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Her Lips Are Sealed

**A murder mystery
dinner theatre play**

by Mary Krell-Oishi



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CAST LIST

Helena Hazbendare — Hedda’s best friend
Misty Shores — Broadway starlet
Jean Astaire — choreographer
Sheesha Ragsworthy — costume designer
Nimrod (Roddy) Hunter — tabloid reporter
Samantha Spaed — detective
Fernando de Las Vegas — Hedda’s personal assistant
Ives Gottsbucks — famed Broadway producer
Samson Goodfellow — Helena’s boyfriend
Guillermo Boca Grande — theatre critic and theatre columnist
Pretty Boy Barnes — Misty’s boyfriend
Jimmy the Weasel — Pretty Boy’s best friend
Sterling Snootmeister — maître d’
Hedda Parseword — the victim
Chi Chi — waitress and aspiring actress
Sheila — waitress and aspiring actress
Darlene — waitress and aspiring actress

Note: Extra people may be incorporated by having more servers, bartenders, etc.

Relationships

Hedda Parseword, murder victim, is escorted to the party by her friend and personal assistant Fernando de Las Vegas. Her best friend is Helena Hazbendare. It is Hedda’s solemn promise to aid Helena in her comeback to the stage. Hedda is rude to everyone.

Helena *Hazbendare* (*emphasis on the first syllable, although she is constantly introduced with emphasis on the second syllable*) is hoping to star in the new Broadway production of *Snowball’s Chance*, produced by famed Broadway producer Ives Gottsbucks. He now spends his time searching for some girl with that “certain something” to make a star.

Samson Goodfellow, in love with Helena, is her protector and support. Her happiness is his chief concern.

Guillermo Boca Grande is a childhood friend of Fernando's and bitter enemy of Hedda's. It is his solemn vow to block any and all plans of Hedda's simply because that is his hobby.

Misty Shores, Broadway starlet, is a former coat check girl who has worked her way to the doors of Broadway stardom with the help of Pretty Boy Barnes, her two-bit gangster boyfriend.

Jimmy the Weasel would do anything for his best friend Pretty Boy, even murder.

Jean Astaire, a choreographer on her last legs, is desperate for the job of choreographing Ives Gottsbucks' new show. However, Hedda and Jean have been at odds ever since Jean's last show, *Whips and the Women Who Love Them* was decimated by reviews and closed early.

Sheesha Ragsworthy, costume designer, has been selected by Ives as the designer for *Snowball's Chance*. This is her last chance to be the huge success she has always dreamed of being.

Nimrod Roddy Hunter, tabloid reporter for the infamous *National Star Reporter* is at the gathering to write about the social event. It's luck that she falls into the best story of her career.

Waiters Chi Chi, Sheila, and Darlene are wannabe actresses who took the job to meet the power brokers. They may break into song, dance, or audition monologue at any moment.

Sterling Snootmeister is the maître d' at this event. He has spent his adult life being rude to all because of the power and his ability to seat people. Only Hedda can be more rude than him. Unbeknownst to anyone else at the party, including Hedda, he is her only son, long lost many years ago, abandoned by his career-oriented mother. He has been following her career over the years from his life of suburbia and has vowed to have his revenge.

Samantha Spaed — no, not that one, her name is a-e-d, not a-d-e — is a second-rate detective. However, thrust into the role of working detective, she must solve the crime.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Staging Suggestions

The play is set in New York City, the early 1940s Broadway. Suggest to your audience that they attend in dress that fits the period. You will find that most of your guests will do so and will have much more fun.

Pre-sell tickets only. This allows you to provide the correct amount of food. Get the names of the incoming guests if possible and do a seating chart. Set your tables up with place cards and have a large seating chart available at the door so your guests know where they are to go. Have a maître d' check tickets and waiters guide the guests to their tables. Utilize your actors for this job. Depending upon your actors' improvisation skills, as the audience enters, the actors are already visible and begin immediately mingling with the crowd, in character. Have your food preset, either on the table, which is more difficult, or as a buffet that your guests will line up and go through. During the break between Scene 1 and Scene 2 the guests will get their food. Between Scene 2 and

Scene 3 the meals can be cleared from the tables as the audience uses the facilities or stretches.

The character of Hedda should be played by, if at a school, a teacher. Hedda gets bumped off early and it is a short, fun part to do: arrogant, irritating, rude.

Scene Progression

Scene 1 must include Hedda getting a lip moisturizer from Samson Goodfellow. A few people must see it, but don't make it obvious.

As the body of Scene 2 takes place, the actors will get up and move around the acting space, in and among the tables, as the focus jumps around. If the actors stay in character at all times, the audience will accept this and enjoy the show.

Scene 3 is a simple diversion in order for dinner to be cleared and to allow the guests to use the facilities, stretch legs, and guess the culprit.

Scene 4 brings the actors back into the scene. It is total improvisation and should only last about ten minutes. The actors mingle again with the guests, trying to guess who did what to whom and exactly what is going on.

Scene 5 has the guests back in their seats for the reveal. The actors arrange themselves in spaces they can easily be heard and seen.

Scene 6 allows for a curtain call and the awarding of door prizes for whoever guessed the murderer correctly. If more than one person guessed correctly, as has happened, simply put the names in a box and pull one for the prize.

The whole show, including from the time the door opens to the end of the prize awarding, should last just about 90 minutes. It has been done in the past where music was provided for the guests and the actors and much swing dancing was done at the end of the evening.

All in all, this is a surprisingly simple play to mount. The blocking is minimal, the staging is simple, and the script is fast moving. Also, everyone in the cast gets a moment of their own to shine, which makes it fun for everyone.

Extra Fundraising Suggestions

A pay bar. No real alcohol! But those virgin Margaritas and virgin Strawberry Daiquiris sell like hotcakes and people, knowing this is a fundraiser, are more than willing to pay exorbitant “real drink” prices for them ... and leave tips for “bartenders.”

The play allows for the audience to guess the murderer. An idea is to charge \$1.00 for guessing cards and \$1.00 for a relationships page, or give both sheets for \$1.00. A sample of both are provided at the end of this playbook.

1 SCENE 1

2 Approximately 15-20 minutes, including improv time

3

4 HEDDA: How wonderful of you all to join me in this little
5 soirée. So good of you. My dear friends, Ives Gottsbucks
6 and Helena Hazbendare, could you please join me up
7 here?

8 GUILLERMO: *(To FERNANDO)* And what is this all about?

9 FERNANDO: You know Hedda. Any chance for the spotlight.

10 HELENA: Oh, Hedda, darling, how kind of you to invite us
11 all to this wonderful event. Isn't she the best? *(ALL*
12 *applaud, ad lib cheers.)*

13 IVES: And this fundraiser is for our new musical production
14 *Snowball's Chance*, the true story about Eve, the tramp
15 of Bourbon Street. This show will help many of you who
16 are here to continue to work in quality theatre. You all
17 know our costume designer, Sheesha Ragsworthy. And
18 the woman who may be our lead choreographer, the
19 brilliantly talented Miss Jean Astaire.

20 JEAN: *(To SHEESHA)* May be?

21 SHEESHA: Not now, darling. Not now.

22 HEDDA: Yes, tonight is about raising money, but right now
23 is about enjoying each other's company ... and later ...
24 perhaps a surprise announcement!

25 SAMSON: *(To AUDIENCE)* No doubt the name of Helena
26 Hazbendare will be mentioned. *(General good mirth all*
27 *around, except from IVES and HEDDA.)*

28 IVES: A toast, to our lady of the evening.

29 HEDDA: Oh, Fernando, darling, can you get me a glass?
30 Sweet thing is supposed to make sure that my glass is
31 never empty.

32 STERLING: You there, Chi Chi, don't be a slacker. Take Miss
33 Parseword this glass.

34 HEDDA: Thank you, Sterling, is it? Haha, don't let me down
35 again, Fernando, dear. Never let me have an empty

1 **glass. This dry weather parches me inside and out.**
2 **ALL: To Hedda ...** (*ALL drink.*)
3 **HEDDA: And to surprises. Isn't that right, Ives?**
4 **IVES: To surprises ...** (*The actors mingle. During this time the*
5 *cast interacts with the audience, talking trash about each other.*
6 *They pick an enemy and nail 'em. HEDDA must, at one point,*
7 *borrow the lip moisturizer from SAMSON. Also during this*
8 *time, perhaps a few moments after she uses the moisturizer,*
9 *HEDDA must sneak Off-stage to "die." After about five minutes*
10 *of mingling the three waiters rush in from the front of the*
11 *room.*)
12 **CHI CHI: Omigod! In there!**
13 **DARLEN: She's dead! She's dead!**
14 **RODDY: Who?! Who's dead?**
15 **SHEILA: Hedda Parseword is dead!**
16 **SPAED: Nobody leaves the area! You there,** (*To the guests*)
17 **you just keep on eating. Don't let the stiff in the outer**
18 **room spoil your party.**
19 **FERNANDO: And who are you?**
20 **SPAED: Spaed. Samantha Spaed.**
21 **GUILLERMO: I've heard of you. Wonderful work recovering**
22 **that Maltese Falcon.**
23 **SPAED: No. That was Sam Spade, a-d-e. I'm Samantha**
24 **Spaed, a-e-d.**
25 **STERLING: Then why are we paying attention to you? You**
26 **are nobody. Chi Chi, Darlene, Sheila. Show this buffoon**
27 **the door.**
28 **SPAED: I didn't mention the Lieutenant Detective title. I'm**
29 **a cop.**
30 **STERLING: Hmmmm. My error. Continue with your fine**
31 **efforts, my good woman. Chi Chi, Darlene, Sheila. See to**
32 **the dinner, we'll let this woman do her fine work.** (*There*
33 *is a break as the audience gets their meals.*)
34
35

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