Murder by Ten

A Murder Mystery Spoof

By Eddie McPherson

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DEDICATION

To all my students who helped bring these whacky characters to life for the first time. It's always a blast working with you guys. Your input was amazing and right on target.

STORY OF THE PLAY

Ten dim-witted people have been invited to an old house on Dunce Island with the ultimate purpose, unbeknownst to them, to be murdered. Apparently, because of his or her dumbness, each was responsible for the earlier death of someone else. Now, one by one, they themselves are done in according to a silly nursery rhyme hanging over the fireplace. Because they're not the brightest bulbs in the box, the poor victims are murdered rather easily by such things as vacuum cleaner hoses and live alligators. After several murders take place, they become suspicious of each other. But when the last person bites the dust and there's no one else on the island, the question remains: Who the heck did all the murdering? A fun parody of one of Agatha Christie's most popular mystery novels.

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

The show was first performed in January, 2012 by three different student casts in the performing arts program at South Paulding High School, Douglasville, GA under the title *Ten Little Dunces*.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(1 m, 2 w, 10 flexible, 1 offstage voice)

PEPPY SPARKS: High strung and nervous.
MISS PRIGGISH: Pompous, smug and, well, priggish.
DR. NOSTRUM: Quack of a surgeon.
MR. ROPER: An ex-cop with a past temper.
MR. DRUDGE: Butler type. Poised and dry.
MRS. DRUDGE: Mr. Drudge's ugly servant wife. (Played by a male.)
JUDGE SLAYER: Overbearing, take-charge type.
GENERAL BLITZ: Wears a uniform but is quite cowardly.
MARK CENTRUM: For some reason wears a large target on his shirt.
RICH N. VIRILE: Ladies' man.
DETECTIVE FOOT: One of three detectives to investigate the murders; appears only in last scene.
DETECTIVE HOUND: Another.
DETECTIVE CLOTHES: Another.
OFFSTAGE VOICE: Friendly then ominous.

Cast Note: This play is written with certain genders noted in the script; however, feel free to adapt to your needs. Peppy Sparks and Miss Priggish would be best played by females. Mrs. Drudge would be best played by a male. The rest can be very flexible with pronoun changes etc.

Because this is a silly farce, the actors should play their characters broadly and the action should move quickly with exaggerated body language and facial expressions. Have your actors begin to speak as soon as they enter the playing area and not when they reach center. This helps with the pacing and tempo of the play, keeping it moving at a pace that fits a farce.

Production Notes: *Please see end of script for notes about the alternative ending, props, costumes, SFX, and blackouts.*

THE SET

The whole play takes place in the living room of an old house. The front door is SR. There's a closet door just a few feet from the front door. A full-length window is upstage right. The fireplace is USL. The kitchen door and hall door that lead to the bedrooms are SL, although you may choose to have one entrance leading to the kitchen and the bedrooms if this better fits your needs. A large framed nursery rhyme hangs over the fireplace. A sofa and chair sit in the middle of the stage. A small table stands downstage left. Sitting on the table are ten pointed hats that have been spray painted black to resemble dunce hats. You may add other pieces of furniture as desired to bring character to your set. In the original production, the set was merely suggestive. Free-standing doors, window, and fireplace were used. The nursery rhyme was attached to a black pole and erected over the fireplace.

Nursery Rhyme: Because the rhyme over the fireplace won't be big enough to be read by the audience, you may want to print the rhyme in your program or have a VOICE recite the rhyme in the darkness before Scene 1 begins. You may choose not to allow the audience to know what the rhyme says until it's revealed verse by verse as the play unfolds. At any rate, the rhyme goes as follows:

Ten little dunces waiting to dine. The one in the red dress coughs himself to death and then there were nine.

Nine little dunces waiting for their fate. The ugly duckling faints and then there were eight.

Eight little dunces talking about Heaven. One is tapped on the shoulder and then there were seven.

Seven little dunces, one is named Frix. He gets it with a vacuum cleaner hose and then there were six.

Six little dunces waiting for the cops to arrive. One gets it with a Taser and then there were five.

Five little dunces pacing the floor. Someone is trapped under water and then there were four.

Four little dunces too blind to see. One stands at a bluff and then there were three.

Three little dunces take off a shoe. One steps on a cobra and then there were two.

Two little dunces fighting o'er a gun. One hits the mark and then there was one.

One little dunce thinks it's all done. What goes around, comes around and then there were none.

Murder by Ten
Scene 1

(AT RISE: PEPPY SPARKS enters with a suitcase. She's young, full of energy and just a bit ditzy. She looks around as she takes in the room.)

PEPPY SPARKS: It's all so beautiful. *(Points.)* Oh, look, a sofa! *(Points.)* Oh, look, a chair! *(Points.)* Oh, look, a fireplace! *(Points to herself.)* Oh, look, I'm talking to myself. *(Shouting toward the door.)* Isn't anyone else coming in?!

(MISS PRIGGISH enters through the front door carrying her own suitcase and looking over the top of glasses.)

MISS PRIGGISH: Ladies don't shout, dear. Hold your shoulders up and don't forget who you are.
PEPPY SPARKS: *(Whispers.)* Sorry, Miss Priggish.
MISS PRIGGISH: *(Looking around.)* What a horribly wretched place.
PEPPY SPARKS: I think it's wonderful! *(Twirls around with her arms out.)* Wheeeeee!
MISS PRIGGISH: Where <u>is</u> everyone?
PEPPY SPARKS: I'll call them. *(Runs to the fireplace and shouts up the "chimney.")* Everyone come on in!
MISS PRIGGISH: *(Shakes her head.)* Good gracious, if you want something done right... *(Opens the closet door and shouts.)* Hello? Is anyone out there?!
PEPPY SPARKS: *(Points at MISS PRIGGISH and laughs.)* Hey, old woman, you're talking to the closet.
MISS PRIGGISH: *(Closing the door.)* Oh, and I suppose shouting up the fireplace is much smarter.

(DR. NOSTRUM and MR. ROPER enter through the front door carrying suitcases.)

DR. NOSTRUM: *(Speaking to MR. ROPER as they move center stage.)* So, I told the old battleaxe, look if you don't like the way I operate, next time I'll sew you up and leave the zucchini in your rib cage.
MR. ROPER: *(Laughs heartily.)* That's a good story, Dr. Nostrum.
MISS PRIGGISH: *(Approaching the men.)* Where did you two come from?
DR. NOSTRUM: We came over on the boat just as you, Miss Sparks.
PEPPY SPARKS: She isn't Miss Sparks, I am.
MR. ROPER: Can you prove it?
PEPPY SPARKS: *(Pulls a cell phone from her purse.)* Yes, I can. I'll call my mother, she'll tell you.
MISS PRIGGISH: We're on an island in the middle of the ocean, you can't get a signal out—
PEPPY SPARKS: *(Puts up a hand to hush MISS PRIGGISH.)* Hello? Mummy? This is Peppy. Yes, we're here. The boat ride was pleasant. I need you to tell this nice man who I am, please.

(SHE hands the phone to MR. ROPER.)

MR. ROPER: Hello? *(To PEPPY SPARKS as he hands back the phone.)* There's no one there.
PEPPY SPARKS: *(Grabs the phone.)* Hello? Hello? *(Realizes.)* Oh, that's right, Mother's dead.

(SHE laughs a strange laugh. MR. DRUDGE enters carrying a tray with a teapot sitting on it.)

MR. DRUDGE: Good afternoon.
MISS PRIGGISH: *(Over her glasses.)* And who, pray tell, are you?
MR. DRUDGE: My name is Drudge, ma'am. My wife and I are servants to Mr. Amos. Would anyone like some tea?
MISS PRIGGISH: I would like some tea.
PEPPY SPARKS: That sounds refreshing.
DR. NOSTRUM: Tea would be nice.

End of Freeview

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