



A Dinner Theatre Murder Mystery
by
Lynn Rushby and Gordon Lewis



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Script

Class War

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Characters

Carole Curtain, head of drama
Bryony Bunsen, head of science
Andy Cox, head of PE
Chris Coke, laboratory technician
Bill Boilerhouse, caretaker
Nick Pinscher, bursar
Samantha Richer-Quick, headteacher
DI Hagley, local police (female)
PC Racy, local police (female)

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Act 1

Scene 1 – The staff room, morning.

(There are a couple of chairs and a lectern. There is a presentation screen at the back and a table with mugs, spoons, etc.)

(The staff drift on, talking about their holidays, new timetables, etc. Carole and Bryony enter first and look for somewhere to sit. Andy, close behind them, spots a couple of chairs, blows his whistle to attract their attention and then rushes to sit across both chairs before they can get there. He pats his lap to suggest they should sit there but then lets both of them sit down. He flirts with Carole behind Bryony's back. Bryony puts her ring binder file under the chair. Andy plays with a tatty cricket ball, which he plays with throughout the scene.)

(Bill and Chris enter next, also looking for seats. Chris reads the Racing Post when he can and Bill moans about his bad back. Nick is next on and checks the lectern is in place. Finally, Samantha enters and takes her place at the lectern to address the staff – including the audience.)

Samantha: Welcome back, everyone. Well, I say everyone, but I have received an email from Tom Jones, whose QueasyJet flight has been delayed yet again. But as we know with our dear Mr Jones, *it's not unusual*. (**Laughs at own joke.**) However, on a serious note, I would like to remind you that this kind of absence at the beginning of term will need full documentary evidence or a doctor's certificate, along with the completion of form one-oh-one, sections c, d and q, otherwise salaries may well be affected. (**To Nick.**) Nick, perhaps you would kindly follow up on that, please?

Nick: Yes of course, Headmistress.

Carole: But Samantha, we can't help flight delays and cancellations, especially when we have to use the cheaper airlines.

Samantha: In which case, I suggest you leave a couple of days earlier, Carole. Luckily, BA were not on strike and my flight from Martinique got in bang on time on Friday. Of course, we always fly Club Class, but as frequent flyers, we were upgraded to First on the way home. By the way, for those of you who have never been, what a sensational place Martinique is. As some of you may know, Charles and I bought a modest little pad there about ten years ago and have never looked back. The food, the culture, the beaches – I thoroughly recommend it. Anyway, I trust you are all suitably rested and thoroughly prepared to face what promises to be a rather challenging year.

Andy: I don't wish to be rude, Samantha, but how many more of these so called "challenging years" do we have to put up with? My bid for new cricket gear was turned down yet again this summer. I have three broken bats and you should see the state of my balls.

Chris: I'd rather not, if you don't mind.

Samantha: As I was saying, in this era of austerity, schools have had to make economies too. Last year, the Parents Association organised several fundraisers to help towards the cost of various equipment, although some events proved to be rather less successful than others. We were perhaps fortunate that the 'Take Your Pet to School' day only resulted in one minor legal action. Once we had paid the local pet shop compensation for the stolen gerbils, we were considerably out of pocket. Clearly, we cannot continue to rely on the parents' generosity to bolster our financial shortfalls, so the bursar and I have been drawing up plans to address this matter. He will give you more details in a moment.

Bryony: Oh, those poor little gerbils.

Bill: Poor little gerbils, my arse. Messy little buggers shat everywhere.

Samantha: If I may continue. As you are already aware, the exam results for some departments have been rather disappointing, to say the least. At least one geography student thought the Taj Mahal was a takeaway in the High Street, and when asked where the Magna Carta was signed, another genius wrote "at the bottom". I despair, I really do. As a result, our position in the league tables has dropped significantly. This will not only have an impact on our ability to recruit quality students, it makes us far more likely to receive an Ofsted visit this term. We will need to be absolutely on top of our game if we want to improve on our previous 'Satisfactory' status. At this point, I'll hand you over to Nick, who has been hard at work on budgets and the like throughout the summer. Nick.

Nick: Thank you, Headmistress. Yes, I seem to have taken over at a particularly difficult time for the school, both educationally and financially. As you say, the weaker our results, the fewer new pupils we attract and the less money we receive. It is therefore my difficult job to address these financial matters, and after lengthy discussions with the Head and the Board of Governors, we have decided that we will not be replacing retiring members of staff for the foreseeable future. Consequently, some of you may have found some additional subjects on your timetables for this term, but I'm sure you will rise to the challenge.

Bryony: I thought it was a mistake when I saw you had given me economics. I mean, I know nothing about it. I am a science teacher.

Bill: You think that's bad – Doris fainted when she heard she was doing double woodwork with 3B on Friday afternoons. She's locked herself in the music room and won't come out.

Nick: We will also have to merge several departments over the course of the coming year. Later today, I will be speaking to those staff who will be affected by these changes. The Head and I also have to ensure that we are all ready for this possible Ofsted inspection, and that is why I sent you all a message last week asking for a copy of your teaching qualifications. I thank those of you who have already responded. I will be chasing up the rest of you today. That is all I wanted to say at the moment, so back to you, Headmistress.

Samantha: Thank you, Nick. That's all for now. I am sure you all have plenty to be getting on with in your own departments, but I would remind you all to be back here at eleven-thirty for the first part of the new health and safety training.

(Staff exit, chatting quietly as they go. Carole stops Nick and takes him aside.)

Carole: Ah, Nick, could I have a quick word please?

Nick: Well hello, Carole! You're looking particularly lovely in that outfit. The break has obviously done you good. Did you get away at all?

Carole: Well, it wasn't quite in the same league as our esteemed head. Her own place in Martinique indeed! I can't think how she manages that, even on a head's salary. I couldn't even afford Spain. Anyway, one of my mates collected some tokens from The Sun and we got a good deal on a caravan at Margate. Not exactly what you'd call luxury, but I'm trying to save all the money I can to get on the property ladder.

Nick: Yes, but we all have to cut our cloth accordingly in these tough times, Carole. And I'm sure a pretty girl like you would still turn a few heads, whether it be in Martinique or Margate.

Carole: Huh, if only. Anyway, I just wanted to check you got my email.

Nick: I've had hundreds of emails. Remind me.

Carole: It was the letter I need for the mortgage company. I do need it quite urgently.

Nick: Oh that, yes. Well, I'm not sure I can sign it. I mean, it's not exactly true, is it? You're asking me to confirm that your temporary role is in fact permanent, which we both know isn't the case. Deirdre will be back from maternity leave at half term and you will return to your basic pay scale.

Carole: But we both know that Deirdre won't be coming back permanently. She'll only stay long enough to get her maternity pay. And I was as good as promised the permanent job when she leaves.

Nick: Well, that was before whispers about your affair with our married Head of PE started doing the rounds.

Carole: What! Me and Andy Cox? That's ridiculous. Who's been spreading stupid rumours like that?

Nick: Rumours? I have it on good authority that you were seen round the back of the pavilion in a compromising situation in your convertible with your top down.

Carole: That's rubbish! I might have given him a lift to the garage to pick his car up, but that's all.

Nick: Really? So how come you were both seen sneaking out of the Crowing Cock last weekend?

Carole: This is ridiculous. I bet it was that bloody caretaker, Bill. He's had it in for me ever since I turned down his creepy advances. Look, are you going to give me this flipping letter or not?

Nick: Pull yourself, Miss Curtain! I'll have to consider my options most carefully. After all, if the rumours were true, it might be a breach of the staff rules. I'm due to be conducting an interview now, but I may have time to discuss it further over a drink on Saturday night. I'll be staying at the Grand in Brighton for the National Bursars Conference. You could meet me there. Say around eight pm? Do let me know what you decide.

Carole: Are you suggesting...? I can't believe you just said that.

(Enter Bryony.)

Bryony: Hello, Carole, have you seen my donkey sanctuary file?

Carole: What a bastard!

(Carole storms off.)

Bryony: What's wrong with her?

Nick: It's the acting Head of Drama being a drama queen as usual.

Bryony: Oh dear. I hope she's alright. I seem to have lost my donkey file somewhere. **(Sees it under a chair.)** Oh there it is. **(Picks up file.)** I'll get straight back to the lab. Lots to do!

Nick: Before you go, Miss Bunsen, I did want a word on a couple of matters.

Bryony: Can it wait? I...

Nick: I'm afraid it can't. As I said at the staff meeting this morning, I need to see everyone's teaching qualifications in preparation for the Ofsted visit. I still don't seem to have received yours.

Bryony: I didn't think it applied to me. I've been here nearly thirty years. Everything must have been checked when I was appointed.

Nick: It applies to everyone, Miss Bunsen. Myself included. Now, do you have your certificate or don't you?

Bryony: Well, it's probably up in my mother's loft. She kept all my old certificates. My twenty-five yards breast stroke, my cycling proficiency test, my Girl Guides sewing badge...

Nick: I don't care if she's got your Grade Three Nose Flute Player's certificate up there! I just need your original teaching qualifications and I need them in my office first thing in the morning!

Bryony: But my mother's on... er, um... an extended walking tour of Iceland and...

Nick: If you can't get hold of your mother to unearth these vintage documents, you can easily get replacements emailed to you from the relevant institution.

Bryony: But after all these years, I'm not sure I'll still be on their records.

Nick: I can assure you, they're all available online by request, even going back to whatever prehistoric age you studied in.

Bryony: Well, I'll do my best.

(Bryony attempts to leave, but Nick stops her.)

Nick: I'd also like to discuss the department's finances at that meeting. You seem to have exceeded your allocated budget by an incredible twenty percent, most of it on chemicals.

Bryony: Well, prices keep going up and up, and the new curriculum demands that we do so many more experiments to keep the students interested, and I know we set fire to the store cupboard last term, but I managed to repair most of the damage myself using a...

Nick: As I've told you repeatedly, it's your responsibility to manage the department's finances, and that includes ordering supplies.

Bryony: Well, that's Chris the lab technician's job. He does all the stock orders and knows when we're running low on stuff.

Nick: You can't just dump all this on a junior colleague. You may delegate the task, but not the responsibility.

Bryony: But, but...

Nick: And my third and final item is to remind you that under the proposed shadow structure, science and maths will merge into *one* department under *one* head of department. We will consequently be looking at redundancies.

Bryony: But Mr Pinscher, I can't lose my post. The donkey sanctuary relies on my salary. The poor dumb animals need me!

(Bryony attempts to show him a leaflet from her file. Nick pushes it away.)

Nick: Yes, there seems to be a lot of dumb animals around here! Your donkey hobby is no concern of mine, but I do need a *stable* head of department. **(Smiles at his own joke.)**

Bryony: But I...

(Bill enters.)

Bill: There you are, Mr Pinscher. Apparently, you're needed back in your office. The candidates for Parent Governor have been waiting ages for you. If you ask me...

Nick: No one is asking you, Bill. If I wanted your opinion, I'd ask for it. **(To Bryony.)** So I'll see you tomorrow at nine o'clock sharp in my office.

(Nick exits.)

(Bryony starts to cry.)

Bill: There there, Bryony, this isn't like you. What's the matter, love?

Bryony: Oh Bill, that wretched new bursar is going to ruin everything. He wants to get rid of me!

Bill: He can't do that. You've been here thirty years, same as me. Take no notice of that stuck up so-and-so. He's only been here five minutes, but thinks he knows it all.

Bryony: But you don't understand. I never finished my teaching course, and when I started here, I fibbed and said I had. No one bothered to check back then as they were so short of science teachers, they were just grateful that anyone was prepared to teach it. But now that odious man is asking to see everyone's qualifications and I don't know what to do!

Bill: You better have a chat with your union rep. I bet you're not the only one. I mean, how did that dopey Doris Strings ever pass her degree? There's a riot every day in the music room. Talk about Roll Over Beethoven, I bet he'd turn in his grave if he heard our so-called school orchestra, and as for that new gospel choir, I've never heard such an unholy row.

Bryony: But at least she does have a degree. If I can't produce a teaching certificate, they'll never let me be head of the merged maths and science department, and if they cut my salary, or worse, I'll never be able to maintain the donkey sanctuary.

(Bryony sobs and collapses onto a chair.)

Bill: Look, Bryony, I know how much them poor animals mean to you, but all these changes could mean I lose my job and my house. That bursar's really got in for me too. He's bringing in a timing motion bloke to follow me around next week and mark me down every time I have a fag break, or even a wind break, come to that. I know what they're up to. They want to outsource my job so they can flog off half the grounds and my cottage with it.

Bryony: But you've been in that cottage ever since you started working here, Bill. It's your home!

Bill: It's a tied cottage. Comes with the job. No job, no home! That's why I never retired when I should have.

Bryony: That's awful. What will you do?

Bill: I've got the union onto it, but even they don't hold out much hope. Seems it's happening everywhere these days, and sadly the unions ain't got no teeth since Maggie clobbered the miners all them years ago.

Bryony: And the poor donkeys don't even have a union.

(The school bell rings. Bryony leaps up.)

Bryony: Gosh, is that the time? And now I've got to get on with a full stock check. Where have you put all the science deliveries?

Bill: Same as always, in the sports hall.

Bryony: What, including the chemicals?

Bill: I don't know what's in all the boxes. There's hundreds of them.

Bryony: But what about the new health and safety policy? Surely anyone could just walk off with them. They cost a bomb and some are dangerous.

Bill: I can't be expected to carry it all round to each department myself, not with my back.

Bryony: Oh heavens, I'd better get Chris to put it all under lock and key before management realises. I can't cope with all these new rules and regulations. I wish that awful man would just go back to whatever stone he crawled out from.

(Bryony exits.)

Bill: Someone needs to teach that so-and-so a lesson he'll never forget, and the sooner the better.

(Bill exits.)

Carole: **(Offstage.)** Andy, quick, in here.

(Carole drags Andy onstage.)

Carole: I must talk to you.

Andy: Hello, darling. Can't keep your hands off me, can you?

Carole: No, listen, this is important.

Andy: Not as important as what I'm thinking.

(Andy pulls her to him.)

Carole: No, stop it, stop it. Something's come up.

Andy: It certainly has, you cheeky little minx!

Carole: No, no. I'm being serious.

Andy: Don't tell me you're pregnant. Look, I told you from the outset I don't do serious. This is just a bit of fun. I'm married with three kids and not looking to lose everything over a quick fling.

Carole: A quick fling! Is that all I mean to you?

Andy: You know I didn't mean it like that. I thought we were both happy with our cosy little arrangement.

Carole: Well, I was, but now that bursar's got wind of it...

Andy: How?

Carole: Apparently, some interfering busybody saw us together in my car behind the pavilion.

Andy: So what? As far as anyone else was concerned, you were just giving me a lift to the garage to pick my car up.

Carole: That's what I told him, but it seems we were also seen leaving the Crowing Cock on Saturday.

Andy: Oh hell. I told my wife I was on a referees' course. Who saw us?

Carole: I don't know, but now that awful man wants to have a bit of 'fun' with me too. He wants me to go to a hotel with him next weekend.

Andy: I'll break his bloody nose.

Carole: That's not all. He as good as implied that he won't sign the letter for the mortgage company unless I sleep with him. I'll lose my deposit and my flat.

(She wails and throws herself into his arms.)

Carole: What are we going to do?

Andy: Leave this to me. You just watch him back down when I grab him warmly by the throat. He won't get away with this.

(Chris enters, looking at his mobile phone. Carole and Andy quickly pull apart and look embarrassed.)

Carole: Thanks for that, Andy. I'll catch you later.

(Carole exits.)

Chris: Thanks for what, eh, Andy? Doing the lovely Carole a favour are we, eh?

Andy: What are you on about? If you must know, I was just giving her a few tips for the Ofsted visit. She's never had to do it as acting head of department before.

Chris: I didn't know heads of department did it any differently to the rest of us. But then what would I know? I'm just a simple lab technician.

Andy: Very funny. There's nothing simple about you, Chris Coke. It strikes me as odd that someone with your qualifications should be working as a low-paid lab technician. Thought you had a master's degree.

Chris: This is just temporary. I've got plans, don't you worry. Anyway, back to you and the lovely Carole. I seem to have interrupted a rather intimate discussion between the two of you. So it looks like all the rumours are true, then.

Andy: What rumours?

Chris: About the two of you having a fling.

Andy: She's just a colleague and a good friend, nothing more than that.

Chris: Well, that's what I thought, until a friend said he saw you with a very attractive young lady in the car park of the Crowing Cock last weekend.

Andy: Well, I often go there with the missus.

Chris: But your wife's a redhead, isn't she? And this girl definitely wasn't. And she was driving a Mazda MX5, just like Carole does.

Andy: Last weekend? Must have been my cousin he saw me with.

Chris: So that's what they mean by kissing cousins, is it? What would your wife say?

Andy: Are you trying to threaten me? You leave my wife out of this. It's none of your goddamn business. Anyway, what was any friend of yours doing at the Crowing Cock? Your lot are more at home in that dodgy dive in the High Street. Or has it been raided again? Half the punters in there have got arms like pin cushions.

Chris: At least it's got a bit of life in it. Not like that overpriced posers' palace the Cock.

Andy: And right next door to the bookies, too. Maybe that's why you go there.

Chris: Oh, I just have the odd little flutter to give me an interest in a race.

Andy: How little is little, I wonder? Anyway, I've got something more important to deal with right now.

(Andy exits.)

(Chris takes his phone out and makes a call.)

Chris: Yeah, it's me... Yeah, I got some... No, I couldn't get all of it... I nearly got caught. Please be reasonable, you don't understand. There's this new manager and he's all over us like a rash. You can't even take a piss without filling in a form... No, please don't do that. I'll sort it... Just give me a couple more days and I'll get the rest and make another batch... No, Terry, please, please!

(He looks at his mobile in despair.)

(Bryony enters in a panic.)

Bryony: Chris, there you are. Thank goodness. I need you to come and help me with a stock check. That new Bursar wants a complete breakdown of the department's expenditure first thing in the morning and I can't find all the stock we ordered. I've found the Bunsen burners and the pipettes but I can't find all the chemicals. Have you already put them somewhere?

Chris: Perhaps some of the stock hasn't been delivered yet. It often comes in stages over several days.

Bryony: But I've looked at the delivery notes and Bill's signed off for ten boxes, but I can only find nine.

Chris: You know what Bill's like. He's too lazy to do a proper check. He probably just assumed it was all there.

Bryony: But this new bursar is making us all do things thoroughly, even Bill. He swears there were ten boxes. He says he counted them twice.

Chris: But then he left them all in the gym, silly beggar. Anyone could have walked off with one.

Bryony: Yes, but what would anyone do with ten kilograms of ammonium chloride, for instance?

Chris: Good question. Maybe it's got mixed up with someone else's stuff.

Bryony: That's all I need! We'll have to search the whole school. If I don't find it, that'll be it for me. I'll get the chop!

Chris: The whole school? You're joking. Why not just send everyone an email?

Bryony: But then the bursar might get wind of it and I'm done for – and so are my precious donkeys! I'll start in the art block, you take geography. They both have lots of deliveries. Come on.

(Bryony rushes off.)

Chris: How the hell am I going to get out of this mess?

(Chris exits.)

(Sounds of an argument offstage. Enter Nick, followed by Andy.)

Nick: Look, I haven't got time for all this nonsense.

Andy: Well, you'd better make time. You've been coming on to Miss Curtain and making threats.

Nick: Threats? What threats? If anything, she's the one at fault. Why don't you ask her about her dodgy mortgage application?

Andy: Funny how it wouldn't be dodgy if she joined you at your offsite conference. You should be ashamed of yourself, you sad old perv.

Nick: Me, a sad old perv! I'm not the one who's married with kids. What would your wife say if she knew about your sordid affair?

Andy: You leave her out of this. It's got nothing to do with her. And for the record, Ms Curtain and I are not having an affair.

Nick: Well, that's not what the rumour mill says, and in my experience, there's no smoke without fire. You might like to remind yourself of the staff code of conduct. "Inappropriate behaviour by a member of staff that could affect the reputation of the school may lead to a warning, suspension or even dismissal." I wonder what the lovely Mrs Cox would say about that?

(Andy grabs Nick by the lapels.)

Andy: You bastard! Think you're so bloody clever, don't you? If the board of governors knew about your sleazy suggestions and threats, you'd be the one out of a job.

Nick: Take your grubby paws off me. Typical PE teacher – all brawn and no brain. You don't have a shred of evidence. It's her word against mine, and I have the email she sent me with her rather dubious request about her mortgage application. Who are the governors more likely to believe – me or her?

(Enter Samantha.)

Samantha: Ah, I'm glad you're here, Nick. I wanted to run a couple of things by you before the meeting. If you'll excuse us, Andy.

Andy: Of course. **(Aside to Nick.)** We'll finish this later.

(Andy exits.)

Samantha: I wanted to check that you had all the documents in place in case Ofsted swoop in. With all the recent changes, they could arrive at a moment's notice.

Nick: I'm on to it. But I was right, there were a lot of discrepancies. I'm still waiting for a couple of bits, such as the science department's stock check and one or two teaching qualifications, but I expect to have everything sorted by tomorrow morning.

Samantha: Oh good. Talk about a new broom. You seem to have done a year's work in six weeks. You'll be able to relax at your conference next weekend.

Nick: **(Smiling to himself.)** I'm hoping it will be a very stimulating weekend. But I can't relax yet, there's lots more to be done. Take the awarding of external contracts, for instance. The system we use looks a little odd, to say the least.

Samantha: Oh, you don't need to bother about that. I usually take care of those.

Nick: But some of the contracts don't seem to have been put out for tender for fifteen years or more.

Samantha: That's because we like to use people we know and trust rather than that Compare the Meerkat nonsense.

Nick: Well, I am amazed the governors have put up with that. I assume they do know about it? For example, the outsourcing policy requires re-tendering every five years.

Samantha: Oh, I am pretty sure they must know and just take a practical view like I do.

Nick: Nonetheless, I think I shall have to raise it with them at the next meeting. Anything else I can help you with, Headmistress?

Samantha: Oh Nick! I do you wish you would stop calling me Headmistress. It sounds so jolly formal, and I think we know each other well enough by now to be on first name terms.

Nick: I just think of it as a mark of respect and professionalism. Makes it easier to deal with challenging issues too, as I am addressing the role rather than the person. So if you don't mind, I will just stick with it.

Samantha: Oh, very well. As you like. Anything else?

Nick: No, no. I think that's it for now. I will see you at the meeting later then.

(Nick exits.)

(Samantha takes out her phone and makes a call.)

Samantha: **(Reverting to her working-class accent.)** Oh come on, come on! Oh Mark, you are there, thank goodness. That nose-y new bursar I told you about is poking his nose into all our outside contracts. Some like yours haven't been re-tendered for decades, and he is on to it. He could really stir up trouble. If he finds out you're my brother, then this could get very messy. Look, if he rings, just try to fob him off and let me know. And do me a big favour, will you? Warn cousin Dawn too, as the same thing is going to happen with her cleaning contract, no doubt... All the family have done very nicely out of our cosy little arrangements so far. At best you might lose the contracts, which will hit us all hard financially, but the worst-case scenario is that we all end up in the clink... Leave the rest to me. I'll try and deal with this.

(Samantha hangs up.)

Samantha: Oh shit! What am I going to do now? If Charles finds out I've been on the take all these years, he'll probably divorce me. And I'm not prepared to go back to that grubby council flat and two weeks in flipping Torremolinos either. No, something will have to be done about that man.

(Exit Samantha.)

(Blackout.)

Scene 2 – The staffroom, a couple of hours later.

(The presentation screen has been moved forward ready for the training session and the kettle is on.)

(Enter Bill and Bryony. Bill is carrying a pint of milk. Bryony is going through her stock orders. Bill starts getting the mugs, etc., ready.)

Bill: Oh good, someone's already put the kettle on. Poor old Daphne got her marching orders at the end of last term after twenty years of tea making. More so-called cost saving. Shame she wasn't in a union. All she got was fifty quid and a box of chocs. Not much of a thank you, is it? Right, I've got the milk. Pass us the sugar, can you?

(Bryony picks up the sugar, but each time Bill reaches for it, she absent-mindedly moves away.)

Bryony: Oh Bill, Chris and I have searched high and low for the missing chemicals. Heaven knows what the bursar's going to say if they don't turn up.

Bill: Well you can't do much about it until this bloody training's over, so give us a hand. No doubt they'll all need a strong cuppa before we sit through more of this mind-numbing guff they call Health and Safety Awareness.

(Bill finally grabs the sugar from Bryony.)

Bryony: **(Distractedly prepares mugs.)** I won't be able to concentrate on it anyway. All I can think about is losing my job and my poor donkeys having to be put down.

(Enter Chris.)

Bryony: Ah Chris, you had any joy?

Chris: No luck so far. Turned the whole place upside down. Perhaps someone's trying to drop us in it.

Bill: But why would anyone wanna do that? What's in it for them?

Chris: Gawd knows. I hate to say it, but if you'd done your job properly, Bill, this wouldn't have happened.

Bill: Don't you blame me. There were ten boxes on the invoice and I counted ten boxes in the gym first thing. **(Moves closer to Chris to confront him.)** You arrived just after me this morning, so I assumed you'd picked them up. I'm not your effing delivery boy.

Bryony: **(Steps between them.)** Now don't you two start. This isn't helping.

Bill: Yeah. She's right. Let's drop it. We've got enough to deal with thanks to this waste of time 'training' crap.

(Bill and Chris continue to set out the mugs and make tea or coffee.)

(Andy and Carole enter, whispering.)

Carole: So have you sorted that man out yet?

Andy: I wish it was that easy. Looks like he's not the only one who's on to us.

Carole: What do you mean?

Andy: Apparently a mate of Chris over there saw us at the Cock. Look, we've got to be careful. I think we should cool it for a while. If my wife finds out, I could be in the shit.

Carole: So you're dumping me? I thought you loved me.

Andy: You know I really care for you, but...

(Chris comes over to interrupt them with a mug in each hand.)

Chris: More Ofsted advice, eh? **(Winks.)** You two love birds going to have a cuppa, then?

Andy: Button it, smart arse.

Chris: Ooh, getting touchy, are we?

Carole: Huh!

(Carole and Andy snatch their mugs from Chris and move apart.)

(Enter Nick, holding a packet of cheap biscuits.)

Nick: Oh good, you've got the drinks ready. I thought I'd treat you all to some biscuits to kick the term off. Chris, perhaps you could pass them round.

(He gives the packet to Chris, who looks at it with contempt and passes it quickly on unopened, as does everyone else till it ends up with Andy.)

Andy: **(Sarcastic.)** Oh, you really are spoiling us with these biscuits, Monsieur Ambassador! I think I saw those in Quidland – four packs for a pound, wasn't it?

(Andy throws it to a member of the audience.)

Nick: Well, we must all make savings where we can, Mr Cox. Is there any decaf coffee?

Chris: Yeah, I think there's some left over from last term. You're the only one who drinks the stuff. Oh, there it is.

Bryony: I'll make it for him. Carole, can you pass me another mug?

Nick: Black, no sugar, thank you.

(Bryony starts making a drink.)

(Enter Samantha.)

Bill: Oh, there you are, Headmistress. Can I get you a cuppa before we start?

Samantha: Thank you, Bill. The usual please. Milk, no sugar.

(Bill starts making a drink. Carole picks up the drink Bryony has made and hands it to Nick with a false smile.)

Carole: There you are.

Nick: Thank you. **(Takes a sip.)**

(Bill hands Samantha a mug.)

Samantha: Thank you. Right, has everyone got a drink? In that case, we'll make a start. As you all know, the new regulations regarding emergency evacuations...

(Nick starts to choke.)

Nick: Excuse me a moment, everyone. I suddenly feel rather...

(Nick staggers out of the room, clutching his stomach.)

Samantha: Bryony, can you see if Nick's okay?

(Bryony tuts, raises her eyebrows and exits.)

Samantha: As I was saying about the training, while some of this may, ahem, not seem directly relevant to us, the main thing is to be aware of any possible dangers and know how to evacuate the children if necessary. I think you can safely ignore the references to earthquakes and tsunamis.

Bill: Tsunamis in Kent! That'll be a first. Another cheap online training package, I suppose?

Samantha: Now, this training is important, so please do give it your full attention. We don't want any mishaps. It is your legal responsibility and mine to ensure that the school environment is safe for children, staff and visitors alike.

(Bryony enters, looking panicked.)

Bryony: Samantha, I really think you should come. He's as white as a sheet and curled up in a ball. If I didn't know any better, I'd say he'd been poisoned.

Samantha: Poisoned? Don't be ridiculous. Andy, you're a qualified first aider, can you take a look?

Andy: Where is he?

Bryony: Out here in the corridor.

(Bryony exits, followed by Andy. The rest speculate on what is happening. Samantha calls for attention.)

Samantha: I am sure he will be fine. After the training, we will all have a nice lunch together. I've ordered something in from our usual caterers. You will then have the afternoon to finish your preparations for the start of term tomorrow, unless Nick or I need to see you. Any questions?

(Andy enters, followed by Bryony.)

Andy: He's gone purple and he's barely breathing! He looks awful. Someone better call an ambulance. I think he's... dying!

(All freeze. Dramatic music. Blackout. Distant sirens heard. Blue flashing lights.)

Act 2

The following morning.

(Six chairs are set out in a line for the suspects to sit on. Hagley enters, followed by Racy who ushers the suspects on. The suspects take their seats.)

Hagley: Well here we are again, Racy, with yet another case of foul play to solve. **(Looks at audience.)** And some of this lot look very familiar. Check the current wanted list later, will you?

Racy: Already have, ma'am. Looks like we'll be asking quite a lot of them to help us with our enquiries tonight. Actually, ma'am, I was called to the school last week to deal with a serious incident. Two of them were going at it hammer and tongs, armed with needlework scissors and compasses – it was savage.

Hagley: Kids!

Racy: Oh no, ma'am, it was teachers. In fact, it was those two over there. **(Points to two members of the audience.)** Seems like anyone can be a teacher these days. It's all this 'woke' and 'inclusion' business.

Hagley: So I've heard. And as for what they teach, words fail me. You can do courses in whatever you like – origami, Harry Potter, Love Island.

Racy: I've got a GCSE in Television Studies.

Hagley: Well, that just proves my point. Anyway, back to the case. **(Addresses the suspects and audience.)** I have to inform you all that your bursar, Nick Pinscher, died in hospital this morning. According to the medics, he ingested a slow-acting poison that affects the respiratory system at around eleven-thirty a-m yesterday, which I understand was the time you were all together in the staff room for some training. That leaves us with a lot of suspects.

Racy: I've narrowed them down to these six, ma'am. **(Indicates the suspects.)** Everyone else can account for their movements yesterday morning and had nothing to do with getting the refreshments ready.

Hagley: Before we question them, Racy, I'd like the results of your fingertip search of the crime scene. What have you discovered?

(Racy produces her evidence box.)

Racy: We found several interesting items, ma'am.

(She takes out a couple of spoof items, such as embarrassing underwear, a bad school report, etc. and connects them to members of the audience before showing the real items – Nick's mug, the decaf coffee jar, and a poison bottle.)

Racy: Exhibit One, ma'am. This is the mug that the victim drank from. Exhibit Two is this jar of decaf coffee. The victim was the only one who drank the stuff. We've had the contents of both analysed to see if the poison was in the jar or the mug and are awaiting the forensic results. Exhibit Three is this bottle of poison that we discovered dumped behind the bicycle sheds. This appears to be the source of the poison.

Hagley: Ms Curtain, I understand that you handed him his coffee.

Carole: Yes, but I didn't make it.

Bryony: I made it, but the mugs were already laid out.

Bill: I got the mugs ready but I didn't poison him.

Hagley: Where was the jar of decaf coffee?

Chris: It was on the table with the sugar.

Racy: So the poison was either put in the mug by one of those who handled it or someone went back into the staffroom before the training session and doctored the jar of decaf. So did any of you go back into the staffroom? Who, for instance, put the water on?

Andy: I did. I popped in to put a notice about Saturday's cricket match on the notice board and put the water on then. I thought I saw you leaving, Chris.

Chris: Well, I did nip in to make a quick call. Only place to get a bit of privacy.

Hagley: Anyone else? We will check the CCTV.

Samantha: Actually, I did go back. I wanted to check that everything was ready for the training.

Racy: Perhaps they were all in it together. Shall I arrest them all, ma'am?

Hagley: Don't be so hasty, Racy. I think we have some more questions. Let's see if any of this lot have anything to ask, shall we?

(Hagley invites the audience to ask questions of the suspects. This might take five to ten minutes, depending on how responsive the audience is. Hagley and Racy should ensure that all the suspects are given at least one question each. Their answers are improvised but can be prepared during rehearsals. The suspects should react to information revealed here that they would not have known earlier - e.g. Andy and Carole's affair. The Audience Interrogation section in the Organiser's Overview document gives more information.)

Hagley: Well, I think we have enough information now to solve the case, Racy.

Racy: Oh yes, ma'am. Can I make the arrest now?

Hagley: I suppose we'd better give this lot a chance to see if they can work it out before you do that, although looking at them, I don't hold out much hope. **(Addresses the audience.)** You've got ten minutes to see if you've got the makings of a detective. We'll be collecting your solutions soon. Take the suspects away, Racy.

(Racy ushers the suspects offstage. Hagley and Racy follow them.)

(Break for completion and submission of the Accusation Sheets.)