

MANDATE FOR MURDER

or

Taking a Stab At Politics

An audience participation mystery comedy

By Pat Cook

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THE STORY

Politics can be murder! It's election night and all the friends and supporters of mayoral candidate Matthew Kensington are throwing him a surprise birthday/campaign party. But there's one surprise no one suspects. An aide is found stabbed in the back with a cake knife!

All clues point to the loyal supporters. Was it the wise-cracking Estelle, with her cutting remarks and shady past? Or maybe Macauley, the editor of the local newspaper, has uncovered some dirt he thinks should be hidden. Clues and suspects abound in this frenetic political satire that leaves the audience wondering just who they can trust.

Great fun for all, with campaigners canvassing the audience as to who they'll vote for. Not only can the audience question the suspects, but they even get to vote for the candidate of their choice and change the ending of each performance!

CHARACTERS

(5 m, 6 w, extras as campaigners)

JOAN SEDGEWICK: Young aide to Professor Kensington, mid-20's, a bit naive.

DOLORES MacDONALD: Society hostess, mid-50's, flits from one subject to another without ever getting involved.

MACAULEY TARLETON: Too-smart editor in chief of the Chronicle, the local newspaper. About 45, knows all the tricks.

ESTELLE MURCHISON: Old "war horse," 50's, makes politics a way of life.

MONROE LAFFERTY: University archaeology professor, late 40's. His dry demeanor is betrayed by his easy going wit.

EILEEN LAFFERTY: Wife to Monroe, late 40's, has a wonderful repartee with her husband.

BILLY JACK HOPKINS: 30-year-old campaign manager to Kensington.

MILLIE KENSINGTON: Mousey, 40-year-old wife to Matt. Has about her a conniving quality and a suspicious nature.

MATT KENSINGTON: Political science professor, mid - 40's, handsome and easy going. So it would seem.

KATHLEEN DONAVAN: Television reporter, mid-30's, always on the lookout for a "scoop."

COMMISSIONER DOGGERTY: A bumbling city official, late 40's.

MIKE CHAMBERS: A dead body. (In the interest of recycling, the person playing this brief but integral part may also double as DOGGERTY.)

Time: The present.

Place: The living room of Dolores MacDonald's home.

Synopsis:

Act I

Scene 1: Early evening, election night.

Scene 2: Fifteen minutes later.

Scene 3: Moments later.

Act II

Scene 1: Fifteen minutes later.

Scene 2: Five minutes later.

SET DESIGN

The setting for this seemingly political intrigue is the swank living room of Dolores MacDonald. The large room has about it an air of old money mixed with dubious taste in furnishings. Its walls showcase an eclectic mixture of framed family pictures flanked by African masks, spears, continental pottery, and abstract art, none of which maintain any particular theme. A front door, SR, leads to the outside. Actors must be able to look outside, either through a peep hole in the door or a large window next to the door. A light-switch is also located next to the door. A second door, UPS, leads to the kitchen while a third door, SL, leads to the downstairs rooms, such as the den and library. An UPS staircase leads to the second floor.

The furniture consists of a large, overstuffed couch, which resides just to the left of CS. Behind it is a couch table. Two end tables flank the couch, which match the coffee table in front of the couch. Near the fireplace on the SL wall is a large ornate chair. A buffet is located close to the UPS wall and holds a telephone, a silver service and various other knickknacks. The room has been decorated with streamers and balloons. There is also a large banner proclaiming: "Happy Birthday To The Next Mayor!" draped over the UPS door.

A Note About the Play

The play may be presented as a straight mystery comedy or as a mystery comedy where the audience can vote during intermission for the mayoral candidate of their choice and change the very end of the last act. It can also be an audience participation play where the audience can question the suspects regarding the two murders that take place during the course of the show.

During the blackouts between scenes, extras may be used as "campaigners" wielding banners and rousing the audience to vote for their candidate. In fact, they may even start in the lobby before the show begins. If extras are not used, then simply insert the recorded voice-overs of the radio DJ as provided in the script.

If the question and answer period is used with the audience, then a few notes might help you out here. First, during rehearsals, have the actors question each other about their characters. Think of both usual and unusual questions.

Second, if your character's background is brought into question, be prepared to elaborate on it. For example, Monroe Lafferty is an archaeology professor who was looking into a fossil find from the Mesozoic era. Look up enough facts to make you look good. If asked a question which has you stumped, simply state that Commissioner Doggerty has advised you to only answer questions pertaining to the murders.

Third, remember, the audience is expecting somebody to be lying. Don't worry about looking suspicious. The minute a murder takes place, there's no way not to look suspicious.

Fourth, if you see someone floundering and can help them out, within the confines of your character, jump in. However, never throw the question to someone else yourself. Remember, you have to dress with these people. The main thing is to have fun!

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: All the LIGHTS are out. The DOORBELL sounds. Nothing happens. The DOORBELL sounds again. Then the door opens gently. JOAN enters. The door closes. Suddenly the room LIGHTS up and MONROE, EILEEN, DOLORES, MILLIE, BILLY JACK, ESTELLE and MACAULEY jump out.)

EVERYONE: Surprise!

(JOAN jumps and screams.)

MONROE: *(To HIS WIFE.)* Look, dear, it's not him.

(EVERYONE grumbles and relaxes, moving around the room.)

DOLORES: Oh, I'm ever so sorry. Did we scare you?

JOAN: Oh, nooo, of course not. I won't need those last ten years, anyway.

MILLIE: Joan, we had no idea. You said you couldn't make it.

JOAN: Last minute cancellation.

BILLY JACK: But you were surprised, right?

JOAN: Yes, Billy Jack, I was surprised, you're right. It works.

BILLY JACK: Great. When Matt gets here we ought to be able to scare him to death.

(HE crosses to the window and looks out.)

ESTELLE: Mayor Obermeier would love that. I can see the headlines now. *(SHE "reads" the air.)* "Obermeier Wins Fourth Term as Mayor Due Mainly to Running Against a Corpse."

MACAULEY: Don't kid yourself. It would still take a run-off.

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