

THE HOBBYIST DETECTIVES

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. TOWN OF CRABBY COVE - MORNING

Detective RITA DOWDY (55; black, curvy), dressed in black pants and white V-neck knit shirt, drives toward the quaint coastal town of Crabby Cove. She's in an unmarked police car. She passes the town entrance sign, which reads "Crabby Cove, Population ~~800~~, ~~700~~, ~~600~~, ~~500~~, ~~400~~, 399." She drives through the little town and passes a flower shop, church, diner, antique store, and a few modest homes. She drives up to the small "Crabby Cove Seniors Home" and stops.

EXT. SENIOR CITIZENS HOME - CONTINUOUS

Rita grabs her cellphone, tablet computer, and a small pad of paper and a pencil. She walks to the front door and finds it unlocked.

RITA  
Tight security.

EXT. SENIOR CITIZENS HOME LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

She HEARS a woman weeping, and RACES in the front desk to see JENNIFER SHINGLES (late-50s-60s; shoulder-length perfectly styled hair) crying over an old woman's face-down body. A FISHING KNIFE is struck in the back of the dead body.

RITA  
Stand up and put your hands in the air.

Jennifer screams.

JENNIFER  
Oh my God! Oh My God!

RITA  
Detective Rita Dowdy. I said, stand up, and put your hands in the air!

Jennifer stands, sobs, and slowly raises her hands.

JENNIFER  
We were best friends! Been dead eight to ten hours is my guess!

RITA  
I can smell. Who are you?

JENNIFER

I'm Jennifer Shingles. The former Junkyard Detective? Last season I solved the murder of the millionaire mayor and his missing ancient hairpiece.

RITA

Let me guess; was he killed for the inheritance?

JENNIFER

His only heir. I used to own the antique store in town.

RITA

It's a Senior Citizens Home. Where is everyone?

JENNIFER

Not many of us left. Can I put my arms down?

RITA

Okay, but step away from the body. You're contaminating my crime scene!

Rita examines the body, and takes photos with her iPhone.

RITA (CONT'D)

You touch anything?

JENNIFER

No, Ma'am. You must be new to Crabby Cove!

RITA

Got the 9-1-1 call this morning.

JENNIFER

Sheriff Marty retired six months ago. Left town. Good thing Doc is still here.

RITA

Doc?

JENNIFER

The former coroner, Doc Seth Hazzben, Junior. We all call him, Doc.

(laughs)

(MORE)

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

Everyone else calls him the town drunk.

RITA

Does Doc get notified for deaths?

JENNIFER

No, Ma'am. Doc couldn't hear the phone if it was connected to a bullhorn. He sleeps downstairs in the home's private morgue.

RITA

Wait! Did you make the 9-1-1?

JENNIFER

No, Ma'am. I saw Handsy Sweatsome, so I came in.

Rita is furiously taking notes.

RITA

Handsy Sweatsome?

JENNIFER

Former owner of the bakery and café.

RITA

And she was here before you?

JENNIFER

Yes, Ma'am. That's why the fishing knife was out. So I put it back.

Rita pulls her pistol.

RITA

You put it back? I thought you said you didn't touch anything!

JENNIFER

Except for the fishing knife.

(whispers)

Between you and me, I was hoping you'd arrest the Barbie Doll of a former Bakery Store Detective, Handsy Sweatsome.

Rita looks stunned.

RITA

The fishing knife was out of her back when you got here, and you put it back?

JENNIFER

Don't worry. I wiped off the prints!

Rita is ready to fire her pistol.

RITA

You what?

JENNIFER

It's always, "Handsy did this, and Handsy does that." Enough to make a body sick.

RITA

(sarcastic)

Did you touch anything else?

JENNIFER

Nothing.

Jennifer produces a sharp, foot-long antique brass letter opener.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

For my former antique shop.

Rita glares at the crazy woman.

RITA

Do you have a room number for Ms. Handsy Sweatsome?

JENNIFER

Number two on speed-dial. I'm number one! Sheriff relied on me to solve murders.

RITA

(sarcastic)

Good to know.

Rita steps to the phone, and presses speed-dial two.

RITA (CONT'D)

Ms. Handsy Sweatsome?

(beat)

This is Detective Rita Dowdy from the front desk calling.

(MORE)

RITA (CONT'D)

Can I bother you to drop by? I understand you were here earlier.

Rita shakes her head, 'yes.'

RITA (CONT'D)

Great. Look forward to meeting you too.

Rita looks around for latex gloves, and finds a HUGE dispenser of them. She puts a set on.

JENNIFER

Buy 'em in bulk around here.

RITA

You just sit over there. And don't say another word until I get this sorted out.

HANDSY SWEATSOME (late-50s-60s, thin, blonde, shoulder-length perfect hair) bounces in with a hot coffee and a plate of cookies.

HANDSY

Howdy, Detective. I'm Handsy Sweatsome. The former Bakery Store Detective! Remember my case of the billionaire who was bludgeoned with day-old bagels?

RITA

Let me guess; did you bake the murder weapons?

HANDSY

The two-day-old French baguettes are the real killers! I used to own the bakery and café in town. Brought ya some coffee and three-day-old Swiss-lemon cookies, with just the lightest touch of salted caramel in the center. They're hard on the teeth. Welcome to the Crabby Cove Senior Center.

Handsy sees Jennifer sitting in the corner. Rita almost dives at the fresh coffee.

RITA

Great coffee. Thank you, Handsy.

Jennifer mimics a jealous, snooty 'Thank you, Handsy' from her chair.

HANDSY

I see you've met the town's former junkyard dog!

RITA

I understand you were seen leaving my crime scene this morning?

HANDSY

Real shame. Dead eight to ten hours is my guess. We were best friends.

Jennifer bristles at hearing this.

JENNIFER

She's number two on speed-dial. Not number one.

RITA

Ms. Sweatsome, was the fishing knife in the victim's back when you got here this morning?

HANDSY

Yes, Ma'am.

Rita looks over at Jennifer, puzzled.

HANDSY (CONT'D)

'Til I took it out.

Rita aims her pistol at Handsy.

HANDSY (CONT'D)

Don't worry. I wiped off the prints!

RITA

What?

HANDSY

Didn't want Father Beige to get blamed. Saw him leaving as I came down the hall.

RITA

Father Beige? The former amateur Priest Detective wannabe?

HANDSY

Speed-dial number three.

Rita rolls her eyes and dials speed-dial number three.

RITA

Father Beige? I'm Detective Rita Dowdy at the front desk.

(beat)

I'd like to speak to you.

(beat)

What's that? You have some questions for me? Good, we'll call it an even trade. See you in a few.

Rita hangs up. She looks baffled.

RITA (CONT'D)

For the record, Ms. Sweatsome, you didn't make the 9-1-1 call?

HANDSY

No, Ma'am.

RITA

You go sit by your friend 'til I sort this thing out.

FATHER BEIGE (late-50s-60s; Irish Catholic priest in a robe and collar) bounds down the hall making the sign of the cross.

FATHER BEIGE

Saints preserve us all. Gone to heaven eight to ten hours ago, I'd say. I'm Father Beige, the former Priestly Detective. You know, the Case of the Imposter Pope?

RITA

Imposter Pope? How was he killed?

FATHER BEIGE

It was a "she!" A Swiss Guard cut the brake fluid lines in her imitation Pope-mobile. Jezebel and I were best friends; soulmates.

Jennifer and Handsy roll their eyes in disgust. Rita sips coffee, and shakes the Father's hand.

RITA

Detective Rita Dowdy. I got your 9-1-1 call this morning.

FATHER BEIGE

Not mine, goodness be. I assumed Aberdeen Kay-Night called it in.



RITA

You saw someone else here? Some kind of twisted dead-body party?

FATHER BEIGE

That's why I put the fishing knife back in. I was sure the Lutheran former florist detective did it!

RITA

The fishing knife was beside the body, and you put it back in?

FATHER BEIGE

Don't worry, Detective. Praise be. I wiped off my prints. Sheriff Marty, and Sheriff Andy before him, relied on my help most of all.

RITA

Ms. Kay-Night? Let me guess, speed-dial four.

Father Beige, Jennifer, and Handsy roll their eyes in disgust.

RITA (CONT'D)

Ms. Kay-Night?

(beat)

Okay, Aberdeen. Get your butt to the front desk!

FATHER BEIGE

Bet they want you to solve this case quickly.

RITA

You have no idea.

ABERDEEN KAY-NIGHT (late-50s-60s, tall brunette with perfect shoulder-length hair in a flowery dress), bounces in with a bouquet of flowers for Rita.

ABERDEEN

Hi, Detective. These are for you. Aberdeen Kay-Night here, the former Flower Shop Detective. Last season, I solved the double-murder of the visiting Arabian princes?

RITA

Let me guess; paid assassins?

ABERDEEN

Who turned the other sheik!

Detective Rita fumes and paces.

RITA

Did you make the 9-1-1 call?!

ABERDEEN

I didn't call. I assume Hank did.

RITA

Who's Hank?

ABERDEEN, JENNIFER, AND HANDSY

He's my boyfriend.

JENNIFER

I mean, we're just friends.

Aberdeen, Jennifer, and Handsy scowl at each other.

RITA

Aberdeen, did you touch anything?

ABERDEEN

No.

RITA & ABERDEEN

Except the fishing knife.

ABERDEEN

I pulled it out when I saw Hank leaving. He couldn't have done it.

JENNIFER

He's such a good former chef.

HANDSY

His desserts are to die for.

ABERDEEN

He's a cutie! Number five on speed-dial.

Rita dials the phone, and motions with her pistol for Aberdeen to join the others.

RITA

Hank, get your butt down to the front desk!

Rita hangs up.

RITA (CONT'D)

I don't know what's going on around here, but you're all going to jail for contaminating a crime scene and obstructing justice!

JENNIFER

Not if you really want to find out what's going on around here!

HANK LAMBSHANK (late-50s-60s; tall, dark hair, handsome) strolls in with an overwhelming smell of delicious barbecued ribs. Rita is swept away by his good looks and his aroma.

HANDSY

See what we mean?

Even Father Beige SMILES at Hank as his heart flutters.

HANK

I'm Hank Lambshank, the former Diner Detective. Last season, I solved the Mystery of the Mean Calorie-counting Countess Who Got Her Just Desserts.

RITA

Let me guess; her husband, the Duke of Earle, shot her in the diner?

HANK

No, she was gluten-intolerant, and he slipped her a brownie sundae.

RITA

Uh-huh.

(sniffs the air)

I don't eat red meat anymore, but is that ribs I smell?

HANK

It's my aftershave. It's called St. Louis Style Rub After Dark. But I smell the body: eight to ten hours old, I'd guess.

RITA

Hank, did you call 9-1-1?

HANK

To be perfectly honest, Rita.

(beat)

May I call you, Rita?

Rita nods 'yes,' staring at Hank.

RITA  
(mumbles)  
Call me anytime you want.

HANK  
I found the fishing knife beside the body, and I didn't want to see Professor Anna Liza Cheatin get away with murder, so I put the fishing knife back in. But I wiped off the prints.

RITA  
Professor Anna Liza Cheatin is here? You have two black people in this town?

HANK  
I saw her leave here before I stepped in. Smart, powerful woman. I think I've found your murderer!

RITA  
Is she on speed-dial?

HANK  
Number six.

RITA  
Go sit over there. Leave the ribs.

HANK  
Yes, Ma'am.

Rita presses six on speed-dial and waits.

RITA  
Hello, girl. Detective Rita Dowdy here.  
(beat)  
Get your black ass down to da station. Right now!

Rita hangs up.

RITA (CONT'D)  
She's goin' down! Got me a smart-ass professor. Yes, sir. That's right!

PROFESSOR ANNA LIZA CHEATIN (late-50s-60s, powerful black woman in a business suit) barges in like she owns the place.

ANNA LIZA

Rita Dowdy? I don't know any Detective Rita Dowdy! I'm Professor Emeritus Anna Liza Cheatin, former Professor Detective! Last season, I solved the Case of Trampled University President.

RITA

Let me guess; the marching band?

ANNA LIZA

Nope. Outdoor club! Revenge for all the tuition hikes. This gotta be the biggest-ass crime scene ever!

RITA

It is? 'Cause it happened in the Senior Citizens Home?

ANNA LIZA

Shit! You know who this is?

Rita stares at the dead body. Jennifer, Handsy, Father Beige, Aberdeen, and Hank circle around Rita.

ANNA LIZA (CONT'D)

She's the whole franchise, baby!

ABERDEEN

World's finest former amateur detective.

FATHER BEIGE

Kindest detective-wannabe I'd ever met.

JENNIFER

World's bestselling mystery writer of all time!

HANDSY

That's Jezebel Fetchim!

All, but Rita, bow and weep. It goes on too long!

RITA

Jezebel Fetchim is dead?

FATHER BEIGE

(sniffs the air)

Murder, she rot! Eight to ten hours ago, remember?

They all stare at the dead body!

RITA

Anna Liza, did you contaminate my  
goddamn crime scene?

ANNA LIZA

Shit no. I may have pulled the  
fishing knife out or put it back  
in. I don't remember. I was in  
shock!

RITA

Shock?

ANNA LIZA

Every time something weird happens  
in this town, everybody blames that  
little white lady.

RITA

Who!

ALL

(but Rita)

Nancy Droop!

Rita is STUNNED!

RITA

Nancy Droop, the fictional nineteen  
fifty-nine teenage crime-solving  
phenom murdered the greatest  
mystery writer of all time?

ANNA LIZA

You got your hands full, girl!

JENNIFER

You're going to need all the help  
you can get from us!

The others nod 'yes' in agreement. The amateur detectives  
circle the body and mumble. Rita shakes her head in disgust,  
and steps out the front door for fresh air.

EXT. SENIOR CITIZENS HOME - DAY

NANCY DROOP (55; in 1950s teenager style; plaid skirt, white  
blouse, Bobby Sox, shiny black shoes; tiny purse) SKIPS by  
the Senior Citizens Home with a small can of white paint and  
a paintbrush. Nancy SMILES. Rita smiles back. The others do  
not see Nancy.

NANCY DROOP  
Hi, I fixed our population sign.

Rita is stunned. Nancy remains overly perky at all times.  
Rita looks at her like she's crazy.

RITA  
You must be Nancy Droop. I'm  
Detective Rita Dowdy.

Nancy RACES over to hug Rita.

NANCY DROOP  
Golly, Detective Dowdy, welcome to  
Crabby Cove, the murder capital of  
the world.

RITA  
Murder capital of the world?

NANCY DROOP  
From 1984 to 1996, with the TV  
series, and all. Golly, this was an  
exciting place.

RITA  
Right! Anybody new in town? Wham!  
And Jezebel Fetchim and the Sheriff  
were on the case.

NANCY DROOP  
We sorta felt sorry for anybody who  
stepped off that old Greyhound Bus!

RITA  
(laughs)  
They didn't last long in this town!

NANCY DROOP  
Murders to solve every week! Lost a  
lot of good townsfolk, too. The TV  
show was quite the hit, man!

RITA  
I see.

NANCY DROOP  
Life expectancy dropped in half  
around here, until...  
(beat)  
They canceled the show in 1996.

RITA  
Gave a whole new meaning to the  
Last Rites!

NANCY DROOP  
Golly, it was dead around here!

Rita chuckles.

RITA  
Nancy, you'll have to excuse me.  
I've got to get back to work.

NANCY DROOP  
Golly, it looks like we have a  
murder to solve.

RITA  
I have a murder to solve!

Nancy shrugs her shoulders, smiles, and skips away.

INT. SENIOR CITIZENS HOME LOBBY - DAY

Rita returns to the group of former amateur detectives.

ABERDEEN  
Certainly, you'll need our help.

JENNIFER  
All the sheriffs have needed our  
help. We're amateur detectives, ya  
know!

HANK  
While keeping up our normal lives,  
of course. I've got to get a leg of  
lamb in the oven, if Mrs. Fetchim  
is going to have a wake!

HANDSY  
I'd better make more cookies.

ABERDEEN  
I haven't begun the flower  
arrangements for the funeral.

Rita stands on a wooden chair. She is angry.

RITA  
Y'all not going anywhere!

Everyone hushes.



RITA (CONT'D)

Somebody made that 9-1-1 call?

JENNIFER

Yes, Ma'am. In the old days, we used to call "0" for the operator, but that all changed in nineteen-sixty-eight when the national emergency number became 9-1-1.

RITA

A yes or no would have been sufficient.

ABERDEEN

Yes, Ma'am.

RITA

And everyone touched the fishing knife in Mrs. Fetchim's back?

ANNA LIZA

Yes, Ma'am.

RITA

Did anyone touch anything else?

FATHER BEIGE

No, Ma'am. That would be contaminating a crime scene, and perhaps, obstruction of justice!

We HEAR Doctor Seth Hazzben, Junior, "DOC", (70; monstrously large and homely, grey-haired man who looks 100, in a blood-stained lab coat), hung-over, trudging up the stairs from the morgue. Thump, thump, thump! Doc enters like Frankenstein.

RITA

What's that?

ALL

Doc!

RITA

Doc?

JENNIFER

Doctor Seth Hazzben, Junior? Former Town Coroner. I told you about him. Homeless town drunk. Lives downstairs in the morgue.

(to Doc)

No offense, Doc.

DOC  
Some taken.

RITA  
I know you didn't tell me all that!

Doc looks hung-over and exhausted.

DOC  
What's all the racket?

Doc steps over the body to the plate of cookies, takes one, and starts eating.

RITA  
I'm Detective Rita Dowdy.

DOC  
Doc, the former coroner.

RITA  
Must be a hundred...  
(beat)  
Degrees outside. Were you  
downstairs in the morgue all night?

DOC  
All week. Months now. Maybe years!

RITA  
Hear anything or see anything odd  
last night?

ALL  
Eight to ten hours ago?

DOC  
Afraid I passed out.

Points at the body.

DOC (CONT'D)  
That's Jezebel Fetchim!

ALL  
Uh-huh!

RITA  
Real tragedy.

DOC  
She overworked dozens of coroners  
in her day! But we all loved her!  
(MORE)

DOC (CONT'D)

She was a personal Full-employment Act. Never without a body when she was alive -- or dead, I guess.

Everyone, but Rita, bows in a moment of silence.

DOC (CONT'D)

Eight to ten hours ago?

Everyone nods in agreement.

RITA

She's really starting to stink. We'd better get her down to the morgue.

DOC

Want me to dust the fishing knife for prints?

Each person raises their hand when they hear their name. Rita points to people as she retells the story.

RITA

Don't bother.

Everyone is proud.

RITA (CONT'D)

Why don't a few you help Doc move Mrs. Fetchim down to the morgue so he can begin his autopsy?

They all raise their hands.

DOC

Autopsy?

RITA

Yes, Doc. Where you determine the cause of death?

DOC

Oh yeah.

They all wave their hands wildly.

ALL

Oooh. Oooh. Pick me. Pick me.

RITA

I'd like to know if she was dead prior to the fishing knife going in and out her back several times.

They all put their hands down.

ALL

Oh!

RITA

Hank and Professor Cheatin, would you mind helping Doc with the body? The rest of you may go. I've got to look around.

Hank and Professor Cheatin lift the body and cart it downstairs. Doc follows.

JENNIFER

We could help.

ABERDEEN

Sure could.

FATHER BEIGE

I'd like to perform her Last Rites.

RITA

She was an Episcopalian, Father.

FATHER BEIGE

To hell with her then.

Hank and Professor Cheatin return.

RITA

Go back to your rooms. I've got my report to fill out. I'm sure you all have something better to do.

They all stand around. Rita angrily pushes them all down the hall.

RITA (CONT'D)

Shoo! Shoo! You've all contaminated my crime scene already.

They EXIT dejectedly. Rita turns and examines the front desk area, slowly and methodically. Rita turns to see them all peeking down the hall. She angrily points her pistol at them!

RITA (CONT'D)

Shoo!

They RACE away. Suddenly, all the lights go out and the computer shuts down. Doc and Rita yell back and forth.

DOC (O.S.)  
Damn it! Power went out again!

RITA  
The power's out?

DOC (O.S.)  
Not much of a Sherlock Holmes, are ya, Kid? Notice the lights go out?

RITA  
Course I did.

DOC (O.S.)  
Third time this week. Happens during summer re-runs. We call it a summer storm!

RITA  
Summer storm?

DOC (O.S.)  
Hot days are so rare in Crabby Cove, everybody turns on their air conditioners and watches re-runs of the mystery shows. Overloads the system, and wham!

RITA  
How am I supposed to do my report without Wi-Fi?

DOC (O.S.)  
How am I supposed to do your autopsy?

RITA  
We'll both have to do what we can!

DOC (O.S.)  
Rookie!

Rita closely examines the old files in the cabinets. Her facial expression suggests she's finding some very interesting things.

Jennifer RACES in carrying two antique oil lanterns (lit).

JENNIFER  
Electricity is out all over town. Thought you and Doc might need a few lanterns.

Rita stares at the lanterns.

RITA

Any modern LED flashlights around here?

JENNIFER

I bought 'em all up at the hardware store, so folks would have to buy my expensive antique lamps.

Rita shakes her head, bewildered.

RITA

Good thinking. Maybe Doc could use them. I can see fine.

Jennifer smiles and races down the hall with the lanterns. Rita continues her investigation. A minute later, Jennifer returns with a huge SMILE on her face.

JENNIFER

Doc says it was the fishing knife. Looks like we have a murder on our hands. Just before midnight, when all decent murders happen!

RITA

Uh-huh. And where were you last night, if you don't mind me asking?

JENNIFER

In our room. My husband was watching TV murder mystery re-runs, like those trophy husbands do on TV, so I went out for a  
(beat)  
walk.

RITA

TV trophy husbands? A walk? At midnight? Can anyone vouch for your whereabouts?

JENNIFER

Let's just say the late-night nibbles in Hank's room are better than the leftovers at home.

RITA

I see. And what time did you leave Hank's?

JENNIFER

Eleven-fifteen, I'd say.

RITA  
Go straight back to your room?

Jennifer acts insulted.

JENNIFER  
I'm a married woman!

RITA  
Any reason you'd want to see Mrs.  
Fetchim dead?

JENNIFER  
Goodness no. In her heyday,  
tourists flocked into my antique  
store. There's real money in  
murder!

Perky Handsy strolls in with two bakery bags and two coffees.  
Jennifer stomps out. They whisper to each other as they pass.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)  
Muffin-top tramp!

HANDSY  
Antique hussy!

Rita hears it all.

HANDSY (CONT'D)  
Thought you and Doc could use a  
snack from the cafeteria.  
Electricity's out, so we can't keep  
anything hot.

RITA  
Except your little spat with  
Jennifer.

Doc returns to grab a pastry bag and coffee.

DOC  
Fishing knife in the back just  
before midnight.

RITA & HANDSY  
Thanks, Doc.

Doc returns to the morgue downstairs.

HANDSY

In case you haven't noticed, all amateur detectives rely on overhearing very important information.

RITA

I wasn't aware of that.

HANDSY

We're always seated near suspects at a restaurant, we have the hotel rooms right next door, and we hear things at grocery stores, pharmacies, and especially, police stations.

RITA

I see. Why don't you let me hear where you were last night?

HANDSY

A single, beautiful, former hobbyist detective never tells.

RITA

You'll tell me, though. So we can work together on this case.

HANDSY

I happened to be strolling by Hank's door, so I stopped in for a little wine.

RITA

Uh-huh. What time was that?

HANDSY

About eleven-twenty to eleven-thirty-five.

RITA

About fifteen minutes?

HANDSY

Just a sip.

RITA

Go straight back to your room?

HANDSY

Of course. Not safe for a single girl to roam the halls.



RITA

I see. Any reason you'd want to see Mrs. Fetchim dead?

HANDSY

No way. She was great for my former bakery. Tourism took over as our number-one industry since her TV show.

RITA

Has tourism dropped off in recent years since the show was canceled?

HANDSY

Sure has! Shame the murder rate dropped off!

Father Beige walks in, just as Handsy is leaving. They whisper to each other.

HANDSY (CONT'D)

Confessional open this afternoon?

FATHER BEIGE

Yes. I'll pack a lunch.

RITA

Father Beige, what brings you back here?

FATHER BEIGE

Saving souls, Detective. It's all around the Home that it was a fishing knife in the back just before midnight.

RITA

They don't need a newspaper here, do they, Father?

FATHER BEIGE

"Gossip is the Devil's radio," George Harrison said.

RITA

You hear lots of sins in the confessional, Father?

FATHER BEIGE

Strictly confidential.

RITA

But you have to report child abuse now, according to the Holy Father.

FATHER BEIGE

The stories I've heard would be very bad for the town.

RITA

And I just learned that the best amateur detectives get most of their information from eavesdropping.

FATHER BEIGE

I guess that's true.

RITA

And Mrs. Fetchim, the greatest eavesdropper of them all, must have had a lot of dirt on a lot of people, including yourself, Father!

FATHER BEIGE

I suppose that's true.

RITA

Any reason why you would want to see Mrs. Fetchim silenced?

Father Beige pauses. He looks up to the heavens.

RITA (CONT'D)

Father, where were you last night?

FATHER BEIGE

When old men have trouble sleeping, we go for walks.

RITA

Can anyone vouch for you around midnight?

FATHER BEIGE

All dead. I walk and pray in the Crabby Cove Cemetery, so I don't disturb anyone.

RITA

I see.

Aberdeen lugs in a huge floral funeral arrangement and sets it up. Father Beige gets up, and they whisper back and forth as the Father exits.

ABERDEEN  
Child molester!

FATHER BEIGE  
Lutheran!

Doc trudges up the stairs.

ABERDEEN  
Thought with the electricity out,  
Mrs. Fetchim would really start to  
stink.

DOC  
Thanks, Aberdeen. Awful down there.

RITA  
Find out anything else, Doc?

DOC  
Her last meal was phenomenal. Steak  
tartar, spring greens, and garlic-  
roasted mashed potatoes, with just  
the hint of cilantro. All paired  
with a Pinot Noir from the south of  
France.

RITA  
You found out all that by cutting  
her open in the dark, with the aid  
of an antique oil lamp?

DOC  
That, and I found her dinner  
receipt in her pocket. She ate out  
at Hank's former diner.

Doc drags the flowers downstairs. Rita turns to Aberdeen.

RITA  
Any reason why you would have  
wanted to see Mrs. Fetchim dead?

ABERDEEN  
Nope. I loved that woman like a  
grandma. And not the kind of  
grandma you shove in the Crabby  
Cove Senior Home. This place scared  
her to death!

RITA  
How so?

ABERDEEN

Saw all her old friends here before  
checking into the cemetery a little  
while later.

RITA

Ninety-one years old!

ABERDEEN

Pleaded with all of us never to  
take her here.

RITA

Pleaded?

ABERDEEN

Cried like a baby to each one of  
us. Once a week or more! She'd yell  
at me, 'Bring me flowers when I'm  
alive, not when I'm dead!'

Hank RACES in with two boxed lunches.

HANK

Sorry, I'm late. Wall clocks  
stopped. Electricity's out.

Hank and Aberdeen whisper as Aberdeen RACES out.

ABERDEEN

Two-timer!

HANK

You don't know the half of it!

Rita takes the two lunches from Hank, as Doc magically  
appears and starts eating.

RITA

How's the food here, Hank?

HANK

Filled with sedatives.

Rita stares at her food plate, while Doc throws the food in  
his mouth like he hasn't eaten in a week.

RITA

What is it?

DOC

Beef, I think.

HANK

Bison, actually. Medium-well, just a hint of hickory and burnt sage. Old Indian...

RITA

No thanks, Hank. Not a fan of red meat. What's on your mind?

HANK

As Doc here knows only too well, it's not easy being a male former hobbyist detective in a Home with a bunch of young, attractive, female former hobbyist detectives. Am I right, Doc?

Rita looks over at the rather homely, homeless, Doc, who has meat sauce covering his lips, cheeks, and chin.

DOC

Uh-huh.

RITA

You two have scheduling problems at all hours of the night?

DOC

Uh-huh.

HANK

Don't get me wrong. Jezebel Fetchim was the best at solving murders.

RITA

But?

HANK

Her husband died decades ago, and I think she was needing to spread those butterball turkey arms and fly again, if you know what I mean.

Doc stops chewing, and begins to head downstairs.

RITA

Wait a minute, Doc. Hank, are you suggesting that ninety-one-year-old Jezebel Fetchim came here last night after a booty call?

Silence.

RITA (CONT'D)

With Doc?

HANK

(whispers)

You may not know this, but Mrs. Fetchim ate at my former restaurant last night.

RITA

Steak tartar, spring greens, and garlic-roasted mashed potatoes, with just the hint of cilantro. All paired with a Pinot Noir from the south of France.

HANK

Wow, Doc. You're good.

RITA

He guessed on the hint of cilantro.

HANK

I heard she drank two bottles of wine, one was on the house.

RITA

What time did she leave the diner?

HANK

New owner says it was ten PM.

RITA

Tipsy?

HANK

Tipped exactly fifteen percent as she always did.

RITA

No, was she drunk?

HANK

Far from it. She was frisky according to the new owner.

RITA

That was her state of mind? Frisky?

HANK

She grabbed my... well, you know, as she walked down the hall.

RITA

And you went straight to your room  
after?

HANK

Sometimes I have company, so, yes!

RITA

(mumbles)

Wonder people don't get trampled to  
death in the hallways at night!

Anna Liza strolls in like she owns the place. Hank hops up to  
leave, and they whisper as they pass each other.

HANK

Don't need another amateur  
detective!

ANNA LIZA

Want some wine with that, cracker.

Rita hears it all.

RITA

Anna Liza, so good of you to drop  
in, Sista.

ANNA LIZA

Don't be calling me Sista, when I  
gotta find out the investigation  
details in the hallway!

RITA

Fishing knife in the back,  
midnight. Common knowledge.

ANNA LIZA

Motive?

RITA

You tell me!

Anna Liza investigates the office. She looks high and low.  
She wipes a finger on a file cabinet looking for dust.

ANNA LIZA

No dust.

RITA

That odd in an old folks' home?

ANNA LIZA

You know what that means?

RITA  
Soft foods, TV all day, and a  
monthly sponge bath?

ANNA LIZA  
Means we should have dust all over  
the place. None!

RITA  
Doc lives downstairs. Maybe he  
cleans?

ANNA LIZA  
Enough dust down there to bury six  
people.

RITA  
Sorry, no motive yet. I'll let you  
know when I find one.

Anna Liza turns her nose up, and stomps away.

Nancy Droop enters from the front door with a huge smile and  
a feather duster.

RITA (CONT'D)  
(whispers to Nancy)  
What are you doing here?

Nancy waves the feather duster.

NANCY DROOP  
I'm here to dust and sweep up.

RITA  
No cleaning today. It's a crime  
scene, remember? What can I do for  
you?

Nancy skips around the inside of the front office in an  
annoying way, while she speaks.

NANCY DROOP  
Ever notice how Crabby Cove has  
more amateur detectives than  
anywhere else on earth.

RITA  
Good point. I suppose you're right.

NANCY DROOP  
Mrs. Fetchim was here the longest.



RITA  
That's right.

NANCY DROOP  
Mrs. Jennifer Shingles as the  
former Junkyard Detective, is  
second longest.

RITA  
Okay.

NANCY DROOP  
Then, about five years ago, after  
Mrs. Fetchim quit writing  
altogether, Father Beige, Hank,  
Aberdeen, and Handsy moved in.

RITA  
Odd timing, you think?

NANCY DROOP  
(acting dumb)  
Gosh, I have no idea. I'm just a  
kid.

RITA  
And Professor Cheatin?

NANCY DROOP  
Like vultures over a dead cash cow!

Rita pauses to think.

Nancy waves her feather duster, and starts down the hall.

RITA  
Thanks for stopping by, Nancy.  
Where are you off to?

NANCY DROOP  
Hank's, I mean, Mr. Lambshank's  
room. He likes to watch me dust.

Nancy skips away. Rita shakes her head in disbelief, then  
STARES around the office, looking high and low at everything.

RITA  
I feel like Snow White, and not  
counting Igor downstairs, I think,  
one of my Seven Dwarf Detectives  
might be guilty of murder!

She paces, looks around, and thinks.

## INT. BASEMENT MORGUE - DAY

It's near pitch dark except for two antique oil lamps. Jezebel Fetchim's body lies fully clothed on a stainless-steel autopsy table. Rita looks on as Doc examines every square inch of her body. They both wear latex gloves.

RITA  
Like your work, Doc?

DOC  
Lucky to have work.

RITA  
Tough life?

DOC  
How old do I look to you?

RITA  
I don't know, eighty-five? Ninety, tops.

DOC  
Fifty-seven next month.

RITA  
Geez. Sorry.

DOC  
Not your fault. I knew I was in trouble when Jezebel Fetchim started hitting on me.

RITA  
Not good.

DOC  
No thanks to Jezebel Fetchim!

RITA  
Hard to get her out of your mind?

DOC  
Hard to get hard when she's in your mind.

RITA  
What did the autopsy tell you?

DOC  
Four surprises.

RITA

Go ahead?

DOC

Body was riddled with six types of cancer. Didn't have long to live. A week or two at the most!

Rita steps back.

RITA

Geez! But, she was ninety-one!

DOC

Two, blood-alcohol level was three times the legal limit.

RITA

For driving?

DOC

For breathing.

RITA

What about the knife wound?

DOC

My third surprise.

He rolls the body over to expose a perfect knife incision.

RITA

Damn. Perfect incision, and perfectly level angle?

DOC

Never seen that before. No up or down thrust. Straight in.

RITA

Professional or lucky?

DOC

Don't know what to make of it.

RITA

Fourth surprise, Doc?

DOC

I think she was losing her mind.

RITA

What makes you think that?

DOC  
She had a weekly TV schedule folded  
up in her bra.

Doc hands the TV schedule to Rita.

RITA  
She has every murder mystery movie  
circled for all next week.

DOC  
But it's not like she was planning  
on seeing them.

RITA  
Why?

Rita examines the weekly schedule more closely in the light  
of the oil lamp.

RITA (CONT'D)  
This newspaper is for the first  
week in May, nineteen-ninety-six.

DOC  
The week her TV show was canceled.

Doc turns to exit.

RITA  
Where are you headed?

DOC  
I've gotta change shirts. Gotta a  
rich widower on the line!

RITA  
Were you there last night, too?

DOC  
For an alibi?

RITA  
Just asking.

DOC  
Her name's Darla Banning. She says  
I look seventy, young enough to be  
her pool boy!

RITA  
One more question, Doc. Does this  
place have an outside door? Do you  
come and go as you please?

Doc points to a dark part of the room.

DOC

Door to the loading dock. For coffins. Small bedroom and kitchenette in the back.

RITA

I'd guess the door is never locked.

DOC

No key. I hear that when Jezebel Fetchim was in her heyday as a mystery writer and amateur detective, this place could have used a conveyor belt for bodies.

RITA

I remember the population sign.

DOC

Gonna wheel Mrs. Fetchim into the fridge, but with the power off, it's gonna smell pretty bad.

RITA

Thanks, Doc. Have fun night with the old widow. Live one this time.

DOC

Thanks, Detective.

Doc starts to wheel Mrs. Fetchim away.

RITA

Doc, who do you think killed her?

DOC

Somebody who wanted to take over her franchise. Could be any one of those idiots listening in.

RITA

What do you mean, listening in?

DOC

They've all been listening in at the door this whole time!

Rita turns violently angry. She RACES upstairs!

RITA  
 Goddamn it. If I find any of you  
 hobbyist detectives up there when I  
 reach the top of the stairs...

INT. SENIOR CITIZENS HOME LOBBY - DAY

Anna Liza, Handsy, Aberdeen, Jennifer, Father Beige, and  
 Hank, RACE down the hall and scatter as Rita STOMPS upstairs.

RITA  
 Don't you people have anywhere else  
 to be?!

Rita is fuming mad.

RITA (CONT'D)  
 That's it! All of you! I'm calling  
 a locksmith to lock you in!

ABERDEEN  
 You can't throw us out. We're all  
 paid up.

The group is too STUNNED to move. Rita slumps into the chair  
 behind the desk!

RITA  
 I'm no closer to solving this case  
 than when I first arrived.

ANNA LIZA  
 We know about her cancer. She was  
 gonna die anyway.

RITA  
 We're all gonna die, but it's  
 against the law to speed up the  
 process!

JENNIFER  
 It's the blood-alcohol level that  
 got me. Mrs. Fetchim was a  
 teetotaler.

HANK  
 Not last night!

FATHER BEIGE  
 It's the knife wound that got me.  
 That straight plunge?

ABERDEEN

As she fell forward, with the  
murderer's hand on the knife, the  
blade should have cut down, like  
gutting a sea bass or a cod fish!

RITA

(mumbles)  
Holy mackerel.

Anna Liza gets in Rita's face. Rita rolls her eyes.

ANNA LIZA

We need a reenactment! I wish my  
brilliant students were here.  
You'll have to do.

JENNIFER

Can I be Jezebel? We were best  
friends, you know.

Handsy prepares to punch Jennifer.

HANDSY

If I hear that again, and that B-S,  
excuse my language, about being  
number one on speed-dial, I'm going  
to punch you in the face.

Anna Liza stands in the middle of the office.

ANNA LIZA

She musta been standing here, if  
she fell there.

Anna Liza points, and everyone sighs.

RITA

Where was the fishing knife?

ALL

Top drawer of the desk!

Rita is stunned.

HANK

Isn't an office desk in town that  
doesn't have a fishing knife in it!

ABERDEEN

You're new here. That's okay.

Anna Liza holds up her arms and yells!

ANNA LIZA  
It's the perfect murder!

Rita leaps out of her chair.

RITA  
No! We have an unsolved murder.  
It's far from perfect.

HANK  
Means, motive, and opportunity?

RITA  
Each of you had the means! You all  
knew where the fishing knife was.

ABERDEEN  
Yes, but...

RITA  
(interrupting)  
You each had the opportunity. None  
of you have an air-tight alibi for  
last night at midnight!

JENNIFER  
Yes, but...

RITA  
(interrupting)  
And motive! You all stood to gain  
by Mrs. Fetchim's demise. Any one  
of you could step into her Hush  
Puppy shoes as the leading former  
amateur detective in Crabby Cove!

They all look at each other suspiciously.

RITA (CONT'D)  
Book deals from major publishers?

The former amateur detectives glare at each other.

RITA (CONT'D)  
Maybe a TV series with residuals  
for reruns totaling hundreds, if  
not tens, of dollars! The oldest  
motive there is: greed!

A fistfight breaks out among all the former amateur  
detectives. Rita strolls slowly back to the desk chair and  
sits down to enjoy the carnage.



Everyone is punching, kicking, and pulling hair, when suddenly, Nancy Droop SKIPS by the office door. While the fight goes on, Rita sticks her head out of the front door to talk to Nancy. No one else notices as Nancy and Rita whisper back and forth.

NANCY DROOP  
Did you look in the front desk?

RITA  
For what?

NANCY DROOP  
Mrs. Fetchim's last will and testament, silly. It's in there! Maybe it'll tell you who had the most to gain from her death!

RITA  
Come back in a minute. I'll get these folks out of here.

Nancy disappears. Rita turns.

RITA (CONT'D)  
Okay, break it up! Everybody back to your cells! I'm determined to solve this case!

FATHER BEIGE  
(mumbles)  
That'll take a miracle.

The amateur detectives grumble as they exit. Nancy races in and prances over to the desk to watch Rita find the will.

RITA  
How did this get here?

NANCY DROOP  
Gosh! Mrs. Fetchim must have put it here yesterday for safekeeping in case something dreadfully awful happened to her!

RITA  
(sarcastic)  
Golly. It did!

NANCY DROOP  
(snooty)  
Don't have to remind me!

Rita stands up, and leans forward with a threatening look.

RITA

Why don't you ever show up around  
the others, just me?

Nancy leans forward with an equally threatening glare.

NANCY DROOP

Why don't you tell me, big-city  
detective?

Jennifer barges in the front door. Immediately, both Rita and Nancy Droop smile and look super friendly, although Jennifer doesn't acknowledge Nancy in any way.

JENNIFER

Forgot my cashmere sweater. Sorry.

Rita and Nancy continue smiling as Jennifer grabs her sweater and begins to exit.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

Anything important in her will? We  
were best friends...

RITA

(interrupting)  
Get out! And stay out!  
(beat, sweet)  
Please!

Jennifer leaves, and Rita and Nancy Droop return to their threatening poses.

RITA (CONT'D)

Exactly when and how did you hear  
about Mrs. Fetchim's will?

NANCY DROOP

Lunchtime, yesterday. At Jerry's  
Malt Shop on Main Street.

Rita checks her phone, typing in a search box. Nancy is very curious about the device.

NANCY DROOP (CONT'D)

What are you doing? What is that?

RITA

Never seen one of these?

NANCY DROOP

(coy)  
Maybe.

RITA

Ah-ha! Just as I thought. Did you say Jerry's Malt Shop on Main Street?

NANCY DROOP

That's right! I had a hamburger, French fries, and a chocolate malt for sixty-five cents, and Mrs. Fetchim had a bowl of clam chowder and a cup of tea for forty-five cents. Ask Jerry if you don't believe me.

Rita leans right up to Nancy's nose!

RITA

Jerry's Malt Shop on Main Street closed in nineteen-eighty-four, after Jerry was suspiciously murdered!

Nancy Droop turns away, almost in tears.

NANCY DROOP

That's when it all started!

Rita comes from behind the desk to console Nancy.

RITA

When what all started?

NANCY DROOP

All the murders, and Mrs. Fetchim's mystery books, everything!

RITA

What?

Nancy gets a jolt of enthusiasm and jumps around the office as she talks.

NANCY DROOP

There was a murder every week around here! Everyone was so happy!

Nancy stops, smiles, and turns to Rita.

NANCY DROOP (CONT'D)

The town's population plummeted!

RITA

(softly)

How did you know the will was in  
this desk?

Nancy stops smiling.

NANCY DROOP

From Mrs. Fetchim. She told me she  
was going to leave an L-A-C; a Late-  
Arriving Clue, like everyone always  
left her for every murder.

RITA

Look, Kid, I've got a case to  
solve. If you lie to me again, I  
will lock you up for obstruction of  
justice and throw away the key.

Nancy sighs.

NANCY DROOP

I'm sorry, Detective Dowdy. It  
won't happen again.

RITA

Okay. Go on. Get out of here. Let  
me read this will in private.

(mumbles)

L-A-C. Late-Arriving Clue. Non-  
sense.

NANCY DROOP

Yes, Ma'am.

Rita returns to the desk chair. Nancy follows her, and stands  
behind her to get a peek at the will.

RITA

Uh-uh. Outta here! Go on!

Nancy hangs her head as she TRUDGES to the door.

NANCY DROOP

(mumbles)

Okay. But you need my help on this  
one, Detective Dowdy! You really  
do. You don't know what you're  
dealing with here!

RITA

Call ya if I need ya! But, you'll  
probably drop in like you always  
do! You're like bird poop, Kid.

NANCY DROOP

(sadly)

Goodbye, Detective Dowdy. I'll miss you!

Nancy shuts the door behind her and disappears.

Rita reads the will with great interest.

Anna Liza stomps into the office, so Rita sneaks the will into the desk.

RITA

Professor, to what do I owe this pleasure?

ANNA LIZA

Assumed you weren't talking about me when you asked everyone to leave. Sistas gotta stick together.

RITA

Playing the race card? That ever help in a murder investigation?

ANNA LIZA

You tell me. Let me ask you some questions!

RITA

Fire away!

ANNA LIZA

What does your average murder victim look like on TV?

RITA

Rich, white, middle-aged, and ruthless.

ANNA LIZA

And what does your average murder victim look like in the real world?

RITA

Black, poor, young kids mostly, and gang-related. What's your point?

ANNA LIZA

I ain't done with you. Why were you sent to Crabby Cove?

RITA  
Me, personally? An experienced,  
black detective?

ANNA LIZA  
Uh-huh. That's right?

Rita gets angry and stands nose-to-nose with Anna Liza.

RITA  
To solve a murder! That's why! Now,  
get out of my office and let me get  
back to work!

ANNA LIZA  
They want to see you fail! Perfect  
little murder in a quaint little  
tourist town ain't no place for  
you, girl!

RITA  
I've had about enough of you,  
Professor Anna Liza Cheatin, with  
your P-H-D in criminology, and your  
high-handed attitude always  
thinking you're the smartest person  
in every goddamn room you enter!

Anna Liza backs up. She looks surprised.

ANNA LIZA  
Ease off, girl.

RITA  
Now, you answer my questions.

Anna Liza looks defensive.

ANNA LIZA  
Fire away!

RITA  
Why did you specifically come to  
Crabby Cove, about a week ago,  
wasn't it?

ANNA LIZA  
I retired. I came to check things  
out. That's all.

RITA

To check things out? Abandon the big city, the big university, and all those brilliant students of yours, just to a Seniors Home?

Anna Liza's chin drops. She paces sadly in the office.

ANNA LIZA

Seen this place on TV. Quiet and peaceful. People smile at ya. That stuff is true.

RITA

Something bothers you, doesn't it?

ANNA LIZA

I worried that I couldn't get a room here if I wanted.

RITA

'Cause you're black?

ANNA LIZA

I don't know. Maybe.

Rita HUGS Anna Liza.

RITA

Times change. Not all the former amateur detectives in the world are thin upper-middle-class business owners with shoulder-length, perfect hair and Botox faces!

Jennifer and Handsy RACE in the door (with their perfect blonde hair) and no facial wrinkles.

JENNIFER

It's Hank!

HANDSY

We think he's been poisoned!

Hank stumbles at the door, with an arm around Aberdeen and Father Beige.

RITA

Quick, get him a chair!

Anna Liza pulls a chair to the center of the office, and Aberdeen and Father Beige get Hank into the chair.

RITA (CONT'D)  
 Didn't take him to the hospital?

JENNIFER  
 It's in the next town. We got the  
 morgue. Never needed a hospital.

HANDSY  
 Everyone dies! Hank needs you!

RITA  
 Ipecac syrup! Where's the bathroom?

JENNIFER  
 Never needed a bathroom. Most  
 crimes are solved in under an hour;  
 two hours max on weekends!

FATHER BEIGE  
 Sheriffs Marty and Andy used to  
 hold it!

RITA  
 Can't be serious! Bet Nancy Droop  
 carries ipecac in her little purse!

Everyone stares at Rita.

RITA (CONT'D)  
 Carries everything in that purse.  
 All I'm saying!

Everyone looks bewildered.

Rita paces and thinks. She races to the phone.

RITA (CONT'D)  
 Get me Doc!

HANDSY  
 Can't! He in the middle of his  
 sponge bath.

The others look puzzled.

FATHER BEIGE  
 They give sponge baths?

RITA  
 Father, go fetch him. Have him  
 bring a bottle of Epicac syrup.  
 (beat)  
 I think I'm gonna be sick!



Rita slams down the phone.

ANNA LIZA  
What should we do?

RITA  
Anna Liza why don't you walk him  
around, and you skinny bitches, put  
your finger down his throat every  
few minutes until Doc gets here!

Jennifer, Aberdeen, and Handsy look puzzled.

JENNIFER  
This never happens on TV, I'll tell  
you that!

RITA  
Then it's about time! What did Hank  
eat or drink that poisoned him?

ABERDEEN  
I think it was the veal in the  
cafeteria. It had been sitting out,  
what with the refrigeration out.

ANNA LIZA  
I had the veal. Could've used a  
dash of ginger.

JENNIFER  
I thought it needed spicy mustard.

HANDSY  
Pinch of tarragon.

RITA  
I think it needed refrigeration!

Doc RACES down the hall wearing a bath towel and tennis shoes, and carrying a bottle of whiskey in one hand, and his clothes under his other arm. He sees Hank is in trouble.

DOC  
Quick! Get Hank downstairs.

RITA  
Whiskey? Where's the Ipecac syrup?!

DOC  
The whiskey's for me!

Anna Liza and Father Beige help Hank downstairs, and Doc follows them.

ANNA LIZA (O.S.)

Oh my God!

FATHER BEIGE (O.S.)

It really stinks down here!

Upstairs, they HEAR Hank puke his guts out.

DOC (O.S.)

Whiskey, quick!

(beat)

Not you, Hank! Me!

Anna Liza and Father Beige RACE upstairs. Hank TRUDGES up. Doc shows up a minute later mostly dressed, buttoning up his lab coat. Doc whispers to Rita.

DOC (CONT'D)

I think I've solved the case!

Rita looks surprised.

RITA

All of you. Let's bring some chairs in here, and form a circle.

JENNIFER

We'll need the folding chairs from the community room, Doc.

Doc gives Jennifer an evil, drunken look, but he staggers away to get the chairs.

LATER

Everyone sits in a tight circle in the office, quietly staring at Doc.

RITA

Doc, you said you solved the case?

ANNA LIZA

Impossible! Would have needed my help.

JENNIFER

Mine.

HANDSY

Uh uh! Would have needed my help.

HANK

Doc just saved my life. Hear him out.

ABERDEEN

He's an old, homeless drunk. What's he know?

FATHER BEIGE

At least he goes to confession! We should hear him out.

RITA

This looks more like group therapy, but, go ahead, Doc.

Doc takes a chug of whiskey.

DOC

I'll tell you what happened.

The group leans in.

DOC (CONT'D)

Fact: Mrs. Jezebel Fetchim, the most renowned mystery writer and amateur detective in the world, was found dead!

RITA

We know, Doc. Move on.

DOC

Fact: No one in this room has an air-tight alibi, except Detective Rita Dowdy, who says she was in the next county.

The former amateur detectives glare at each other.

RITA

So you think I did it! That's ridiculous.

DOC

Is there anyone who can vouch for your whereabouts last night at midnight, Detective Dowdy?

RITA

Are you insane?

DOC

Maybe, but answer the question!

ANNA LIZA

He's a regular Sherlock Home.

JENNIFER

Doc might be on to something. Rita is a stranger in town.

FATHER BEIGE

Stranger danger! That's it!

ABERDEEN

She never said that she liked Mrs. Fetchim. Everyone else loved her.

RITA

That doesn't make me a killer.

DOC

It's an awfully strange coincidence that you showed up so soon after Mrs. Fetchim was murdered!

The others nod and grumble in agreement.

RITA

They called 9-1-1!

DOC

What's your feeling about the town of Crabby Cove?

RITA

Am I on trial here?

FATHER BEIGE

Answer the question!

RITA

Nice enough place. Fishing boats, lots of trees, quaint little shops, people who look like they stepped out an L.L. Bean catalog.

The amateur detectives look at their clothing in shame.

ABERDEEN

Except Father Beige, who has the fashion sense of a medieval executioner.

FATHER BEIGE

It's a cassock! Suggested as sensible all-weather wear in twelve-fifteen A.D.

ABERDEEN

I rest my case! Everybody else in town looks normal though!

RITA

I was called in to investigate the murder. That's all.

DOC

It did seem a little odd to all of us that you didn't request our help right away like Sheriff Andy and Sheriff Marty always did.

Rita stands and yells.

RITA

That's it, isn't it? You were all accustomed to working with dim-witted sheriffs who could never solve a case on their own!

The others nod in agreement.

RITA (CONT'D)

Must have felt great to be needed.

ABERDEEN

Some of the murder cases in town were very complicated!

HANK

When the millionaire with amnesia forgot he killed his wife with a power lawnmower!

DOC

The Case Where He Loved Her Too Mulch.

JENNIFER

When the bossy millionaire's wife killed her cheating husband with a golf cart hit-and-run!

DOC

The Case of Ordering A La Carte.

HANDSY

And, when the millionaire epileptic drug lord was killed on his yacht.

DOC  
The Case of Illegal Search and  
Seizure.

ABERDEEN  
I remember all those cases like  
they happened yesterday!

RITA  
What's this got to do with me?

DOC  
We had a good thing going! And now,  
it's ruined!

RITA  
Maybe your next sheriff will be a  
dullard, too. Maybe he or she will  
need all of you to help on every  
case.

Everyone has an ALARM go off on their cell phones.

JENNIFER  
Oh my God. Can't miss the open-  
house picnic!

RITA  
What's the open-house picnic?

HANDSY  
The biggest social event of the  
year in the Crabby Cove Seniors  
Home!

HANK  
And we cater the food in the  
cafeteria!

RITA  
For the whole town?

ABERDEEN  
You'll see. Cafeteria in fifteen  
minutes!

RITA  
I've got to check a few more  
records out in the files. I'll  
catch up to you when I can.

The amateur detectives all RACE out.

FATHER BEIGE (O.S)  
It's a sin to miss all the fun!

Rita pauses, then she digs through the office files.

EXT. CAFETERIA - DAY

The amateur detectives stand behind one six-foot-long single fold-up table with food and paper plates on it, enough to feed fifty people. A banner hangs from the table and reads: "Crabby Cove Annual Open-House Picnic!" No other townsfolk have shown up.

Rita ambles over to the table and stops in front of Hank, who stands behind a mountain of fried chicken on a platter.

RITA  
Fried chicken?

HANK  
Cooked it up early this morning on  
the gas stove.

RITA  
You know that's not too healthy?

HANK  
Limited culinary choices since the  
storm knocked out the power.

Rita takes a step to see Anna Liza is behind an iron skillet of fried okra.

RITA  
Those fried in lard?

ANNA LIZA  
Southern-style.

RITA  
Hmmm. Not healthy either.

Rita steps down to Jennifer's giant bowl of red Jell-O.

JENNIFER  
It's my antique red gelatin. If it  
was good enough for my parents to  
serve me, it's good enough for me  
to serve the public!

RITA  
Red dye number two? Uh-uh.

Rita takes a step over to Handsy, who stands behind a platter of several-day-old cupcakes with flies on the icing.

HANDSY

Don't tell anyone. Serving expired food items is a tax write-off.

RITA

Your secret is safe with me.

Rita steps down to see Father Beige standing proudly behind a silver plate of communion wafers.

RITA (CONT'D)

Are those...

FATHER BEIGE

They're not for everyone.

Father Beige glares at Aberdeen, who glares back.

Rita steps down to a nice floral display of chrysanthemums, borage, and day-lilies.

RITA

Chrysanthemums, borage, and day-lilies; all edible.

ABERDEEN

I'm gladiolus you noticed!

RITA

Strangely enough, the safest thing to eat here. Where is everyone?

JENNIFER

Picnic participation has been dropping every year.

RITA

With the population?

FATHER BEIGE

I think they're afraid to come out of their houses.

Doc takes a swig of whiskey.

DOC

Been telling 'em for years! Serve more alcohol on picnic day!

ANNA LIZA

Didn't that cause a riot once?



JENNIFER

That's how the newspaper wrote it up. In actuality, Doc took a swing at Father Beige.

DOC

He called me a drunk!

FATHER BEIGE

Doc called Jezebel a nosy old bitty. I got a little hot under the collar. Get it?

RITA

So you gave him a left cross?

FATHER BEIGE

Like brass knuckles if you use a crucifix correctly.

RITA

Doc, did you press charges?

DOC

I was at the town picnic! No witnesses.

Rita looks around.

RITA

I confess. I was hoping to list a few other potential suspects here today.

FATHER BEIGE

Confession is good for the soul.

RITA

(whispers)

Heard anything interesting in the confession box today, Father?

FATHER BEIGE

Would be confidential, but, no.

Rita looks around and tries to change the subject.

RITA

Why do you still hold the picnic every year?

JENNIFER

Townfolk can't stay home forever.

Rita looks out the window to see Nancy Droop skipping by dressed in her short skirt.

RITA  
Nancy Droop?

Everyone squints their eyes to see Nancy.

JENNIFER  
Always around when there's trouble!

RITA  
What do you mean?

ABERDEEN  
Every time there's a murder of a millionaire, billionaire, or royal heir, she's somewhere around town, poking around and asking questions.

HANDSY  
Nosy and annoying for a time-warped teenager.

HANK  
(mumbles)  
But there's something about a young girl with a feather duster.

Everyone STARES at Hank.

FATHER BEIGE  
(mumbles)  
Or a boy.

RITA  
She's around at every big murder?

ANNA LIZA  
Very suspicious to me, too! Haul her in for questioning?

JENNIFER  
Maybe a little gentle persuasion?

ABERDEEN  
Good cop, bad cop?

HANDSY  
Waterboarding?

FATHER BEIGE  
The rack?

RITA  
She seems harmless enough.

Nancy skips out of view.

JENNIFER  
Jezebel never missed a town picnic!

Doc takes a swig of whiskey.

DOC  
No other town wanted her.

FATHER BEIGE  
Afraid for their lives.

RITA  
How so?

HANDSY  
Wherever she went, murder followed.

ABERDEEN  
Every vacation spot.

JENNIFER  
Every convention.

HANK  
Every family gathering.

JENNIFER  
I think her family canceled family gatherings altogether!

FATHER BEIGE  
Attrition.

RITA  
Poor thing. Must have gotten very lonely.

ALL  
Always had sheriffs and doctors.

RITA  
She never remarried?

HANDSY  
Writing became her husband.

JENNIFER  
Murder became her lover!

They bow their heads in a moment of silence.

RITA

What will you do with all this  
food?

JENNIFER

Leave it for the staff.

FATHER BEIGE

Could be multiple funerals this  
week.

INT. SENIOR CITIZENS HOME LOBBY - AFTERNOON

Rita returns to the lobby to see the door wide open, and  
Nancy Droop sitting behind the desk.

RITA

I'm not in the mood!

NANCY DROOP

Good, neither am I.

RITA

I mean, I'm not in the mood for  
your teeny-bopper social banter!

Nancy Droop gets up and prances around the office with  
annoyingly happy smiles and disposition.

RITA (CONT'D)

Why didn't you come to the open-  
house picnic?

NANCY DROOP

They don't dig me, if your catch my  
drift. They're not boss.

RITA

They're not your boss?

NANCY DROOP

No! They're not boss! Bold! Cherry!  
Out of this world!

RITA

Who's your idea of boss, bold,  
cherry, and out of this world?

NANCY DROOP

Mrs. Jezebel Fetchim, for one. Can  
I go see her?

RITA  
No. Crime scene and coroner's room  
are off-limits.

NANCY DROOP  
You're a fink!

Rita gets up and moves in to get a better look at Nancy Droop, but she slips out the door.

RITA  
Get back here! Want to ask you a  
few more questions!

Nancy is running away yelling.

NANCY DROOP  
Sorry, gotta run. But if you really  
want to solve the crime, I'd start  
with Hank, the last one of us who  
saw her alive.

Rita returns to the desk, and calls Hank, number five on speed dial.

RITA  
Hank, this is Rita. I wonder if you  
might come down to the lobby and  
help me out on the case.

Hank steps in the office.

HANK  
Waiting for your call.

Rita looks at Hank suspiciously.

RITA  
Take a seat. Couple of things have  
bothered me about Mrs. Fetchim's  
state of mind last night after  
dinner at your old diner.

HANK  
Restaurant.

RITA  
Sorry. Restaurant. My notes say  
Mrs. Fetchim was a teetotaler.

HANK  
She had an occasional glass of  
sherry, customary of women of a  
certain age from Great Britain.

RITA

Yet your new owner claimed she drank two bottles of French red wine last night?

HANK

He told me he served her two bottles of wine last night. So?

RITA

And she wasn't drunk when she left your place?

HANK

When she was in the hallway here, she wasn't drunk, she was frisky. What's this about?

RITA

Just trying to establish the victim's state of mind.

HANK

She grabbed my bum!

Hank stands and turns to show Rita where he was grabbed.

RITA

Right there, huh?

HANK

Go on! See for yourself. You're just trying to establish her state of mind.

Rita shrugs, smiles, and grabs Hank's bum. The experience is too pleasant, and Rita grabs it again. Hank moans and sighs.

RITA

This is fun.

Hank turns and sits back down. He smiles.

HANK

Mrs. Fetchim was frisky, but she wasn't as frisky as you!

Rita steps around the desk to be closer to Hank.

RITA

Truth is, it's been a while.

HANK

For me, too.

RITA  
What? All those women coming to  
your place late at night?

HANK  
They just tease me. It's all  
innuendo!

RITA  
Innuendo?

HANK  
They flirt, then leave. The sexual  
tension has me wound up tighter  
than a teenager on prom night!

RITA  
Teenager on prom night?

Their eyes meet. Hank steps closer. Rita steps closer.  
Suddenly, Handsy races in with a to-go cup of hot coffee and  
a small bag of cookies.

HANDSY  
Electricity's back on! Brought you  
some fresh coffee, Detective.  
Black, like you like it!

Handsy sees that she came at an awkward moment.

HANDSY (CONT'D)  
Least, I thought so. Hank, what are  
you doing here?

HANK  
Answering a few questions.

RITA  
What a bum. I mean, what a bummer  
we couldn't meet under more  
pleasant circumcision, I mean,  
circumstances.

Handsy stares at Hank.

HANDSY  
Sexual tension so strong you could  
cut it with a fishing knife?

Rita returns to the desk chair.

RITA  
I was just trying to establish Mrs.  
Fetchim's state of mind last night.

HANDSY  
Why don't you ask Doc?

RITA  
Doc?

HANDSY  
Who do you think helped drink the  
two bottles of wine?

RITA  
Hank, you didn't mention Doc was  
there?

HANK  
He was at the next table, according  
to the new owner!

Rita is angry.

RITA  
That's an important detail!

HANK  
They didn't sit together, but she  
did keep handing him glasses of  
wine, according to my friend.

RITA  
Another important detail! Handsy,  
how did you know Doc was there?

HANDSY  
Peered in the window, like any good  
former amateur detective.

RITA  
Around ten PM. You just happened to  
be outside of Hank's old d...  
restaurant?

HANDSY  
We all eavesdrop. It's what we do.

RITA  
Where's Doc? Gotta ask him more  
questions!

HANDSY  
Napping on the park bench. What he  
does best!

Hank begins to race out.



HANK  
I'll fetch him!

Hank exits. Handsy GLARES at Rita.

HANDSY  
Hank likes to avoid sexual tension.

RITA  
And you know this, how?

Handsy pauses, then steps nose-to-nose with Rita.

HANDSY  
Every time I get this close to  
Hank, he gets a sudden overwhelming  
urge to whip something up in the  
kitchen, and I don't mean me.

RITA  
Is that coffee and cookies you  
brought me?

Handsy takes a step back to hand Rita the coffee and cookies.

HANDSY  
The cookies are a new recipe: Greek  
Sugar Cookies. Socrates would have  
loved them. They're a good size.

Handsy takes a huge cookie out of the bag.

RITA  
Only two to a Plato.

Handsy steps nose-to-nose with Rita.

HANDSY  
Three's a crowd. Crumby, if you  
catch my meaning.

RITA  
I'm not here to steal your man,  
Handsy. I'm here to solve a murder.

Handsy yells, just as Hank returns with Doc.

HANDSY  
Then keep your paws off my  
boyfriend's bum!

Rita quickly returns to the chair behind the desk. Hank helps  
Doc to a seat, then Handsy pulls Hank out down the hallway.

DOC  
What was all that about?

RITA  
I guess she caught me with my hand  
in the cookie jar.

DOC  
Huh?

RITA  
Never mind. Anything you want to  
tell me about your autopsy report?

DOC  
It was awfully dark down there.

RITA  
Just the facts. Change that. Just  
the truth!

DOC  
I lied a little to impress you,  
like I always did for Sheriff Marty  
and Sheriff Andy before him.

RITA  
You lied?

Doc seems a little drunk.

DOC  
I like to think of it as shen-  
sationalizing the shtory.

RITA  
Sensationalizing?

DOC  
For dramatic flair.

RITA  
Mrs. Fetchim didn't have cancer,  
did she?

DOC  
No, Ma'am.

RITA  
And her blood-alcohol level was low  
and normal wasn't it?

DOC  
Yesh, Ma'am.

Rita is angry.

RITA

And you know what she had for dinner, because you sat at the table next to her!

DOC

Yesh, Ma'am.

RITA

I'm guessing it was you who drank her two bottles of French wine!

DOC

Yesh, Ma'am.

RITA

Only thing you got right, on your own, was that the fishing knife went in perfectly straight into Mrs. Fetchim's back!

DOC

Yesh, Ma'am.

RITA

Doc, go clean up your act. Shave, shower, and put on clean clothes, or I'll have your medical license suspended in a New York minute! Is that clear?

DOC

Yesh, Ma'am.

Doc trudges downstairs, as all the amateur detectives storm down the hallway. Rita puts on latex gloves as she yells at them.

RITA

Y'all here again! I've got to document the crime scene and search for clues. Y'all are constantly in my way and contaminating the area.

FATHER BEIGE

Thought you could use our help.

ABERDEEN

Viewers are demanding answers.

JENNIFER

They want to see someone arrested.

HANK  
Anybody!

HANDSY  
(whispers)  
We thought you should take a closer  
look at Doc!

They all nod in agreement.

JENNIFER  
Suppose Doc lured Jezebel into his  
little bedroom downstairs after  
dinner at Hank's old diner?

HANK  
Restaurant.

ABERDEEN  
Maybe Doc and Jezebel were closer  
than friends, if you know what I  
mean?

FATHER BEIGE  
Closer than friends?

ANNA LIZA  
Closer than pen pals, if you know  
what I mean?

Father Beige looks perplexed.

RITA  
Nobody's pen pals anymore. They  
text!

HANDSY  
Not Jezebel! No cell phone!

RITA  
What?

JENNIFER  
Same with Doc. No cell phone.

RITA  
What kind of a backwoods place is  
this?

FATHER BEIGE  
Exactly! Doc and Jezebel had so  
much sexual tension between them,  
you could cut it with a knife!

ANNA LIZA  
A fishing knife!

Rita starts looking in drawers and file cabinets.

RITA  
Y'all crazy. Doc may be the town drunk, but he's no murderer!

HANK  
Body wasn't found 'til morning!

JENNIFER  
What happened last night around midnight?

ANNA LIZA  
He had the opportunity. What was Doc's motive?

HANDSY  
We can rule out jealousy.

RITA  
Why?

HANDSY  
No one else was beating down her door for dates.

ABERDEEN  
Doc's drinking problem?

FATHER BEIGE  
Jezebel was ninety-one, and more than a Vatican prune.

RITA  
Maybe it was money. Doc's practically homeless.

JENNIFER  
Jezebel would have given him every penny she had, if he asked. Same as any of us.

RITA  
None of you seem financially stressed!

HANK  
We're all doing okay. Weekly shows, endorsements, residuals...

RITA

Right! No motive, but everyone had the means and opportunity!

Rita keeps looking in drawers and file cabinets.

RITA (CONT'D)

I guess one of you might stand to gain a little notoriety if you collared one of your own for the murder of such a famous person.

The former amateur detectives GLARE at each other.

FATHER BEIGE

What are you suggesting, Detective?

RITA

I'm suggesting that the heir-apparent to Mrs. Fetchim's throne might be the one who solves her murder!

ANNA LIZA

Like Tom Sawyer painting his fence! You need our help, don't you?

RITA

Somebody killed her. That's all.

JENNIFER

And you think it's a competition to solve the murder?

ABERDEEN

Winner take all, is that it?

RITA

Something like that!

HANDSY

And you expect us to tear up each other's rooms looking for clues? Is that it?

RITA

Got a dead body downstairs. Don't have a lead suspect yet!

FATHER BEIGE

And you think one of us did it?

Rita stops and yells.

RITA

You all wiped off the prints on the murder weapon. Of course, I think one of you did it!

Rita continues to glare at them.

ANNA LIZA

And you think one of us is hiding the ultimate clue?

They all look angry as Handsy finally speaks up.

HANDSY

Detective Dowdy, that is very irresponsible of you to get us to accuse each other! Is that so you can quietly look for clues here?

RITA

All I've been trying to do since I got here, but I keep getting interrupted by...

FATHER BEIGE

(interrupting)

What do you mean by that?

Rita takes out her pistol and aims it at each of the former amateur detectives one by one.

RITA

Y'all starting to get on my nerves. You gave me an impossible task by handling the murder weapon. The real murderer's prints are wiped off by each one of you!

ABERDEEN

We said we were sorry about that!

They nod in agreement.

RITA

Before I got here, I studied the police records for this backward town! All I see were murderers; not robberies, not shoplifting, not disturbing the peace, nothing else! All murders!

JENNIFER

Those were the good ol' days.

They all nod in agreement.

RITA

But this isn't just one more murder! This is the icon of Crabby Cove. Practically a saint!

FATHER BEIGE

If she weren't Episcopalian.

RITA

And I got no clues! So, one of you must be hiding the perfect clue in your room!

The former amateur detectives GLARE at each other.

RITA (CONT'D)

If y'all want to help me, get out there and find me that all-important clue.

HANK

Look for evidence in each other's rooms?

RITA

Can't tell you what to do. All I'm saying is, one of you did it! And meet back here just before midnight! What we need is another trial of the century.

ABERDEEN

A trial?

RITA

That's right! Tonight! Just before midnight, we'll gather all the potential suspects together, like in the movies, and together we'll solve the murder!

Father Beige puts his hands together in prayer.

FATHER BEIGE

Just like in the movies!

RITA

Go on! Find me that clue!

The amateur detectives GLARE at each other before racing down the hall pushing and shoving each other angrily.



After they're gone, Nancy Droop appears in the front door. She sees Rita searching high and low for clues.

NANCY DROOP

Not very nice, pitting those nice people against each other.

Rita turns around, glances at Nancy, and continues searching, while speaking to her. Nancy skips around the office.

RITA

Oh. It's only you.

NANCY DROOP

Those hobbyist detectives will rip each other's rooms apart looking for clues that aren't there.

RITA

Good. Keep 'em out of my hair.

NANCY DROOP

What's this about another trial of the century tonight at midnight?

RITA

How'd you hear about that?

NANCY DROOP

Golly, it's common knowledge. All over town. In the schoolyard, too, just like in all those Nancy Drew mystery books.

RITA

I read all those Nancy Drew books as a teenager. The Case of the Crooked Contortionist, The Stolen Bicycle Wheel That Spoke up, Mystery of the Lost Story Plot...

NANCY DROOP

(interrupting)

And you think that inviting them all back to the scene of the crime twenty-four hours later, that a clue will be exposed, and one of them will confess?

RITA

Something like that!

NANCY DROOP

Golly, you sure are a good crime-solver, Detective Dowdy.

RITA

Thanks, Kid. Now get lost. I've got work to do!

NANCY DROOP

'Til tonight at midnight then.

RITA

You don't have to come.

NANCY DROOP

Finding out who killed Mrs. Jezebel Fetchim? Wouldn't miss it for the world!

Nancy Droop skips out the door and down the street.

INT. SENIOR CITIZENS HOME LOBBY - NIGHT

The clock shows 11:30 PM. The lobby is set up like a courtroom. The desk has a gavel on it. On the right side of the desk is "the witness chair" (a folding chair). The room is very dark with two old oil lamps serving as the main lights. Rita, who has a flashlight, greets everyone as they arrive, and shows them to their seat (folding chairs in a tight semicircle on the left side of the lobby). Rita wears latex gloves and is still looking for clues around the office as Jennifer storms in.

JENNIFER

First to arrive. Even with another summer storm and the power out!

RITA

Jenifer, the former Junkyard Detective! You'll sit here.

Jennifer sits down as Handsy enters.

RITA (CONT'D)

Handsy, the former Bakery Store Detective is seated next to Jennifer.

HANDSY

This is highly irregular. A trial at this hour.

RITA

Your time is greatly appreciated.

Handsy sits as Father Beige enters.

FATHER BEIGE

Lord, protect all here.

The priest sits as Aberdeen enters.

ABERDEEN

I've got a flower delivery at six.

FATHER BEIGE

(mumbles)

Lutheran!

RITA

Aberdeen, I have the former Flower Shop Detective next to the intolerant Priest Detective.

Aberdeen sits as Hank enters.

RITA (CONT'D)

Hank, the former Diner Detective, you're next to Aberdeen.

HANK

Restaurant! But isn't this a lovely coincidence?

JENNIFER & HANDSY

I don't think so!

Hank sits as Anna Liza enters.

ANNA LIZA

What's all this about?

RITA

You'll see, Anna Liza, the former Professor Detective.

Anna Liza sits. They hear a GUNSHOT downstairs! Everyone jumps! Doc yells from downstairs.

DOC (O.S.)

Just a rat. Dead one now.

RITA

You ready, Doc?

DOC (O.S.)

Ready.

Everyone hears Doc TRUDGING upstairs.

RITA

All rise!

Everyone stands. The trudging stops. Everyone sits.

DOC (O.S.)

Forgot my bottle!

A moment later, Doc continues trudging upstairs.

RITA

All rise, for the Honorable Judge,  
Seth Hazzben, Junior.

Everyone stands. Doc, dressed in a judge's robe, clearly drunk, carries a bottle of whiskey to the desk. He sits and tries to hit the gavel on the desk, but misses it.

FATHER BEIGE

Good God. He missed the desk!

Doc hits the desk with the gavel. Everyone sits.

DOC

Court is now in shh, shh, shession!

RITA

Will the former Junkyard Detective  
tell us who killed Ms. Jezebel  
Fetchim?

Jennifer stands up quickly.

JENNIFER

I'd like to call Handsy Sweatsome  
to the stand!

Handsy jumps to the stand.

HANDSY

Good! Time we cleared the air!

Handsy glares at Jennifer as she PACES.

RITA

Tell the truth! Both of ya!

HANDSY

Yeah. Yeah!

JENNIFER

Please state your name and occupation.

HANDSY

Handsy Sweatsome, former owner of the Crabby Cove Bakery and Café.

JENNIFER

You're gone a lot from your room. Always snooping around, digging up dirt.

HANDSY

So do you, Ms. former Junkyard Detective. Who else in town has that much free time, they can nose around in other people's business? Don't you have a trophy husband?

JENNIFER

He's understanding of my habits and hobbies! I'll ask the questions!

Doc hits the gavel on the desk.

DOC

I'll have order in my court!

Doc burps.

RITA

Proceed.

JENNIFER

Where were you last night about this time?

HANDSY

Dropped by Hank's. So did you! So did Aberdeen!

HANK

I object!

RITA

You objectify women! Shut up for now. You'll get your chance.

JENNIFER

Handsy, did you kill Mrs. Jezebel Fetchim for the sole purpose of taking her job as lead amateur detective in Crabby Cove?

Handsy looks away.

HANDSY

You can't be serious! I pulled the fishing knife out of her body! You put it back in to blame me!

JENNIFER

I may have returned it to its rightful resting place, but I...

FATHER BEIGE

(stands, interrupts)  
I object! Handsy was just protecting me!

HANDSY

I'd like to call Father Beige to the stand!

RITA

Fine! Least we don't have to swear him in.

Jennifer sits. Handsy paces in the lobby as Father Beige takes the witness stand.

HANDSY

Father, you said that I was protecting you. From what?

FATHER BEIGE

(laughs)  
Altar boy lawsuits?

Everyone laughs, but Father Beige looks away guiltily.

FATHER BEIGE (CONT'D)

Just kidding. Poor choice of words. Protecting me from another type of scandal, maybe?

HANDSY

Having to do with your vow of chastity?

FATHER BEIGE

My vow of perverty? Poverty? No way! Mrs. Fetchim was an Episcopalian. Protestant-lite. Based on the falling numbers of Episcopalians over the decades, we can safely assume they are not reproducing.

HANDSY

I was speaking about your vow of poverty!

FATHER BEIGE

Well, solving crimes is a lucrative business, as we all know!

Everyone nods, 'yes.'

FATHER BEIGE (CONT'D)

There are book rights, TV, residuals, guest appearances, and commercial endorsements for unhealthy American snack foods. Helps me afford this place! Product placement is everything!

Doc shows the label on his whiskey bottle as his head hits the desk.

RITA

We all know what you're getting at: There's money in murder!

FATHER BEIGE

But who'd ever killed for money?

They all raise their hands.

FATHER BEIGE (CONT'D)

I do agree, it's good for businesses in town if we solve murders, which contributes to more change in collection plates on Sundays.

RITA

How much more change?

FATHER BEIGE

The Monsignor has a new Mercedes-Benz. I'm getting a new eighteen-gear titanium off-road bicycle with a padded seat. The church lady is getting a new cross-your-sacred-heart bra. Her old one has rips along the sides and right here.

Father points to his belly.

FATHER BEIGE (CONT'D)

Poor things sag a little.

RITA

We get the idea. Solving murders is good for business.

HANDSY

Did you kill her, Father?

FATHER BEIGE

Heaven's no, but I'd like to call Aberdeen Kay-Night to the stand!

Handsy sits. Father Beige begins pacing as Aberdeen takes the stand.

FATHER BEIGE (CONT'D)

State your full name and occupation.

ABERDEEN

Aberdeen Kay-Night, only former florist in town.

FATHER BEIGE

Are you now, or have you ever been, a Lutheran?

ABERDEEN

(mumbles)

You know I have, Father, but that doesn't make me a murderer!

FATHER BEIGE

I see you have a hyphenated last name. Are you aware that only seven percent of Americans have hyphenated last names, mostly old hippies and movie and TV stars, who are over fifty, but trying to play forty?

All the women GLARE at each other.

ABERDEEN

Wasn't aware of that.

Father Beige gets in Aberdeen's face and yells.

FATHER BEIGE

Are you aware that Martin Luther, the scourge of the Roman Catholic Church, thoroughly approved of drinking and sex?



ABERDEEN

I wasn't aware of that.

FATHER BEIGE

Are you aware that when you pulled that fishing knife out of Mrs. Fetchim's body, and wiped off your fingerprints, that you were committing a crime?

ABERDEEN

Each of us touched the knife and wiped off the fingerprints.

FATHER BEIGE

Now, we're getting somewhere!

RITA

I disagree! You may step down, Ms. Kay-Night.

FATHER BEIGE

(mumbles)

"Thou shalt not kill," really gets thrown under the bus on most TV shows!

ABERDEEN

I'd like to call the chef and former Diner Detective, Mr. Hank Lambshank, to the stand!

Father Beige sits, Aberdeen paces, and Hank takes the witness chair.

DOC

The chef? I don't see where this loin of reasoning is going.

HANK

Reasoning or seasoning, I'm just here to spice up the trial, Your Honor.

Hank and Doc chuckle.

ABERDEEN

And the town, Hank? Have you spiced up the town since you arrived five years ago?

HANK

Well I...

ABERDEEN

(interrupting)

Spread your sweet sauces around town. A lamb chop here, a soufflé there.

HANK

I'm a single, Grade A, American side of beef, if that's what you're getting at!

Jennifer and Handsy squirm in their seats.

ABERDEEN

Maybe that's why somebody tried to poison you today!

Jennifer stands.

JENNIFER

I object. There's been no evidence that Hank's poisoning and Mrs. Fetchim's death are related. And what a strong, handsome, virile hunk of a man does with his own sweet time...

DOC

(interrupting)

Is that thyme the spice or time in the chronological sense?

JENNIFER

(angry)

You know what I mean, you crazy old drunk.

Jennifer sits, while Handsy stands.

HANDSY

I move that this line of questioning be stricken from the record as immaterial. As a chef, Hank can't be expected to let his meatloaf, Your Honor.

DOC

Strike it from the record. I'll remind the former Flower Shop Detective to stick to the facts.

ABERDEEN

Yes, Your Honor. However, I think I can show that these two incidences are related.

The crowd gasps.

RITA

That's a beefy accusation!

ABERDEEN

I think Hank's poisoning was meant to distract us from the real issue, the power outages!

RITA

What's this summer storm of mystery reruns have to do with Hank?

ABERDEEN

How should I know? I'm only a former hobbyist detective! But I blame Jennifer and Handsy. They're tramps!

Aberdeen leaps from the witness chair and dives at Jennifer and Handsy. Anna Liza breaks it up.

ANNA LIZA

I'd like to take the stand to confess.

RITA

By all means.

Anna Liza sits in the witness chair.

ANNA LIZA

When I got here a few days ago, I thought you all might be crazy.

(beat)

My suspicions were confirmed.

RITA

That's your confession?

ANNA LIZA

I've got more.

Anna Lisa looks away. She starts to tear up.

RITA

Go on!

ANNA LIZA

I loved reading Mrs. Fetchim's novels as a young adult: The Case of the Under-inflated Ego, The Key to the Bagels and Lox, and The Mysterious Disappearance of the Movie Extras. I read them all. But it wasn't 'til I got to Crabby Cove that I understood how much Mrs. Jezebel Fetchim meant to everyone.

Everyone except Rita is wiping tears from his or her eyes.

RITA

(sarcastic)

Wow. Thanks for sharing.

Rita pulls out her pistol and points it at Anna Liza.

RITA (CONT'D)

Go sit down! All of you, shut up!  
We're going to do this my way!

As Anna Liza sits down, Doc lays his head on the desk next to his near-empty bottle of whiskey.

JENNIFER

You can put away the pistol,  
Detective!

RITA

I think I need the pistol. Y'all think you're smarter than the average sheriff. I see no evidence of that.

HANK

Then why did Sheriff Marty, and Sheriff Andy before him, always come to us for help?

RITA

The sheriffs needed Mrs. Fetchim's help, not yours.

The former hobbyist detectives look puzzled.

RITA (CONT'D)

I researched the reports for the town and compared them to TV listings of TV shows.

JENNIFER

You did?

RITA

Did any of you know that a murder occurs on twenty-two percent of prime-time TV shows every night?

ANNA LIZA

That seems high.

RITA

That's right! In real life, violent crimes occur the least of any type of crimes, but that's not true in Crabby Cove, is it?

HANDSY

We're big on murder here. Is that a crime?

Rita points her gun at each of them.

RITA

In all the reports I read for your town, not one case of vagrancy, shoplifting, or traffic violations in the town's history! Any of you detective geniuses find that hard to believe?

Silence.

JENNIFER

I admit that's a little strange, but our murders are textbook murders!

RITA

Textbook murders?

HANDSY

Committed because of greed, jealousy, emotional instability, mental pathology, and other individual weaknesses.

The former hobbyist detectives nod proudly.

RITA

So tell me. In real life, murder or attempted murder incidents comprise less than one percent of the violent crimes. Why does Crabby Cove have one-hundred percent murders?

FATHER BEIGE  
Just lucky, I guess.

Rita moves in to point the gun at Father Beige's head.

RITA  
How do you explain that in real life, over one-third of murders go unsolved, but on TV and in Crabby Cove they solve every case in an hour or two?

The hobbyist detectives STARE at each other.

ABERDEEN  
(mumbles)  
We're good at what we do?

RITA  
And who are the killers?

ANNA LIZA  
Professional killers mostly?

RITA  
Exactly. But in real life, the killer is almost always a family member or friend.

Jennifer stands proudly.

JENNIFER  
But our victims represent a good cross-section of society!

RITA  
According to the reports, your victims are mostly white, in their thirties and forties. In the real world, over half the victims are young blacks. Sit down, former Junkyard Detective, or I'll blast a cap in your butt!

Doc raises his head, appearing drunk, and yells.

DOC  
Detective Rita Dowdy, where do you get off scolding these fine former hobbyist detectives?

Rita points the gun at Doc.

RITA  
You want a piece of me? You sit  
your butt down in the witness  
chair!

Doc stumbles to the witness chair.

DOC  
Give me your best shot!

RITA  
First things first!

Rita grabs Doc's whiskey bottle from the desk, and takes a  
huge swig. Doc's eyes light up in horror.

RITA (CONT'D)  
Just as I thought!

DOC  
I can explain!

RITA  
It's iced tea! Doc ain't no drunk!

The former hobbyist detectives GASP!

DOC  
Oops!

RITA  
That's right! And all the wine  
around here is really sparkling  
cider or grape juice.

Rita points her pistol at Hank.

RITA (CONT'D)  
Isn't that right, Hank, the former  
Diner Detective? So, Mrs. Fetchim  
and Doc were drinking harmless  
cider and grape juice last night.

HANK  
Oops.

The former hobbyist detectives gasp!

RITA  
That's why all the blood tests show  
low alcohol levels. Shall we test  
Doc right now with a Breathalyzer?

DOC  
 (mumbles)  
 No need. We get the picture! TV  
 alcohol is fake!

The former hobbyist detectives look defeated.

RITA  
 Now, we're getting somewhere!

DOC  
 You're forgetting that one hundred  
 percent of murders around here have  
 been solved, but not Mrs.  
 Fetchim's!

RITA  
 I'm getting to that!

The former hobbyist detectives look shocked.

RITA (CONT'D)  
 You all forget the five basic laws  
 of network TV murder mysteries.

Jennifer stands.

JENNIFER  
 What five basic laws?

RITA  
 Harmless distraction, misdirection,  
 multiple suspects, L-A-Cs or Late-  
 Arriving Clues, and the stupid full  
 confession at the end!

Jennifer sits, and Father Beige stands.

FATHER BEIGE  
 Harmless distraction?

RITA  
 Y'all being harmless former  
 hobbyist detectives, always  
 eavesdropping and poking around the  
 Senior Citizens Home.

FATHER BEIGE  
 Okay. We do that!

Father Beige sits and Handsy stands.

HANDSY  
 Misdirection?



RITA  
Hank's food poisoning! Takes your  
mind off the far more important  
murder investigation.

HANDSY  
Oh.

Handsy sits, while Aberdeen and Hank stand.

ABERDEEN & HANK  
Multiple suspects?

Aberdeen and Hank STARE at each other, then at the former  
other hobbyist detectives.

RITA  
A little too obvious, don't you  
think?

Aberdeen and Hank sit as Anna Lisa stands.

ANNA LIZA  
L-A-Cs? Late-Arriving Clues?

Rita keeps pointing the gun at the others, while making her  
way to the desk. She opens the top drawer and pulls out  
Jezebel's last will and testament.

RITA  
Mrs. Jezebel Fetchim's will!

The former hobbyist detectives GASP!

ANNA LIZA  
What's it say?

RITA  
She donates everything to the  
Crabby Cove Seniors Home to take  
better care of everyone in their  
final years.

ALL  
Awwwww!

ANNA LIZA  
She didn't identify her murderer?

The hobbyist detectives start fighting each other and Doc.  
It's a huge brawl, as they each accuse the other of murdering  
Mrs. Fetchim.

ALL

You did it! Admit it! You did it!

Rita moves to stop the fight, and she ends up close to the door.

Nancy Droop, in the same short skirt and outfit, RACES in and tackles Rita. The hobbyist detectives stop fighting, as Nancy pulls a pistol on Rita.

NANCY DROOP

Nancy Droop of the FBI. I'm arresting you, Rita Dowdy, on suspicion of murder in the first degree! I think you impersonated a detective to frame Mrs. Fetchim's murder on one of these fine citizens, while you hunted down the gun you used in other murders!

The former hobbyist detectives pull Rita and Nancy to their feet.

ANNA LIZA

Rita's gotta gun!

NANCY DROOP

A costume gun! It's as fake as she is! None of you asked to see her badge! And none of you called 9-1-1 this morning when you found the body!

JENNIFER

Detective Dowdy was already here!  
(puzzled)  
Oh!

NANCY DROOP

You were all busy taking the knife out and putting it back in. I saw the whole thing from the window!

ABERDEEN

We all assumed someone else called 9-1-1? That's embarrassing!

NANCY DROOP

Ya think?

Nancy puts a pair of handcuffs on Rita.

HANDSY

Can we see your badge?

Nancy pulls out her official FBI badge.

HANDSY (CONT'D)

Nancy Droop, Special Investigator,  
Washington D.C. This says you're  
fifty-five years old! You look  
fourteen!

NANCY DROOP

I eat right, get my exercise, and  
like all of you, I use Botox!

FATHER BEIGE

Why do you dress so funny?

NANCY DROOP

Nobody even noticed me in this  
town! Perfect disguise!

HANK

Rita lied to us?

Nancy checks the label on Rita's blouse.

NANCY DROOP

Just as I thought! It's a detective  
suit from Costume Americana, the  
largest Halloween store in the next  
town.

JENNIFER

She fooled us, too!

ABERDEEN

That's not very nice!

NANCY DROOP

And she was gonna kill you!

FATHER BEIGE

Against the Fifth Commandment?!

RITA

Just to shut you blowhards up! You  
know what bothered me most?

ANNA LIZA

What?

RITA

The sexual innuendo.

HANDSY

What?

RITA

All y'all drop by Hank's room late at night, and I bet he's never touched one of you!

Hank looks down. Jennifer, Aberdeen, Handsy, and Anna Liza look away. Then, even Father Beige looks away.

RITA (CONT'D)

You are all a bunch of nosy busybodies who deserve to be shot!

DOC

That's not very nice!

RITA

Shut up, you pretend drunk! And I wouldn't shoot you in the heart, like everybody does on TV murder mysteries.

JENNIFER

You wouldn't?

RITA

No! I'd shoot you smack dab in the middle of the face, after shooting your arms and legs so you squeal for hours! Maybe shoot you in the crotch too! Just for fun!

The former hobbyist detectives grab their crotches.

ANNA LIZA

Nobody does that on TV! You're not a nice person!

NANCY DROOP

No, she's not. Ms. Rita Dowdy was released from Crabby Cove's ultra-minimal security prison two days ago, where she was being held on aggravated assault.

FATHER BEIGE

One year ago! She assaulted Mrs. Jezebel Fetchim!

NANCY DROOP

Exactly! She beat Mrs. Fetchim to a pulp for not revealing the whereabouts of a pistol Ms. Dowdy may have used in several murders. Ballistics would prove it!

JENNIFER

But she never revealed the whereabouts of the gun?

NANCY DROOP

She was protecting Sheriff Marty, who was fishing at the time.

ABERDEEN

But Marty was pretty far gone with Alzheimer's, and he forgot where he put it. Jezebel probably hid it here, where she lived in complete anonymity until we moved in!

NANCY DROOP

That's why Rita Dowdy returned: to find the weapon that would put her away for life! Isn't that right, Ms. Dowdy?

RITA

I know my rights!

ALL

You have the right to remain silent...

RITA

Ah, shut up!

NANCY DROOP

That's why she wore latex gloves all the time.

ALL

No fingerprints!

JENNIFER

Federal Agent Droop, where did Jezebel hide Rita's murder weapon?

NANCY DROOP

Where, indeed? Golly, Don't know where it could be.

Nancy puts on a pair of latex gloves and looks high and low around the lobby and office.

RITA

You ain't gonna find it, Droop! I've been looking for twenty-four hours, and I didn't find it!

NANCY DROOP

That establishes your whereabouts  
at the time of Mrs. Fetchim's  
murder!

ALL

Opportunity.

NANCY DROOP

I'll bet Mrs. Fetchim was  
eavesdropping and saw you come in  
here late last night.

RITA

Conjecture.

NANCY DROOP

Bet you were looking in the desk,  
where you found the fishing knife!

RITA

Supposition.

ALL

The means!

NANCY DROOP

Bet Mrs. Jessica Fetchim knew that  
you would kill her and all these  
fine hobbyist detectives one by one  
until you found your murder weapon.

HANK

She sacrificed herself to save our  
lives.

NANCY DROOP

Exactly! By drawing you all into  
her murder investigation adding to  
the distractions, misdirection, and  
multiple suspects that added to the  
chaos around here.

FATHER BEIGE

So, we were helpful to the FBI in  
solving the case?

NANCY DROOP

Extremely! By eavesdropping and  
snooping around, you always served  
as potential witnesses to any  
additional killing.

RITA

Great! You nosy former detective-wannabes spoiled everything!

Nancy stands on the desk, and looks like a preacher.

NANCY DROOP

You see, nobody wanted to see Mrs. Jezebel Fetchim die! There's money in murder! But there's also fun, and exciting detective work, with the use of critical thinking, evidence-based learning, and deduction!

The hobbyist detectives cheer and congratulate each other, shaking hands and kissing each other on the cheeks. Everyone does a double-take when Father Beige kisses Hank on the cheek.

RITA

Oh, brother!

NANCY DROOP

Research proves that half of the television audience sees themselves as smart enough to be a detective.

(beat)

Sure, they don't show it by the way they vote, and half of them also think they can be doctors after watching medical shows, but solving murders on TV cheers people up!

RITA

(sarcastic)

I've heard everything! TV oversimplifies life, makes a mockery of violent crimes and death, and tranquilizes you. I know! They let us watch your TV re-runs in prison!

NANCY DROOP

I think Mrs. Jezebel Fetchim knew things were changing, that audiences were becoming more sophisticated and diverse, so she devised this ingenious finale to her glorious life!

JENNIFER

A murder mystery!

The former hobbyist detectives cheer and smile!

ABERDEEN

She knew things had to change!

HANDSY

Our pre-occupation with guilt-free  
TV murder had to come to an end.

The smiles cease.

HANK

Does that mean our amateur  
detective work might be limited in  
the future?

Everyone sighs.

RITA

(sarcastic)

Gonna miss ya!

Doc perks up!

DOC

Wait a minute! What about the last  
basic laws of network TV murder  
mysteries: the stupid full  
confession at the end by the  
murderer?

JENNIFER

Hey, that's right!

RITA

Can't prove I killed the famous  
Mrs. Jezebel Fetchim with that  
fishing knife. Every idiot here  
handled it, and wiped off any  
prints!

The former hobbyist detectives look ashamed.

ABERDEEN

This is awful! Mrs. Fetchim's  
murder would go unsolved!

The former hobbyist detectives look more ashamed.

ANNA LIZA

It's all our fault.

Silence. Then Nancy becomes jubilant.

NANCY DROOP

Shucks! It's time for an L-A-C!



FATHER BEIGE  
A Late-Arriving Clue?

NANCY DROOP  
Golly, That's right!

Nancy opens her tiny purse and pulls out a plastic bag with a small pistol in it. Rita recognizes it right away.

RITA  
What the...

NANCY DROOP  
(interrupts)  
Heck! I know, right! I found this pistol last week when I heard they were releasing you from prison.

HANK  
That the gun Rita used to kill all those other people?

NANCY DROOP  
Ballistics matched!

DOC  
But Jezebel's murder would remain unsolved!

NANCY DROOP  
Not necessarily! Huddle up!

Nancy and the others huddle up. Rita is dragged into the huddle unwillingly, and they whisper. Only Rita yells.

RITA  
You wouldn't!

Nancy and the former hobbyist detectives whisper more.

FATHER BEIGE  
A little white lie, is all!

RITA  
You'll never get away with it!

Nancy and the former hobbyist detectives whisper more.

JENNIFER  
Would keep our perfect record intact.

RITA  
That's against the law!

Nancy puts on a pair of latex gloves. The hobbyist detectives restrain Rita, while Nancy (with the gun and oil lamp) leads Doc downstairs.

They HEAR a gunshot! BAM!

Nancy and Doc RACE upstairs.

NANCY DROOP

Rita Dowdy, I'm arresting you for the premeditated murder of Mrs. Jezebel Fetchim. Anything you say, can and will be used against you.

RITA

She was already dead!

NANCY DROOP

Gosh! I've got six witnesses and a coroner who disagree! Doc will perform a second autopsy, and with this murder, and the ballistics matching you to the others, this is how Mrs. Jezebel Fetchim planned to put you away for life!

FATHER BEIGE

She's a saint, Mrs. Jezebel Fetchim!

The former hobbyist detectives look down in a moment of silence. Rita looks up to heaven.

RITA

Okay, I'll confess to everything. I did it. I stabbed Jezebel Fetchim with that fishing knife and killed the others with the pistol! Are you happy now!

DOC

That's it! The stupid full confession at the end of every TV murderer story!

JENNIFER

And we're all back in business!

NANCY DROOP

That's our last basic rule: No one ever uses their right to remain silent on TV shows! Remember that!

Nancy leads Rita out in handcuffs, while the hobbyist  
detectives jump around and cheer!

FADE OUT.

THE END