



*A Dinner Theatre Murder Mystery*



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**Customer Taster**

# *Killer Chili*

*Copyright 2019 by Debi Irene Wahl*

## *Overview*

An old diner, in a small town in the southern United States. A despot sheriff rules the town and everyone has a reason to want him dead. Even Mean Ole Henry, the diner's resident cat, hates the sheriff. Because of illegal activities that span several states, the FBI has an agent working undercover when a murder takes place. Can the agent determine who murdered the nasty sheriff?

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# *Killer Chili*

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## **About The Pack**

The full pack should provide everything you need to produce your very own murder mystery event. 'Killer Chili' is intended to be used at a sit down meal, where the cast will act out a set of events for the assembled guests. The main action is scripted, but then written evidence is distributed to the audience and they get the opportunity to interrogate the suspects.

## **Structure**

This murder mystery pack contains:

- The **Organiser's Overview** [*Extract here*]
- The **Script** [*Extract here*]
- **Clues for Stirring the Pot** - further evidence points, distributed to the audience before they interrogate the suspects.
- **Accusation Sheets** for the audience to enter their solutions.

## **The Organiser's Overview includes**

- An overview of **Plot** and **Characters**.
- **General Staging Notes** on how best to plan and stage your murder mystery event.
- **Character Briefs** which may help the actors during the interrogation.
- **Production Notes** - Set diagram, Set Dressing, Costume, Props, Sound Effects.

## **Plot Overview**

The mystery is set in an old diner, in a small town in the southern region of the United States. A despot sheriff rules the town and everyone has a reason to want him dead. Even Mean Ole Henry, the diner's resident cat hates the sheriff. Because of his illegal activities that span several states, the FBI has an agent working undercover when the murder takes place. He may be able to determine who murdered the nasty sheriff.

## **Character Overview**

Sheriff Lloyd - the victim

TJ - male, chef and owner of Edna's grill

Miss Dolly - the town's best-kept lady

Terry - male, pastor

Janie - late teens to early twenties, waitress

MaryAnn - waitress

Zeb - dishwasher

## General Staging Notes

Note that if you wish to stage the show, you need to purchase a Performance Licence from the Murder Mysteries page of the Lazy Bee Scripts website.

The script takes the form of a conventional play, with entrances, exits and other basic stage directions included. It requires a set with exits upstage and stage left. The cast are required to handle various props which probably rule-out staging the show as a “rehearsed reading”; in other words, the cast need to learn their lines!

The performers also need to rehearse the interrogation, getting comfortable with their back-story and practicing dealing with odd and awkward questions. The actor playing the FBI agent is in charge of the interrogation and must be prepared to step-in if questioning is proceeding in a direction that takes it beyond the plot and character briefs. (A simple “we’ve ruled that out of our investigation” should cover most circumstances.)

The audience are invited to consider the motives and evidence against the characters involved. The case can be discussed during and after the various courses of the meal.

The script says one Accusation Sheet per person. However, if the audience is seated around tables it can be changed to one sheet per table - because it encourages the audience members to argue amongst themselves! Either option works well and is up to the discretion of the production company. (The same applies to the “Clues for Stirring the Pot”.)

The *ghost* of the late Sheriff Lloyd will sort through the answers backstage. This can be done in a break before the final denouement or, under greater time pressure, during the denouement.

The sheriff’s ghost will be brought back to announce the winner, and award any prizes. In the case of two or more tables correctly identifying the murderer, the one with the clearest analysis should be the winner; failing that, a random draw from the sheriff’s hat.

## Suggested Timing

This show works well in productions where food is served, particularly a chili cook-off that allows guests to show their culinary skills.

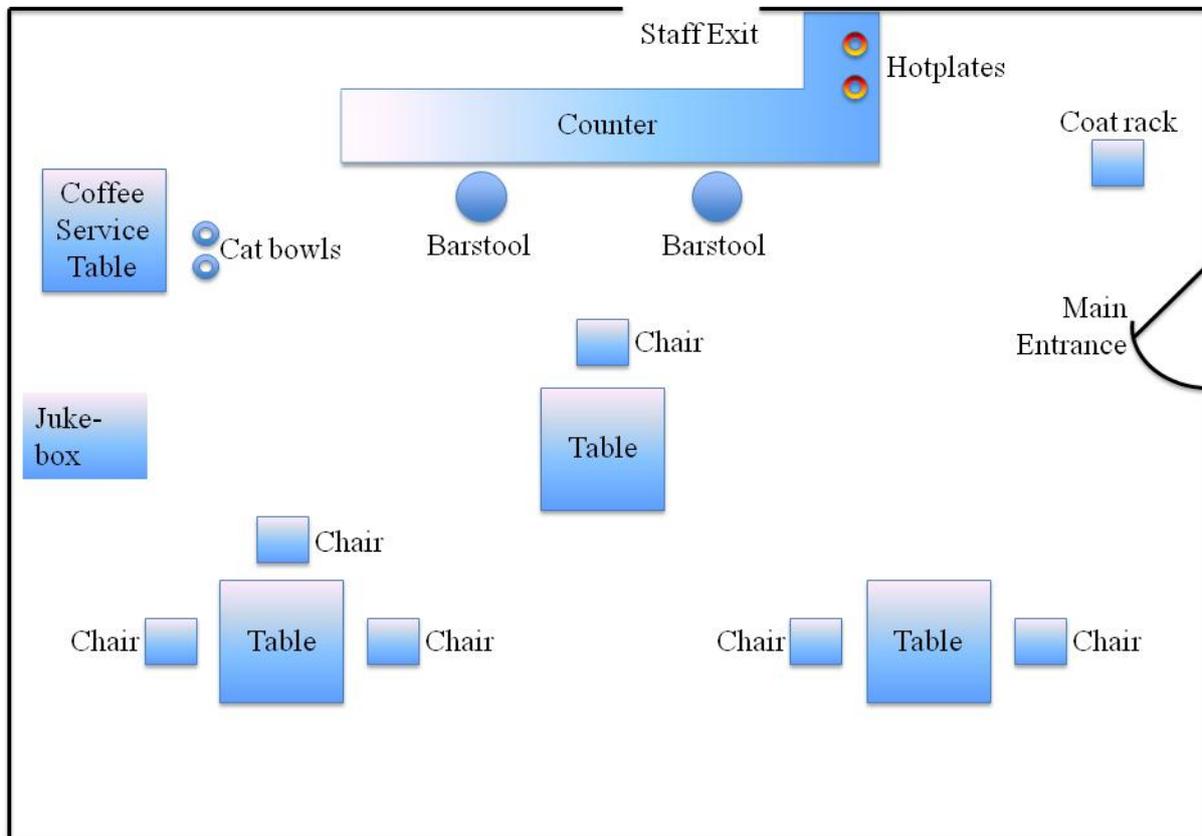
If *Killer Chili* were performed for a dinner theater murder mystery, the main course might be served prior to Scene 1. Dessert, like revenge, is best delivered cold and should be served right before Scene 2. The following times show how the evening might be arranged. However, many variations are possible, not least if there is a cook-off.

The running times of the three scenes are based on our estimation. You should check the timings based on your rehearsals, and review with the caterers, particularly if hot food is being served (although a large pot of Chili is very flexible in this respect).

7:00 pm	Guests arrive and are seated. Drinks and/or starters can be provided.
7:30 pm	Main Course.
7:50 pm	Scene One.
8:15 pm	Dessert.
8:35 pm	Scene Two.
9:00 pm	Interrogation.
9:15 pm	Accusation Sheets to be filled in and collected. Coffee.
9:30 pm	Scene Three.
9:50 pm	Announcement of the winning team.
10:00 pm	Finish.

# Production Notes

## Set



The entrance door, stage left, has a bell that rings during entrances and exits; however, the door can be implied to the audience (by the bell sound) if the production company is using a simpler set.

# *Killer Chili*

Script Extract

## ***Scene 1 – Early Morning***

**(Interior of a diner that has changed little in fifty years. An L-shaped counter upstage with a door to the kitchen behind it. A coffee station to one side. Bar stools by the counter, three sets of tables and chairs downstage. Street entrance stage left.)**

**(Zeb is pushing a small broom around in circles, stirring up dust. Terry is seated downstage right, facing stage left, his Bible and hat on the table, writing in a paper tablet. Dolly is seated on a barstool at the counter, filing her nails. Her purse is on the counter.)**

**Voiceover:** Nobody liked him. He was a loud-mouthed backwater jerk, who hung out at the local diner and ruled over the small town like he was its god. No one was safe from his ugly rages and despotic justice. He had a hankering for hot chili and even hotter women. Unfortunately, Edna's grill was the only diner in this one-horse town. Unfortunately, he was the chief law enforcement officer. Unfortunately, this is his story.

**(Enter TJ from kitchen. He is carrying a large butcher's knife and a cooking pot filled with chili that he places on hot plates on counter. TJ begins to chop vegetables close to where Dolly is seated at the counter.)**

**(Enter MaryAnn. She hangs her sweater on the coat rack and retrieves one of two half-length aprons, which she ties around her waist.)**

**MaryAnn:** Mornin', Zeb.

**Zeb:** Mornin', MaryAnn.

**MaryAnn:** Mornin', Preacher.

**Terry:** Good morning, MaryAnn.

**MaryAnn:** Mornin', TJ.

**(TJ waves the butcher knife in greeting and splatters food near Dolly.)**

**TJ:** Mornin', MaryAnn.

**Dolly:** TJ! Be careful!

**(MaryAnn sniffs at Dolly; there is definite rancor between the two women.)**

**MaryAnn:** Dolly.

**Dolly:** MaryAnn.

**(MaryAnn picks up one of two empty bowls that sit on the floor near counter and fills it with milk.)**

**MaryAnn:** Here Henry, here kitty, kitty, kitty.

**TJ:** MaryAnn, when you're done with Mean Ole Henry, get to choppin' them hot jalapeño peppers for my killer chili.

**MaryAnn:** Killer's the word for it!

**(Zeb snickers, pushes the broom too close to the counter and almost knocks over the box of rat poison.)**

**TJ:** What are you laughin' at, you idiot? Stop shoving that broom around. You darn near knocked the rat poison over. All you is doing is stirrin' up the dust. Get to wipin' off the tables. Don't make me sorry I gave you this job.

**(Zeb props the broom on the coat rack and begins to lazily wipe the seats of the middle table.)**

**Terry:** Say, MaryAnn. How is that little boy of yours? Is he feeling better? I hear he had a terrible case of chickenpox.

**(MaryAnn starts to place utensils at Terry's table.)**

**MaryAnn:** Yes, Billy's better now since he stopped scratchin'. Wouldn't have been so bad, but he had them pox in between his toes and fingers something awful. Kept rubbing the inside of his toes raw between the legs of my kitchen table. Got the varnish rubbed off in three places. I even found some pox up his nose; he got the inside of that raw, too. Had to wrap his fingers together to stop him from stickin' em up there all the time. They's all old pox now. Doctor says no new ones should be popping out to be itchin' him. But I'll tell him you asked about him, Preacher.

**Terry:** Tell your boy I'll be praying for him and I'll stop by for a visit. I've got some matchbox cars that might help him leave those scars alone.

**MaryAnn:** Well, now that's right nice of you, Preacher. Don't rush none, them pox is just about gone. Gonna get your coffee. **(MaryAnn exits to kitchen.)**

**(Enter Janie. She hangs her sweater on the coat rack and retrieves the last apron, which she ties around her waist.)**

**Janie:** Mornin', Zeb.

**(Zeb raises a soggy towel in greeting to her.)**

**Zeb:** Mornin', Janie.

**Janie:** Mornin', Preacher.

**Terry:** Good morning, Janie.

**Janie:** Mornin', TJ.

**(TJ waves the butcher knife toward Janie.)**

**TJ:** Mornin', Janie.

**Dolly:** For goodness' sake, TJ! Stop that!

**(Janie leans toward Dolly and gives her a slight kiss on the cheek.)**

**Janie:** Good mornin', Miss Dolly.

**Dolly:** Good mornin', Baby.

**(Janie picks up second cat bowl and fills with cat food.)**

**Janie:** Here Henry, here kitty, kitty, kitty.

**TJ:** Janie, when you're done with Mean Ole Henry get to choppin' them sweet onions for my killer chili.

**Janie:** Killer's the word for it!

**(Zeb snickers and slops water onto the floor.)**

**(TJ swings the butcher knife wildly.)**

**TJ:** That's it!

**(Dolly jumps and mutters indistinct profanity at him.)**

**TJ:** Take that tub of slop water into the kitchen and get to washin' the pots and pans in the sink.

Doggone you; my good nature went against my common sense. I shoulda never given you this job, lazy drifter!

**(Janie runs to clean up the spill.)**

**Terry:** Say, Janie, how is your father's bursitis? I hear he had a very bad attack and he can hardly move off of his recliner.

**Janie:** Yeah, my pa's lookin' like ten miles of rough road these days, Preacher. He gets these sharp slingin' pains in his shoulder, down over his buttocks, right down to his toes. Doc has him on special pain medicine.

**TJ:** I heard about that pain medicine, Janie. Hear it's about a hundred proof!

**Janie:** Well, Pa don't seem to be hurtin' so much once he has a glass of it.

**TJ:** Darlin', I guess he don't mind nothin' at all after a shot of that moonshine.

**Terry:** Ahem, well, I will be praying for him, Janie. I'll stop by and see him in a few days to visit. Perhaps I can find some helpful scripture so that he feels less inclined to... ah, fill the void with... ah, medicine.

**Janie:** **(Suddenly nervous.)** That's right nice of you, Preacher. But truly, don't rush yourself none. In fact, you might want to put off that visit 'til much later. Pa ain't goin' nowhere and that medicine makes him mighty sleepy most of the day.

**(Enter MaryAnn with regular coffee pot. She pours a cup, places the pot on the coffee maker burner and brings the cup to Terry's table. Sheriff Lloyd enters. MaryAnn exits to the Kitchen. Sheriff Lloyd tosses his hat down, stage left, taking the seat that places him facing Terry. Dolly seems pleased to see the man, but he ignores her completely.)**

**Terry:** Good morning, Sheriff.

**Sheriff:** What's good about it?

**TJ:** You're alive, ain't ya? 'Course that only makes it good for you.

**(The sheriff has a constant nasty laugh.)**

**Sheriff:** Watch your mouth, TJ. I noticed you is parked real close to that fire hydrant outside, hate to give you a ticket so early in the day.

**TJ:** What fire hydrant? You mean the broken one them cowards you call a town council won't replace, no matter how many times the neighbors complain about it? Why, when Myrtle's house burned to the ground a month ago, that hydrant wasn't workin' and she had to move in with family from out of state. Your brother runs that stinkin' council and he don't give a darn about the law.

**Sheriff:** My brother obeys the law... my law. Maybe I'll just impound that scrap of junk you drive, save myself writin' a ticket.

**Terry:** My goodness, Lloyd, no need for all that. I'm sure TJ was only kidding. By the way, I'm glad to see you're walking a bit better than last week. I heard you had a pretty nasty dog bite a few weeks ago.

**Sheriff:** I'm doin' just fine, Preacher. Why? Wanna have a prayer meetin' for me? Do a little healin' over the back of my leg? **(Moves his hands, mockingly.)** A little heat here, a little tickle there? What'll that cost me? A couple of bucks in your donation plates? Don't worry about me, Preacher. I always land on my feet. I can't say the same for the mutt that tried to remove my leg. I gave him one right between the eyes.

**(Janie gasps and fights to hold back tears.)**

**Sheriff:** Stop your snivelin', little girl. I warned you about that mutt. He was always snarlin' at me.

**Janie:** Hounddog was only a pup; he was playing. He couldn't have hurt a fly.

**Sheriff:** Oh yeah? I guess you could say I just sent him to a better place than that broken down farm you live on. What do ya think, Preacher? Do dogs go to heaven?

**Terry:** Well, I...

*[... Continued in the full script...]*