

The play takes place in an auditorium, hall, or restaurant. On the stage or at the head of the room stands a table big enough for three desserts. A sign at the entrance to the playing area reads "Local Charity Bake-Off Today Featuring our Town's Finest Chefs' Greatest Creations." The time and place of the performance can be added.

## Clues

Prior to the performance, the letter from Judge Cogsworth should be taped under one of the chairs in the playing area. Also, the clues described at the end of the first scene should be either in place or have been left by the characters at the appropriate times.

As each audience member enters, he or she is given a program which has space to make notes. Be sure to supply small pencils. If this is a dinner theater presentation, the program and pencils can be placed at the tables.

## Props

In addition to the clues, these props will be needed:

coats for Judge and three contestants
waste can near stage
desserts for the three contestants
a small bottle of liquid for Edna Mae
chef's hat, apron, clipboard and pen for Judge
forks and napkins on judging table
folding chairs for the three contestants
handkerchief for Edna Mae

## SFX (Optional)

Sound of storm and howling winds
Police sirens

# JUST DESSERTS

## Scene 1

*(As the AUDIENCE enters, MISS PEABODY, head of the Charity Bake-Off, greets guests and suggests where they can sit. Just as the last one is seated, EDNA MAE CARTER enters from stage or front. She wears her coat. She sets her dessert on the table, then moves into audience along one side where a chair or two sit vacant. She places her coat over the chair. She notices she still holds a book. She tucks the book into the folds of her coat. She then pulls a bundle of letters from her coat pocket and tosses them into a wastebasket near the stage. She exits the way she entered. A beat later, MISS PEABODY reappears at rear of theatre, looks around nervously.)*

PEABODY: Oh, dear, it's just about time...has anyone seen the judge? Judge Reginald P. Cogsworth? *(PEABODY specifically moves to audience members.)* You know the judge, don't you? He's been our district judge for over twenty years. Any idea why he'd be so late? I just don't think I should have let the committee talk me into having the judge judge our bake-off. I mean, I'm sure he's impartial and so on, but he isn't the most pleasant person around. I mean, have you ever been to court, ma'am? Why, you know he just bites the head off the clerk and the recorder and anyone around. Not to mention what he does with the defense attorneys! I think it all began just after he was appointed to the bench. Why...as I recall, he had a small dog, a poodle. He loved that dog more than life itself, though for the life of me, I can't imagine why. Foo-Foo was her name, and honestly, he had her hair dyed pink.

*(JUDGE enters at rear of room.)*

JUDGE: Where's that Peabody woman?!

PEABODY: Why, Judge! You've made it!

JUDGE: No thanks to the weather! It's snowing cops and robbers out there. *(Taking off his overcoat.)*

PEABODY: We were getting worried. The bake-off was due to start five minutes ago.

JUDGE: Hang the bake-off!

PEABODY: Now, Judge Cogsworth, remember, this is for charity.

JUDGE: Charity begins at home, and that's where I belong. Got a backlog of cases I ought to be working on right now.

PEABODY: Nonsense! It'll do you good to get out and mingle. Relax a bit.

JUDGE: Mighty easy for a retired teacher to say.

PEABODY: You could retire any time you like. I'm sure everyone in town would celebrate. Oh! I didn't really mean it quite like that, but --

JUDGE: Oh, you meant it like that, and I'm sure you WOULD all celebrate. All the crooks and thieves would be REAL glad to get me off the bench. Sure, replace the hangin' judge with one who'll watch out for criminal rights. But I'm gonna stay on that bench 'til my last breath, sending the vermin of society to their just dessert!

PEABODY: Speaking of desserts, why don't you come up here...

JUDGE: I don't know why I'm doing this! I HATE sweets.

PEABODY: Why doesn't that surprise me?

*(PEABODY moves JUDGE to the front of the room.)*

JUDGE: *(As HE follows PEABODY.)* Sweets don't do anything but rot the teeth...and they do something funny to the blood. They take away our natural aggression. What's a human animal without aggression? I say eat meat, lots of it. The redder the better! Keeps you on your toes. Keeps you watching!

PEABODY: Well, we certainly are thrilled, then, that you have agreed to bend a few of your personal nutrition rules to be with us today.

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