Invitation to Murder

A Chilling Comedy in Two Acts

By
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DEDICATION

To Katie Stefaniak.

STORY OF THE PLAY

Lord and Lady Lexington have picked a rather beastly night to throw a haunted house party in their newly acquired home, Foxworth Manor. Oddly, the guest list appears to be made up of disparate and desperate strangers. There's the pretty secretary, the acerbic gossip columnist, the local physician, the flighty real-estate agent and a handsome, but somewhat surly young man.

Foxworth Manor has a tragic history, and this evening will prove to be no exception. As the storm rages on outside, the guests suddenly discover that not everyone is quite the stranger they appear to be … and more than one of them may have murder in mind. This single-set, easy to produce play provides enough laughs and chills for a full evening.

CHARACTERS

(3 m, 5 w)

NETTIE: A well-meaning housekeeper prone to random hysterical outbursts; in her 50s.

LORD FREDRICK LEXINGTON: The host of the party. An affable, sophisticated man; in his 40s.

LADY ELLA LEXINGTON: His wife and the hostess. Charming and beautiful, in an icy way; in her 30s.

KEVIN SMITH: An extremely handsome young man with a sullen attitude; in his 20s.

MADGE SINCLAIRE: A cynical gossip columnist with a quick wit; in her 40s.

LESLIE DUNLAP: A very pretty, very nervous young woman who works as a secretary for Lord Lexington; 18 years old.

DR. ANTHONY TRENT: The town physician. An attractive, likable man; in his 30s.

MADAME CARLOTTA BUTTERLY: A flighty real estate agent who has a penchant for the supernatural; in her 50s.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I
Scene 1: A stormy evening at Foxworth Manor, 1949.
Scene 2: A short time later.
Act II
Scene 1: Several hours later.

SETTING

The living room of Foxworth Manor in England, 1949. It is a comfortable room. The furnishings are expensive and well thought out, although the walls and fixtures are in gloomy disrepair. French doors dominate the back wall, with a view of the stormy evening sky beyond. To the right of the doors stands a large grandfather clock. To the left, a small round table holding a bowl of fresh flowers. A doorway leads off to the kitchen at SR, DS of the door is small but fully stocked liquor cart. Shelves on the wall behind the cart produce room for glasses and other accessories. US of the doorway, is a tall wooden cabinet with long cupboard doors that run the length of the cabinet. The wall at CL is dominated by a large fireplace, which is presently lit. Above the mantel is a flattering portrait of Lady Ella Lexington, recently commissioned. Utensils for the fireplace are nearby. Flanking the fireplace are 2 doorways; the US doorway reveals a staircase, the DS doorway leads to the front hallway. Centered in the room is a comfortable sofa, flanked by 2 armchairs. A coffee table stands in front of the sofa. A piece of cloth hides whatever lies beneath it on the table. This cozy sitting area sets on a colorfully ornate Oriental rug.

Please see additional notes for props and costumes at the end of the script.

ACT I

(AT RISE: The LIGHTS fade up slowly, to the SOUND of thunder and lightning. NETTIE busies herself at the liquor cart. LORD FREDRICK LEXINGTON ENTERS from the stairs. He wears a smoking jacket over tuxedo trousers. He lights a cigarette, tossing the match into the fireplace and watching it burn for a moment before turning to Nettie.)

FREDRICK: Are the preparations in order, Nettie?
NETTIE: *(A thick cockney-accent.)* Oh yes, Lord Lexington. I took care of everything accordin' to yer specifications, I did. Followed 'em down to the letter, I did. I'm just checkin' the provisions now.

(Lightning and thunder fill the room for a second and NETTIE lets out a bloodcurdling scream.)

FREDRICK: Nettie, what is it?
NETTIE: I … I think we're out of the good scotch, sir!
FREDRICK: Nonsense. Check below the cart.

(NETTIE bends down behind the cart. FREDRICK moves to the French doors, looking out. Thunder and lightning punctuate the evening throughout.)

NETTIE: Ah, yes …. *(Takes a swig.)* 'Ere it is! *(Gets to HER feet and stores the bottle on the shelf behind her.)*
FREDRICK: You see? Do try not to unhinge over every little thing tonight, Nettie. Although Lady Lexington and I find that quality in you to be ever so endearing, tonight everything must be perfect for this … gathering.
NETTIE: I'm sorry, sir. I'll try to behave me-self. I must say though, you certainly picked a beastly night for yer … gatherin', as you call it.

FREDRICK: I think this weather is most suitable for the evening that is planned. Remember, Nettie, that tonight was Lady Lexington's idea and she can have quite a macabre sense of humor.

NETTIE: *(Wiping glasses with a cloth.)* Must be why she wanted to live in this old 'ouse in the first place. I doubt you'd catch the first Lady Lexington 'ere – or the second for that matter! *(Catches HERSELF.)* I'm terribly sorry, Lord Lexington. I shoulda never said that! It's this place is what it is! I 'eard plenty of stories about it down in the village! Why, there's them that say –

FREDRICK: *(Sternly.)* That will do, Nettie. You'll warm up to house, wait and see. It's only been three weeks. And you certainly couldn't expect Lady Lexington and me to make a life for ourselves in my old house forever; there would be far too many memories there from my previous marriages.

NETTIE: *(Muttering to HERSELF.)* From what I 'ear, there are far too many memories in this 'ouse too! And sometimes they wander the halls at night!

FREDRICK: *(Reproachfully.)* Nettie ….

NETTIE: Yes, sir. Sorry, sir. I'll just go and get yer tuxedo jacket fer you, sir.

FREDRICK: Thank you, Nettie.

(NETTIE EXITS to the kitchen. FREDRICK wanders about the room, surveying it satisfactorily. He gingerly lifts the cloth covering the coffee table and then hears approaching footsteps. He rushes to hide behind the grandfather clock as LADY ELLA LEXINGTON ENTERS. She appears anxious. She paces, then heads for the liquor cart and starts to pour herself a drink, but thinks better of it and paces back to CS again. Ella primps at her hair and clothing as Fredrick sneaks up behind her.)

FREDRICK: Boo!!

ELLA: *(Clutching HER heart and gasping for a breath.)* Wha!? *(Turning to see FREDRICK.)* Oh, Fredrick! Why would you do such a thing? You know my heart … well, I'm not exactly a hundred percent since the accident.

End of Freeview

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