

COOKIES AND CRIME



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BIG DOG PUBLISHING

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Cookies and Crime

FARCE/MURDER-MYSTERY. When the cookie money goes missing and the museum curator is found dead, bake-sale volunteers at the Houtini House Museum immediately suspect foul play. But with the police chief away on vacation, the bake-salers are forced to put aside their mixing bowls to become volunteer sleuths. Finding clues proves difficult, but with the aid of a teenage mystery buff, they manage to find the murder weapon—a plate of brownies. However, when another body shows up, the bake-salers wonder if they can unravel the mystery before anyone else partakes in a sweet to die for.

Performance Time: Approximately 75 minutes.

Characters

(5 M, 13 F, opt. extras)

(With doubling: 5 M, 10F)

BARNABAS VOIGT: Gloomy tour guide and curator.

MIMSY: Tourist.

EFFIE CRABTREE: 60s, museum volunteer; wears flower print dress, heavy dark shoes, drooping nylons, and a wig.

ELLIE CRABTREE: 60s, museum volunteer; wears flower print dress, heavy dark shoes, drooping nylons, and a wig.

JOY MAGUIRE: Head of the restoration committee.

ARCHIE MAGUIRE: Teenager, Joy's son.

MADIE MAGUIRE: Teenager, Joy's eldest daughter.

LACEY MAGUIRE: Joy's youngest daughter; mystery buff.

SYLVIA: Tourist.

CONRAD: Sylvia's husband; a tourist.

GLORIA: Tourist.

VICKI ROWE: Committee member.

COLLETTE ERWIN: Committee member.

DEWEY DIVINE: Restoration artist; wears a pastel suit (or sport coat and dark pants), flashy tie, and matching fedora.

DARLA DIVINE: Dewey's wife and restoration artist; wears a colorful flowing dress.

SHERIFF DUKE STODGEHILL: Local sheriff; wears a police uniform (blue long-sleeved shirt, dark pants), badge, and hat.

THE WOMAN IN A VEIL: International art thief AKA "Sticky Fingers Stella"; wears a long black dress, large black hat, long black gloves, and a veil that covers her face; non-speaking.

ROSETTA STONE: Psychic and ghost hunter.

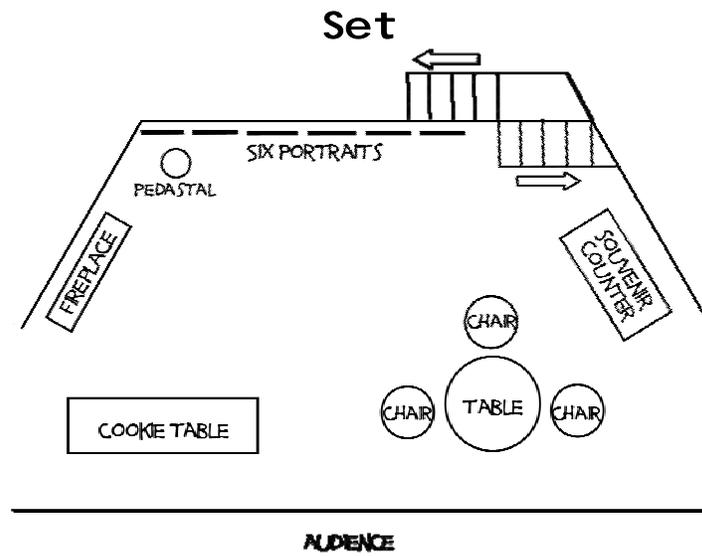
EXTRAS (Optional): As tourists.

NOTE: The parts of Mimsy and Gloria can be combined. The actress who plays Mimsy or Gloria can play the part of The Woman in a Veil. Either can also play Rosetta Stone.

Setting

The great room of Houtini House, which once served as the former residence of a famous magician and is now the home of a local museum. Up right is a stand or pedestal on which sits a top hat and a magic wand. A long narrow table at center right is covered with a cloth. A sign hanging from the front reads "Houtini House Cookie Sale." On the table sit plates of cookies. A small chair grouping sits left center with a small low table between them. A counter stands far left and holds a rack of postcards and a few other souvenirs. On the right wall hangs a better portrait, which is larger than the others, of Hopalong Houtini, a very sinister man dressed in a top hat and cape and brandishing a magic wand. There is a fireplace SR under the portrait of Hopalong Houtini. Behind the counter on the left wall are posters of Hopalong Houtini, showing various tricks he performed. Hanging about five inches from the upstage wall (so they can eventually be turned around easily) are six cartoony/brightly colored portraits of Houtini ancestors. Each ancestor is dressed in a colorful costume: Hagar Houtini is a Viking, Hippolyta Houtini wears Renaissance garb, Hepzbolah wears black and holds a raven in her hand, Hardtack wears a Civil War uniform, Halfpint is dressed as a circus performer, and Hortense is dressed as a ballerina. The pictures are colorful and large (poster size). On the backside of the portraits are posters of six well-known masterpieces (see note below). Various statues and/or objects of art, such as vases, candlesticks, and so on decorate the room. Wing entrance right leads to outside. Wing entrance left leads to other areas of the house. The half stairway up left leads to the second floor.

NOTE: If the budget allows, posters of well-known masterpieces can be purchased or you may select works that students can easily copy in chalk or watercolors. The more recognizable the masterpiece, the better.



Synopsis of Scenes

ACT I

Scene 1: Great room of Houtini House, a summer morning.

Scene 2: The following morning.

Scene 3: Several hours later.

ACT II

Scene 1: Three days later in the evening.

Scene 2: A few minutes later.

Props

Pedestal	Hammers, yardsticks, other tools
Top hat	3 Flashlights
Wand	Necklace that looks like the Hope Diamond
Knitting bag with knitting	Desk phone
Needlepoint kit	Scarf
Plates of assorted cookies	Pizza box
Books	Scissors
Souvenir counter	Hoes, rakes, shovels, etc.
Paper	Pajamas with silly design, for Sheriff
Purse, for Lacey	5 Prints of famous artworks including a Picasso
Keys	Poster-sized portrait of Hopalong Houtini, dressed as a magician
Cash drawer	Portrait of Hagar Houtini dressed as a Viking
Cell phone, for Collette	Portrait of Hippolyta Houtini wearing Renaissance garb
Fireplace tools including poker	Portrait of Hepzbolah Houtini wearing black and holding a raven in her hand or on her arm
Chairs	Portrait of Hardtack Houtini wearing a Civil War uniform
Postcards, trinkets, etc. for souvenir counter	Portrait of Halfpint Houtini dressed as a circus performer
Plate of brownies	Portrait of Hortense Houtini dressed as a ballerina
Cell phone, for Sheriff	
Plastic bag	
Money	
Candle	
Table	
Cakes	
2 Cream pies (fill pie tin with whipped cream)	
Empty cardboard boxes	
Checkbook	
Purse, for Effie	
Candlesticks	
Candle	
Feather duster	
Coat, for Collette	

Sound Effects

Thunder
Sobbing
Cell phone ringing

Screams
Bang

**"Roses are red,
Viol ets are bl ue,
Garbage stinks,
And so do you."**

ACT I Scene 1

(Spotlight on the portrait of Hopalong Houtini right. Houtini is pictured as a frightening man in a black cape, wearing a top hat, and brandishing a magic wand as if it were a sword.)

BARNABAS: *(Offstage.)* Hopalong Houtini was the greatest magician of his day. The critics said so. His fellow magicians said so. Audiences said so. Even President William McKinley said so. I welcome you now to Houtini House, the home he built, his treasured hideaway, his refuge from the pressures of show business.

(Lights gradually come up as Barnabas reveals the great room of Houtini House. Barnabas stands right before the portrait of Hopalong. Joy stands behind the counter. Ellie and Effie sit in the chairs. Ellie knits and Effie is doing needlepoint. Sylvia, Conrad, Gloria, and Mimsy stand in front of Barnabas and listen intently.)

MIMSY: Excuse me, but was he really as mean in real life as he looks there?

BARNABAS: This is one of his better moods.

EFFIE: If he'd a-smiled, his face would a-cracked!

ELLIE: Now, Effie, dear, you don't know that for sure.

EFFIE: Met him, didn't I, dear? Right here in this room and you're just jealous 'cause you had to go get a tooth pulled that morning and you missed out.

ELLIE: A tooth you knocked loose because you hit me with that tennis racket!

EFFIE: Purely accidental, sister dear!

JOY: Ladies, I think Mr. Voigt would like to continue.

BARNABAS: Thank you, Ms. Maguire. Construction on Houtini House began in 1928 and continued for five years. Mr. Houtini personally designed every room, and we're still finding secret passageways and hidden cabinets. Of course,

over the years, various occupants have updated much of the house and modernized the building, giving it a much brighter, more cheerful mood than it originally had. It's so much...nicer...this way.

JOY: But to attract visitors, the Houtini House needs to look like it did when Houtini built it.

EFFIE: Which is why it's being restored.

SYLVIA: So it'll look as gloomy as it used to?

ELLIE: Gloomier!

EFFIE: Yeah, it'll make Ellie, here, look like a buttercup. And if there's one thing you ain't, it's a buttercup!

JOY: Perhaps you'd like to point out the portraits to our visitors, Barnabas?

BARNABAS: (*Admonishingly.*) I was just coming to that, Ms. Maguire!

GLORIA: Those look like something out of a comic strip.

BARNABAS: Mr. Houtini painted those himself.

CONRAD: Shoulda stuck to magic!

BARNABAS: He wanted to depict several other famous Houtinis throughout history beginning with his ancestor, Hagar Houtini, a Viking marauder. Hagar is reputed to have been the first European to set foot on the rocks of North America. Unfortunately, he had to leave that foot behind when it got wedged in between several rocks and Leif Erickson had to— (*Barnabas pantomimes chopping with an axe.*)

MIMSY: That is so gross!

BARNABAS: If it's any consolation, Hagar recovered and went on to plunder the coast of France, Spain, and Italy. Now here we have Hippolyta Houtini, the wife of an Italian nobleman who fancied herself a poet. During the Renaissance, she felt liberated enough to leave her husband, settle in Greece, and write poetry while living in the belfry of a Greek church.

SYLVIA: I've never heard of Hippolyta Houtini.

BARNABAS: But you know her most famous poem, written to her ex... *(Recites dramatically.)* ..."Roses are red, violets are blue, garbage stinks, and so do you."

ELLIE: Effie, that's the very poem you wrote on my valentine last year!

EFFIE: Not original, but so appropriate, dear!

JOY: Ladies!

CONRAD: Who's the witch?

BARNABAS: That's Hepzbolah Houtini, a resident of New Salem accused of being a witch and hanged during the New Salem Witch Trials, which followed the more famous Salem Witch Trials.

SYLVIA: Poor woman! The victim of mass hysteria!

GLORIA: I'm sure she was exonerated.

ELLIE: Oh, no, my dears! She was a witch!

EFFIE: Takes one to know one.

BARNABAS: It was said Hepzbolah could knock out an entire herd of cattle with a single spell. And she once made a leopard change his spots! *(Indicates portrait of Hardtack.)* Now, Hardtack Houtini was a Union soldier during the Civil War.

MISSY: Was he a hero or something?

SYLVIA: I'll bet he rescued an entire platoon.

GLORIA: No! He looks like he was a spy.

BARNABAS: Actually, he deserted. Halfpint Houtini was the first Houtini with show business in his blood. Halfpint found out early he was the only man in the country who could play "The Star Spangled Banner" using only his armpits and a comb. He was followed in the next generation by Hortense Houtini who studied ballet. She danced her way to fame until her tutu became too tight.

CONRAD: So what about Houtini's tricks? What kind of stuff did he do?

BARNABAS: He made an elephant disappear.

ELLIE: He sawed a crocodile in two.

EFFIE: Escaped from a vat of hot molasses.

JOY: Ate fire, shards of glass, and swords.

SYLVIA: I've seen that done lots of times.

JOY: All at once?

MISSY: (*Hopefully.*) And he sang "O, Danny Boy" while he was swallowing, right?

BARNABAS: He was a genius. (*Moves to pedestal.*) Over here we have Houtini's top hat and wand. (*Missy moves to touch the wand.*) Oh, no! Don't touch! Houtini wouldn't like that! He never let anyone touch his things while he was alive...and he certainly won't now that he's...on the other side! Now, if you'll follow me...

(*Barnabas leads Sylvia, Conrad, Gloria, and Mimsy up the stairs, left.*)

CONRAD: (*Exiting.*) The guy sounds like a nut to me!

ELLIE: No, just eccentric, kind of like me.

EFFIE: Oh, Ellie, dear, you're just a nut.

(*Visitors exit.*)

JOY: Ladies, I don't know how we're going to make it through this restoration project with you two bickering so all the time. You're sisters! You've lived together all your lives. You do everything together!

ELLIE: No wonder we bicker!

EFFIE: Maybe if Daddy had been a bit nicer to me like he was to you, dear –

ELLIE: Don't you start blaming Daddy!

EFFIE: I never got a pony!

ELLIE: You never broke your leg!

EFFIE: I tried!

(*Archie and Madie enter SR, carrying plates of cookies.*)

ARCHIE: Where do you want these, Mom?

JOY: Right on the table, Archie. Thanks!

MADIE: Okay...we brought the cookies. Now, let's get out of here.

ELLIE: What's wrong, Madie?

ARCHIE: She's a scaredy-cat!

MADIE: I am not! I just...I just don't...like this place.

JOY: Madie, it's just a house.

EFFIE: Oh, that's where you're wrong, Joy. It's Houtini's house.

MADIE: And everybody says it's haunted!

ARCHIE: Do you see any ghosts? I ask you! Do you see any ghosts?

(The Woman in the Veil enters, "floating." She is wearing a long black dress, a large black hat, a veil that covers her face, and long black gloves. She "floats" to the right.)

JOY: Ma'am? Ma'am? *(Madie screams and hides in front of the table. Unperturbed, the woman exits SR. Joy moves to follow her.)* Ma'am!

ELLIE: Gracious me! My heart's doing flip-flops!

EFFIE: Who...who was that?

MADIE: I told you! This place is haunted!

(Lacey enters SR, reading a book.)

JOY: Lacey! Where did that woman go?

(Archie grabs the book.)

LACEY: Hey!

ARCHIE: Sherlock! Mom's talking to you!

LACEY: Sam Slade was just about to reveal who killed the chauffeur and stuffed the body in the old potting shed!

JOY: Lacey, where did the woman go?

LACEY: There wasn't a woman in the potting shed.

ARCHIE: The woman who walked through this room just now.

ELLIE: All in black!

EFFIE: You must have passed her!

LACEY: I didn't see anybody. May I have my mystery back?

JOY: She walked right out there! You must have seen her!

LACEY: I didn't! Why don't you believe me?

MADIE: (*Terrified.*) I do! She was a ghost! She vanished at the front door...

ELLIE: Then it must have been Henrietta Houtini. She died of consumption in this very room.

EFFIE: You're wrong as usual, Ellie! It was Helena Houtini. Poor Helena cut her finger chopping watercress for tea sandwiches, and an infection set in, and within 24 hours, she was knocking at the pearly gates.

MADIE: How come they didn't let her in?

(*Vickie and Collette enter carrying cookies.*)

VICKIE: Well, I never!

COLLETTE: I'm sure she just couldn't see you through that black veil and all!

JOY: Hi, ladies! You made it.

VICKIE: Barely!

ARCHIE: What happened?

COLLETTE: Oh, some dizzy dame all dressed in black almost ran us off the road.

JOY: You said she wore a black veil?

VICKIE: And a hat. I don't know how she fit behind the wheel of a [Mini-Cooper]. [*Or insert the name of another small car.*]

COLLETTE: And she was zipping out of the parking lot like a dragon was snapping at her heels!

JOY: So much for your ghost, Madie.

MADIE: There's nothing that says a ghost can't drive a car.

VICKIE: Oh, this wasn't a ghost. She waved at us!

JOY: All right! All right, let's just get set up here...the first tour group is with Barnabas, and they'll be back here in a minute.

ELLIE: I'm sure they'll be hungry.

ARCHIE: Bored is more like it.

JOY: Archie! Barnabas gives a very...compelling...tour.

MADIE: I think he's creepy.

JOY: Madie!

VICKIE: Well, to tell you the truth...he is a bit weird.

COLLETTE: I agree. I think when the restoration is complete we ought to hire somebody else to give the tours.

ELLIE: But Barnabas has always been here.

EFFIE: He knows this place inside and out.

ARCHIE: Well, you know what the vampire said...nothing like a little fresh blood to liven the place up.

JOY: Madie, take your brother to soccer practice.

MADIE: Gladly!

LACEY: If [David Beckham] would kindly return my book, I'll be content to stay right here and finish it. *[Or insert the name of another well-known soccer player.]*

ARCHIE: It's all yours, Sis! See you, Mom!

MADIE: I don't have to come back here, do I?

VICKIE: I'll give your mother a ride home.

MADIE: You're a lifesaver!

(Archie and Madie move right.)

LACEY: If you see a madwoman driving a [Mini-Cooper], get out of her way!

(Madie exits SR in a huff. Archie follows.)

JOY: Lacey!

(Lacey exits SL carrying her book.)

VICKIE: You have such nice kids, Joy.

COLLETTE: It can't have been easy raising them all by yourself.

JOY: Well, I've always felt Dan was kind of looking over my shoulder.

VICKIE: That is so sweet...

COLLETTE: And probably true.

ELLIE: Your children seem to really like each other.

EFFIE: Unlike some siblings I know.

ELLIE: Naturally you mean me!

EFFIE: If the shoe fits, dear!

ELLIE: Your big clodhopper wouldn't fit anything but an elephant!

EFFIE: We wear the same size!

ELLIE: But they look bigger on you!

JOY: Ladies! Now, why don't you straighten up the souvenir counter, Effie. And, Ellie, you can take the money from the cookie sale.

(Effie moves to the souvenir counter.)

EFFIE: I wouldn't trust her with cash, Joy.

ELLIE: Look who's talking...the bull in the china shop!

JOY: Ladies! We won't get anywhere if you two keep bickering all the time.

VICKIE: It's hard enough trying to raise money for the restoration.

COLLETTE: Really...sometimes I wonder if we'll ever be able to do it.

JOY: Of course we will! And once Houtini House is restored to its original condition, the number of visitors will triple. There's a lot of interest in Houtini now.

VICKIE: Ever since that book came out...

COLLETTE: "The Secret Life of Houtini." I haven't read it yet.

EFFIE: We got eight copies back here if you want to buy one!

VICKIE: You really should. It's hard to believe between doing all those tricks Houtini had time to...well, do even more tricks!

(Collette pulls Joy down center.)

COLLETTE: Joy? Can I ask you something?

JOY: Of course!

COLLETTE: Well, this is our tenth cookie sale.

JOY: Feels like the hundredth.

COLLETTE: I know. My cookie sheets are more pooped than I am. But...well, I think there's a problem.

JOY: What kind of problem?

COLLETTE: I was checking the bank statements to get ready for our monthly meeting next week and none of that money has been deposited.

JOY: What?

COLLETTE: We made an average of \$264 on each sale. So Barnabas should have deposited \$2,640. But nothing has shown up.

JOY: You're sure?

COLLETTE: I called the bank.

JOY: This money's supposed to supplement the grants we're getting.

COLLETTE: I know. They want proof that the restoration committee's raising money on its own...but we don't have proof without the bank statements.

JOY: We've got to talk to Barnabas then.

COLLETTE: Since you're the chairperson...

JOY: *(Tiredly.)* I know...it's my job, and I'll certainly get to the bottom of this...somehow.

(Dewey and Darla enter SR. Dewey wears a pastel suit with a matching fedora. Darla is in a colorful, flowing dress.)

DEWEY: Allo! Allo! Allo! It's Dewey and Darla!

DARLA: Divine Restorations!

(With sour looks on their faces, Dewey and Darla look over the room critically. Dewey then looks over Ellie.)

DEWEY: I don't think we can do much with this!

DARLA: Dewey! Diplomacy, please!

JOY: We...we didn't expect you until...tomorrow.

DEWEY: We thought we'd just come get the lay of the land.

DARLA: Again.

VICKIE: We've been studying your specifications.

DEWEY: Aren't they specific?

COLLETTE: It seems you've done your homework.

DARLA: We always do our homework, darling!

DEWEY: Right down to the exact tint originally used in this room. Montgomery Ward oil-based premier interior paint called "burnished beige."

DARLA: A bit dark, but there are gilt highlights on the cornice. That'll brighten things up.

DEWEY: Mr. Houtini didn't have a lot of use for color, did he? Poor man.

ELLIE: They say he was color blind.

EFFIE: But that's hard to believe. How would he have known which bowl the walnut was under?

ELLIE: There was one under each, Effie. Don't you remember?

JOY: Any luck tracking down the furniture we'll need?

DARLA: Oh, Joy, darling, have we had the luck!

DEWEY: One horsehair couch originally in this room sits in a storage unit in East Orange, New Jersey. It will only cost \$789 to ship it here.

VICKIE: You're sure it was in this room?

DEWEY: Vickie, we're professionals.

DARLA: When we're done with this house, you'll step back in time whenever you unlock the door!

COLLETTE: But you're sure it's the right couch?

(Dewey pulls out a piece of paper.)

DEWEY: Brandon and Oaks Furniture Emporium, Buffalo, New York, manufactured 1918.

DARLA: Purchased by Hopalong Houtini on January 10, 1919, and kept in his possession until his death. The couch was sold with the rest of the furniture when Anderson MacMillan purchased Houtini House and decided to modernize.

EFFIE: How about the Houtini portraits?

ELLIE: Oh, sister, dear, they must stay! Hopalong painted those himself.

EFFIE: They're ugly as a rat's behind!

ELLIE: They are a part of history!

EFFIE: So was bubonic plague, but we don't need a picture of it!

DARLA: Still, these are historically significant, and if you want your funding from the National Preservation Society, they must remain.

DEWEY: We've located at least two of the original frames, so we can make reproductions for the others.

DARLA: We want this place to look as if Hopalong Houtini is in the next room creating a new illusion for his audiences!

(Barnabas enters SL.)

BARNABAS: *(Ominously.)* How do you know he isn't?

DEWEY: And here's one thing we won't have to restore.

DARLA: He came with the house.

BARNABAS: Make fun, but you'll not touch a thing in this house!

JOY: Barnabas, the board has decided that Houtini House needs to be restored—

ELLIE: We voted on it a year ago!

VICKIE: We've got the grant money to go ahead with the project.

BARNABAS: You can get all the money you want, but he's not going to let it happen!

COLLETTE: Who isn't?

BARNABAS: Hopalong Houtini!

(Dewey and Darla laugh.)

DEWEY: Oh, the old ghost in the house trick, hmmm?

DARLA: How could the old boy possibly care now?

DEWEY: He disappeared in...what? 1947?

BARNABAS: You think so, hmmm? He's here! He's been here since that night he disappeared so long ago! In the quiet of the night...when the house is empty except for me...I hear him walking about...sometimes in here...sometimes in the kitchen...sometimes in the library...and in the morning, I'll find a book or two sitting on the table...books that were on the shelf the night before!

DARLA: Maybe he's got a new career as a ghost writer!

(Screams are heard off left. Terrified, Conrad, Gloria, Sylvia, and Missy enter, running.)

GLORIA: Help us!

SYLVIA: Somebody's in the library!

MISSY: A ghost!

CONRAD: Well, now, we're not absolutely sure —

GLORIA: What else could it be? That book flew across the room by itself!

SYLVIA: We saw it!

MISSY: I'm getting out of here!

BARNABAS: It's okay, folks...you got a special treat...that was the ghost of Hopalong Houtini.

ELLIE: Up to his old tricks!

DEWEY: *(Nervously.)* Darla, could we be wrong?

JOY: I don't think so, Mr. Divine. Lacey!

(Lacey enters SL, holding a book.)

LACEY: It couldn't have been the window washer!

JOY: Did you throw your book in the library?

LACEY: It made no sense!

GLORIA: You almost scared us to death!

LACEY: Sorry.

SYLVIA: You mean it wasn't a ghost?

LACEY: I got a bit carried away. But I still don't see how the window washer could have done it. He was outside the whole time in full view of the man waiting for the bus—

VICKIE: Well, now that you've finished your tour, how about a snack?!

COLLETTE: Cookies are only 50 cents!

EFFIE: And we've got some nice souvenirs here, so you can remember your visit!

MISSY: I just want to forget it!

(Missy runs off SR.)

BARNABAS: You two go on 'n get!

DEWEY: We're here to do a final walk-through!

BARNABAS: You're not changing a thing in this house!

DARLA: We've been hired to restore it!

BARNABAS: Get out! Get out of here now, I tell you!

DEWEY: Ms. Maguire—

JOY: Barnabas, I think we need to have a talk.

BARNABAS: I don't want to talk! Not here! Not now!

JOY: What is wrong with you?

BARNABAS: Tonight...tonight I'll come to your house. Eight o'clock.

JOY: All right.

BARNABAS: But no one else can be there!

JOY: Barnabas, what's going on?

BARNABAS: No one else, is that clear?

JOY: If you insist.

BARNABAS: (*Glances at Dewey and Darla.*) I do! Oh, how I do!

EFFIE: Say, Barnabas, what can you tell us about the woman in black?

BARNABAS: What woman?

ELLIE: She was dressed in black from head to toe...

JOY: And wore a veil.

EFFIE: She floated into the room...

ELLIE: And then was gone, just like that!

LACEY: I never even saw her!

BARNABAS: (*Covering.*) I...I don't know what she was doing here! I don't know!

(*Barnabas races off SL.*)

JOY: Cookies? How about some nice chocolate chips!

VICKIE: We've got peanut butter chocked full of nuts!

CONRAD: I think most of the nuts are running this place!

(*Sylvia and Gloria go to buy cookies. Dewey and Darla exit SR in a huff. Blackout.*)

Scene 2

(AT RISE: The following morning. Only one plate of cookies sits on the table. After a moment, Joy enters SR carrying a plate of cookies. Lacey follows her and is carrying two plates of cookies.)

JOY: *(Nervously.)* Barnabas? Barnabas!

LACEY: That front door being left open is mighty suspicious, Mom! You ought to call the police.

JOY: I think he probably just opened a bit early.

LACEY: I dunno! That's always a red flag in a mystery. In "Murder on Elm Street," this woman went up to the condo where her friend Louverne lived, and she found the door open and –

JOY: Thanks, Lacey, but I don't need a gruesome story right now.

LACEY: Yeah! Here come the Crabtrees! They're gruesome enough!

JOY: Lacey!

(Ellie and Effie enter SR, carrying plates of cookies.)

ELLIE: I told you you'd flood the engine, dear!

EFFIE: I knew what I was doing.

ELLIE: That's why we had to take my car?

EFFIE: So? We took mine yesterday!

ELLIE: I think you flooded your engine on purpose!

EFFIE: Oh, look, Ellie...the only plate of cookies left are your thumbprint cookies. A shame they didn't sell, dear, but with your dirty thumbs, I don't know who'd want them!

JOY: Good morning, Ellie...good morning, Effie.

EFFIE: Sure, say "good morning" to her first!

LACEY: Did you know the front door was open when we got here?

ELLIE: Barnabas must have come in early. His car is in the parking lot.

LACEY: It is?

EFFIE: It's that old Rolls Royce. The real old one...I think it's almost as old as Ellie.

ELLIE: Look who's talking, Methuselah!

JOY: Barnabas can afford a Rolls Royce?

EFFIE: Oh, this was a real fixer-upper.

ELLIE: But he's never got around to fixing 'er up.

LACEY: I'm gonna go take a look at it.

JOY: Sure, and would you bring in my purse? It's got the cash register key in it.

LACEY: Check!

(Lacey runs off SR.)

JOY: Barnabas?

ELLIE: Oh, he's probably out back fixing something.

EFFIE: He's such a dear. And how he loves this house.

JOY: Unfortunately just the way it is.

ELLIE: Oh, he'll come around. I'm sure of that.

EFFIE: We'll persuade him.

(Vickie and Collette enter SR carrying plates of cookies.)

VICKIE: Morning!

JOY: Hi! Ready for a busy Saturday?

COLLETTE: And how. How much did we make yesterday?

JOY: A hundred and ninety-five dollars.

VICKIE: Awwww, that's below the average.

ELLIE: But we sold almost everything.

EFFIE: Except Ellie's dirty thumbprint cookies.

ELLIE: They just got a bit too done around the edges.

EFFIE: Around the edges? Those things look like hockey pucks.

JOY: Ellie, why don't you check out the rooms upstairs, and, Effie, how about setting up things behind the counter?

EFFIE: Anything you say, Madame Chairperson! (*Effie moves behind the counter.*) Ellie, you have a job to do.

ELLIE: How come I always have to climb upstairs? Daddy always let you do chores on the bottom floor, but I had to climb all the way—

JOY: Okay! I'll go, Ellie. I wouldn't mind a bit of peace and quiet.

ELLIE: Oh, he used to say that, too! Don't bother, I'll go.

(*Ellie exits up the stairs. Collette pulls Joy down right.*)

COLLETTE: Well?

JOY: He never showed up.

COLLETTE: What?

JOY: He was supposed to drop by at eight o'clock last night, but he never did.

COLLETTE: Did you call him?

JOY: Of course, but there wasn't any answer. He probably forgot and went out somewhere.

COLLETTE: Where would Barnabas go? There wasn't a funeral directors convention in town or anything.

JOY: Well, I decided I'd just ask him about it all today.

COLLETTE: But you said he was really nervous.

JOY: He was. I think this restoration is really getting to him.

COLLETTE: Yeah. Maybe he's been stashing money away in some secret passageway, and he's afraid it'll be found when they redo the place.

JOY: That's ridiculous—at least on the salary we pay him.

COLLETTE: Well, he'd better have some kind of explanation for where that money went!

JOY: (*Calls out.*) Barnabas? Barnabas!

VICKIE: You haven't seen him?

JOY: No.

VICKIE: Maybe he's not in yet.

(*Lacey enters SR carrying a book and a purse.*)

LACEY: Oh, he's here all right. In fact, he never left last night.
JOY: How do you know?
LACEY: *(Hands Joy the purse.)* Here you go, Mom!
JOY: Thanks. *(Joy fishes in the purse for the key.)*
LACEY: His car's windshield still has frost on it.
EFFIE: Oh, that doesn't mean anything. Ellie drives without
scraping her windshield all the time.
LACEY: He couldn't have seen a thing through this stuff.
JOY: Here you go, Effie.

(Joy hands Effie the key.)

EFFIE: Oh, I don't need that, Joy. The cash drawer's open.
JOY: He never locked it?
EFFIE: I thought you unlocked it.
JOY: No.
VICKIE: Is there money in it?

(Effie opens the drawer.)

EFFIE: No!
JOY: There's nothing?
COLLETTE: We'd better call the sheriff!
JOY: Don't touch anything more back there, Effie. C'mon
around here.

(Effie does so as Collette dials her cell phone.)

COLLETTE: *(Into phone.)* Lucille? This is Collette Erwin over
at the Houtini House. I think we've had a break-in here. He
is? *(Pause.)* He is? Oh, well, I can call him there. Thanks.
JOY: Where's the sheriff?
COLLETTE: Guess.
LACEY: Myrna's Bake Shoppe.
COLLETTE: Is there a phonebook back there?
LACEY: I see one.

JOY: Would you look up Myrna's number?
EFFIE: Why would anybody want to rob a museum?
VICKIE: People will steal anything these days! My neighbor had her old shovel and hoe stolen right from her back yard!
COLLETTE: Somebody probably had to weed their garden.
VICKIE: Or bury something!
LACEY: There's no "Myrna's" in here.
JOY: How are you spelling it?
LACEY: M-I-R...
JOY: It's M-Y.
LACEY: That's dumb! Oh, yeah...here it is.
COLLETTE: Go ahead.
LACEY: (*As Collette dials.*) 555-8976.
COLLETTE: (*Into phone.*) Hello? Myrna? This is Collette Erwin at Houtini House. Oh, I'm fine, thanks, but is the sheriff there? Good, can I talk to him? Soon as he swallows, right. (*Covers phone.*) He's eating. (*Into phone.*) Hello, Sheriff Stodgehill? This is Collette Erwin calling from Houtini House. I think we've had a robbery here. The cash drawer was open and there's no money in it. No, we haven't seen him yet. Well, no, I don't suppose there is a rush. I know how you like a second cup of coffee, but...well, sure. We'll carry on. (*A scream is heard from off left.*) That? That was somebody screaming! Maybe you'd better forget that second cup!

(*Effie moves to the stairs.*)

EFFIE: Ellie? Ellie, is that you? (*Joy rushes up the stairs.*) She probably caught a glimpse of herself in a mirror.
COLLETTE: You two, I don't understand how you can live together!
EFFIE: Neither of us wants to buy the other one out. But we've got a nice compromise.
VICKIE: What kind of compromise?
EFFIE: Left side of the house is hers. Right side is mine!

(Joy enters on the stairs, helping Ellie, who is terrified.)

JOY: What is it? What did you see?

LACEY: Was it that woman in black again?

(Ellie tries to say something.)

EFFIE: Sit her down! She's probably just dizzy from all that orange juice she drank this morning. *(To Ellie.)* I told you too much acid isn't good for you!

(Ellie points to upstairs.)

VICKIE: There's something up there?

COLLETTE: *(To Ellie.)* Do you want us to go up and see?

(Ellie violently shakes her head no.)

JOY: But it might be important. I'll go up.

(Joy exits up the stairs.)

EFFIE: Now, you take it easy. How about a nice thumbprint cookie?

(Ellie violently shakes her head no. Vickie goes to the stairs.)

VICKIE: Joy? Joy, are you all right?

JOY: *(Offstage, upstairs.)* So far!

COLLETTE: You want a baseball bat or something?

JOY: *(Offstage, upstairs.)* I'm fine.

VICKIE: What's up there?

JOY: *(Offstage, upstairs.)* Nothing so far.

COLLETTE: False alarm?

JOY: *(Offstage, upstairs.)* Oh, no! Oh, no!

VICKIE: What's wrong?

LACEY: Mom? Mom, what is it? (*Lacey moves to the stairs, but Vickie holds her back.*) We've got to go up and help her!

COLLETTE: Do you need any help, Joy?

VICKIE: Get that fireplace poker over there!

(*Collette grabs the poker just as Joy enters on the stairs.*)

EFFIE: Are you all right? You look like you've seen a ghost.

(*Ellie screams and buries her head in her hands.*)

VICKIE: What's up there?

JOY: Barnabas!

LACEY: He's a little creepy, but he's not that scary!

JOY: Speak nothing but good of the dead.

COLLETTE: You mean Barnabas is...dead?

(*Joy nods. Ellie cries.*)

VICKIE: That's why he never left...

EFFIE: And the drawer was never locked.

COLLETTE: Poor man. His heart must have just given out.

LACEY: Good thing the sheriff's on the way.

VICKIE: Oh, well, I'm sure there's nothing...suspicious about all this...

LACEY: Except where's the money?

COLLETTE: All of it!

(*Blackout.*)

[END OF FREEVIEW]