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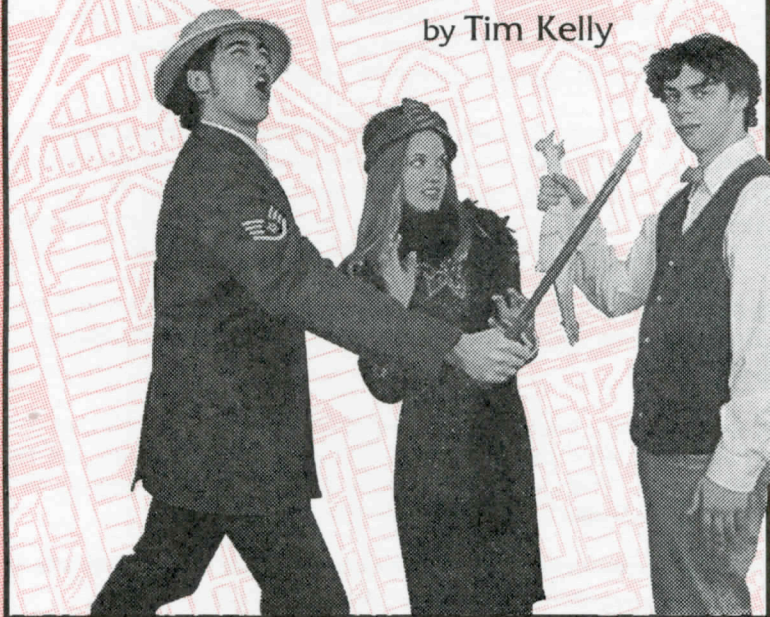
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MURDER AT CROOKED HOUSE or 18 NERVOUS GUMSHOES

MURDER at Crooked House or 18 Nervous Gumshoes

A hilarious spoof of murder mysteries

by Tim Kelly



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Contemporary Drama Service

PO Box 7710 • Colorado Springs, CO 80933-7710

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

TIM KELLY, playwright, has won innumerable writing awards including grants from the National Endowment For The Arts. His work covers a wide range — everything from musicals to mystery thrillers. His plays have been produced off-broadway and at regional theatres winning considerable acclaim from both press and public. He particularly likes to write plays for youthful audiences that are imaginative and spirited: **Lucky, Lucky Hudson** and **Unidentified Flying High School** being prime examples. *Dramatist Guild Magazine* calls him “One of the most successful and most produced playwrights operating outside the New York area.” His complete writings are with the Special Collections Library at the University of Wyoming.

He is, very likely, the most-published playwright in America.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(In Order of Appearance)

(For a flexible cast of eighteen: 9 female, 6 male; or 8 female, 7 male. Plus 3 characters who can be either)

BUM* — An intruder

REBECCA FITZWILLIAM — Landlady of “Crooked House”

JEEVES — Old butler, totally confused

SHIRLEY — Teenage maid

FAY STRANGE — A strange young actress

ANGUISH CRISPIE — Writes mystery plays

MARK PALEGRAVE — Eccentric young man, interested in orchids and bugs

PENNY RUSSELL — Distraught young bride

DELIVERY PERSON** — Anyone for pizza?

HERCULES PORRIDGE — The famous Hoboken detective
— well, almost

LEON RUSSELL — Corpse

BRIDGET MORIARTY — Doomed visitor

DETECTIVE BOBBY — City police

POLICEWOMAN MULLIGAN — Bobby’s partner

COLONEL CHUTNEY — Bizarre neighbor

STUDENT #1 — Aspiring gumshoe

STUDENT #2 — Another

STUDENT #3 — Another

NURSE PAYNE — Not what the doctor ordered

*Role of BUM and LEON RUSSELL are played by the same actor.

**Can be played Female or Male.

SYNOPSIS

The action of the play takes place in “Crooked House,” an old mansion converted into a boarding hotel. The time is the present.

ACT I:

Scene 1 — A dark and stormy night.

Scene 2 — The following morning.

ACT II:

Scene 1 — That afternoon.

Scene 2 — That night. It’s dark and stormy again.

PRODUCTION NOTES

AUTHOR’S NOTE

The characters should all be exaggerated. Don’t try for subtlety. The dialogue should be spoken in a loud, direct fashion. We’re poking gentle fun at the classic stage mystery and it’s the comedic elements that should be stressed. The “whodunnit” aspects will take care of themselves.

PROPS

ON STAGE: Fireplace, vase. Ottoman or low bench. Floor lamp with large shade. Large potted fern or bush. Desk with chair, telephone. French doors with practical drapes or curtains (optional). Sofa, table with vase of flowers or ferns. Wastebasket, handsome chairs (2) with table. Additional stage dressing, as desired: Rugs, more lamps, pictures, etc. Remember — everything at “Crooked House” is rather shabby.

BROUGHT ON, Act I, Scene 1:

BUM — long loaf of bread, bottle of soda pop

REBECCA — lorgnette or monocle on chain

SHIRLEY — flowers or ferns

FAY — raincoat and hat, umbrella, hat with black veil,
envelope with \$ bills, cigarette holder

MARK — orchid, magnifying glass, flashlight

PENNY — book
DELIVERY PERSON — pizza box
HERCULES — manila file folder, wastebasket
CORPSE — eyeglasses

BROUGHT ON, Act I, Scene 2: Wastebasket positioned prior to curtain

HERCULES — pad and pencil, wristwatch
MARK — magnifying glass, jar
DETECTIVE BOBBY — I.D., wallet, whistle
POLICEWOMAN MULLIGAN — revolver
COLONEL CHUTNEY — rifle, knapsack with rubber chicken
PENNY — hanky
ANGUISH — cup and saucer
DELIVERY PERSON — large candy box wrapped with colorful ribbon

BROUGHT ON, Act II, Scene 1:

POLICEWOMAN MULLIGAN — handkerchief
STUDENTS — pads and pencils
FAY — envelope with \$ bills
SHIRLEY — towels
NURSE PAYNE — medical bag with hypo
HERCULES & STUDENTS — shrubbery
LEON — suitcases (2)
DETECTIVE BOBBY — whistle
COLONEL CHUTNEY — rifle with cartridge

BROUGHT ON, Act II, Scene 2:

SHIRLEY — vase with flower/fern arrangement
FAY — knitting bag with needles & 4' length of yarn
PENNY — book
MARK — magnifying glass
LEON — handcuffs
NURSE PAYNE — revolver
DELIVERY PERSON — pizza box containing revolver
DETECTIVE BOBBY — bandage, sling, crutch

SOUND

Rain, slamming door, doorbell, telephone, gunfire (optional: supposedly from Colonel Chutney's rifle)

COSTUMES

Modern. Any special description is mentioned in text as character makes his or her appearance.

MISCELLANEOUS

Even though BUM and LEON RUSSELL are played by the same actor, list *two* names in the program. Let the role of the BUM be played by a fictional GEORGE SPELVIN. Use the actor's real name for LEON (corpse).

The ***SIMULTANEOUS ACTION*** scene that ends Scene 1 of Act II deserves special rehearsal attention. The hilarious action must go like clockwork. The blocking will require drilling, but the end result will prove well worth the extra attention.

If director wishes, role of DETECTIVE BOBBY can be played as a female character.

Remember — there must be no dead spots, no pauses, no waits. Something is always happening on stage. As soon as one character exits, another character is making an entrance. Work on a brisk flow of action.

1 *ACT I*

2
3 *Scene 1*

4
5 **SETTING:** “Crooked House,” a Victorian monstrosity. We see the
6 main room. Down Right leads into the dining room. Right is a
7 fireplace. Vase on mantel. An ottoman or low upholstered bench
8 is placed in front of fireplace. Up Right there’s an entrance into
9 the library. Up Center leads into the entry hallway. Offstage
10 Right from this hallway goes to the front door. Offstage Left
11 leads to the upstairs. (If possible, we should see some stairs.)
12 On one side of entry hallway is a standing floor lamp with a
13 large shade. Down Left leads into a solarium — a room for
14 growing tropical plants, ferns and orchids. This entryway is
15 practically obscured by a large potted fern or bush. Left is a
16 desk and chair. Telephone on the desk. Up Left are French doors
17 that lead onto the grounds. There are practical curtains or
18 drapes that can be drawn across. A sofa is Stage Right Center.
19 Behind the sofa is a table with a vase of flowers or a “fern
20 arrangement.” Wastebasket Right of sofa. Stage Left Center
21 are two handsome chairs with a small table between them.
22 The preceding describes only the basic stage properties
23 required for blocking the play. To these basic items should be
24 added “dressing.” That is — rugs, lamps, pictures, etc. Whatever
25 enhances the stage picture. Everything looks as if it’s been in
26 the shabby house forever — elegance gone, faded and
27 threadbare. The perfect setting for, say, a mystery by Agatha
28 Christie. Note: Set will work easily with only stage drapes.

29 **PRIOR TO CURTAIN:** We hear the *sound of heavy rain*.

30 **AT RISE:** Curtains open slowly to reveal the room. *Sound of rain*
31 *up*. The *stage lighting flickers, dims*, giving a shadowy look to
32 establish a “mysterious” mood. BUM sneaks in from Down
33 Right. He looks about warily. He doesn’t wish to be seen. He
34 wears a ragged topcoat. From one pocket protrudes a long loaf
35 of French bread. He carries a bottle of soda pop. His face is

1 hidden by a large floppy hat and dark sunglasses. He wears
2 gloves with no fingers and overshoes that are plainly too large
3 for his feet. Instead of trousers, he wears pajama bottoms. The
4 French doors stand open. He crosses behind sofa and pauses to
5 take a long thirsty swallow of soda pop. *Sound of rain fades.*

6 **REBECCA:** *(Offstage; from hallway, Left)* **Do the best you can,**
7 **Jeeves.**

8 **JEEVES:** *(Offstage; from hallway, Left)* **You know I will, madam.**

9 **REBECCA:** *(Offstage)* **You're a comfort.**

10 *(BUM practically gags on the soda pop when he hears the voices.*
11 *Shoots a furtive look Upstage and escapes out onto the grounds*
12 *via the French doors. REBECCA FITZWILLIAM, the landlady*
13 *of "Crooked House," enters Up Center. She wears an out-of-style*
14 *dress that practically touches the floor. Around her neck is looped*
15 *a lengthy strand of pearls. To compliment her dated persona she*
16 *uses a lorgnette or monocle, which is also draped around her*
17 *neck. JEEVES, the aged butler, follows in. He wears either formal*
18 *attire (swallowtail coat), or dark trousers with a white steward's*
19 *jacket. He's very proper, very stuffy. Complete senility is near.*
20 *The two look as if they were characters from a mystery or detective*
21 *film from the 1930s.)*

22 **REBECCA:** *(Notices the dim lights.)* **Oh, dear. The lights again.**
23 **Whenever there's a storm or a hurricane they flicker and**
24 **fade.**

25 **JEEVES:** **I'll call the electrician in the morning.**

26 **REBECCA:** **Won't do much good. Everything here in "Crooked**
27 **House" is so old and worn. Even the wiring. Not to**
28 **mention the plumbing.** *(Notices the open French doors.)* **Who**
29 **left those doors open?**

30 **JEEVES:** **I'll attend to them, Mrs. Fitzwilliam.** *(JEEVES walks*
31 *slowly to the French doors, as if he had all the time in the world.*
32 *REBECCA steps Left of sofa.)*

33 **REBECCA:** **Mr. Russell wasn't due until morning. It's**
34 **inconsiderate of new boarders to call up at the last**
35 **moment and change things about.**

1 **JEEVES:** Yes, Mrs. Fitzwilliam. *(He closes the French doors. The*
2 *stage lighting returns to normal. REBECCA reacts.)*
3 **REBECCA:** That's better. I don't like it when the lights
4 flicker and dim. It gives me the creeps.
5 **JEEVES:** Shall I get you something, Mrs. Fitzwilliam?
6 **REBECCA:** For what?
7 **JEEVES:** Your creeps.
8 *(SHIRLEY, the maid, enters from the solarium. She's a teenager.*
9 *We know she's the maid because she wears a starched white*
10 *apron over her black dress. Also a maid's white cap. She carries*
11 *a bunch of flowers or ferns that match those already in the vase*
12 *behind the sofa. SHIRLEY moves in a world of her own, always*
13 *oblivious to what's going on around her. No one in the house*
14 *pays the slightest bit of attention to her.*
15 *As the dialogue continues, SHIRLEY'S business is this:*
16 *She crosses to the vase behind the sofa and puts down the flowers/*
17 *ferns that she's taken in. She removes the flowers/ferns in the*
18 *vase and puts them aside. Puts in and arranges the flowers/ferns*
19 *from the solarium. Done with this, she takes the old flowers/ferns*
20 *and drops them into the wastebasket. She exits Left into hallway,*
21 *Out.)*
22 **REBECCA:** There is no medication that I know of for "the
23 creeps." It's not like having a headache or an anxiety
24 attack.
25 **JEEVES:** Most perceptive, Mrs. Fitzwilliam.
26 **REBECCA:** You can say that again.
27 **JEEVES:** If you don't mind, Mrs. Fitzwilliam, I'd rather not.
28 I don't like to repeat myself. I tire easily. Once a thing's
29 been said that ought to be the end of it. What's the sense
30 of going on and on about something? On and on. And
31 on — *(He's interrupted by sound of front door slamming, Up*
32 *Right, Offstage.)*
33 **FAY:** *(Offstage, from hallway)* Yoo-hoo!
34 **REBECCA:** Now who can that be?
35 **JEEVES:** Sounds like that strange Miss Strange. Shall I let

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