

NOT A MURDER MYSTERY

*By
David Dubczak*

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NOT A MURDER MYSTERY

*for Laura
and all dreamers*

NOT A MURDER MYSTERY

CAST: 18 Actors. 4-14F, 1-12M, 10NB

CURLEY	(F) A con-artist and stowaway aboard the Mississippi Belle. She disguises herself as southern gentleman "Abel Underwood." Spirited and free.
PITT	(M/F, as Patricia or Patty) Curley's brother, a steward. Uptight.
PROFESSOR HASHER	(M/F, as Julia) Egyptologist. Conniving.
BASHER	(M/F) A student of Professor Mayberry.
MELINDA	(F) A wealthy socialite. Controlling.
VIOLET	(F) Melinda's college-age daughter. Rebellious.
APPLEBOTTOM	(M/F) The Chief Steward. Uptight.
STOUT	(F, or M as Edwin) World-Renowned detective.
BENNETT	(F, or M as Andrew) Dean of Faculty at Tulane University.
HARPER	(M/F) Child of Bennett.
SAWYER	(M/F) Child of Bennett.
CAPTAIN	(M/F) Captain of the Belle. Skittish.
CARL	(M) The coal stoker. Gruff.
SYLVIA	(F) A very old woman. Nearly deaf. Aloof.

Supported by an ensemble cast of any size. Three passengers (Named Passenger 1, 2, and 3) have speaking parts in Act II.

TIME: Early 1900s

PLACE: The Mississippi Belle, from New Orleans to St. Louis

NOTE: A few Mississippi River paddle wheel vessels to reference for set design may be the *Delta Queen*, the *Belle of Louisville*, and the *Natchez*.

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ACT I

SCENE 1: THE CARGO HOLD

It's 1901 and the paddlewheeler "Mississippi Belle" is preparing to depart New Orleans for St Louis. The cargo hold is full of crates and luggage awaiting crew to take them to passenger rooms.

Enter CURLEY: Young, charming, hypnotic smile - and dripping wet. Curley has a suitcase, and is sneaking around.

CURLEY. *(whisper shout)* Pitt? Pitt! Pitt, where are you? *(Stunned, the uptight and proper PITT, a steward aboard the Belle, enters - in a tux.)*

PITT. What? Curley? No. No, no, no. You can't be here. Go back where you came from.

CURLEY. Overboard?

PITT. You swam to the ship?

CURLEY. *(heavy sarcasm)* No, I wash my clothes while I wear them, it's the latest thing. They form to my body when they dry.

PITT. You can't be here. You don't have a ticket.

CURLEY. Let me be a part of the crew. I'll sleep in your room, I'll earn my keep.

PITT. Curley...

CURLEY. This is it. I'm going legitimate. *(Beat. Pitt stares.)* I only ever needed one break. One break to leave crime behind me. *(beat)* Mom left me her store.

PITT. *(Studying Curley and her suitcase)* You brought your forgery kit.

CURLEY. And my lock picks, but that was out of habit.

PITT. Your whole life is out of habit.

CURLEY. Please, Pitt. For your kid sister.

PITT. Mom was broke and the store's nearly bankrupt.

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CURLEY. I'll figure that out later! (*Pitt hesitates. The ship's horn blows - passengers are about to board.*)

PITT. Go to my cabin, clean yourself up. I have an extra tuxedo. Get back here as soon as you can.

CURLEY. (*sarcasm*) Wash it *after* I put it on?

PITT. Shut up, get outta here! Wait, hold on, help me move this trunk.

(*They approach a steamer trunk belonging to PROFESSOR PJ*

RICKETTS. They strain, struggle, and groan trying to lift it.)

CURLEY. Man, it's heavy!

PITT. Grab that cart.

CURLEY. (*Pulls over a wheeled cart. With more strains and groans, they plop the trunk on the cart.*) Is there like a dead body in it or something?

(*reads the tag*) "Professor P.J. Ricketts." (*Fiddles with the lock*)

PITT. Curley!

CURLEY. Aren't you curious?

PITT. I am paid to respect privacy.

CURLEY. (*shrugs, goes back to fiddling with lock*) I'm not.

PITT. (*Bats her hand away*) Stop! (*The ship's horn blows again.*)

PITT. (*Hesitates*) Once you're dry, can you get that up to room 217? The lift is in the back.

CURLEY. You trust me?

PITT. No... but, can you?

CURLEY. Yes.

PITT. Don't look in the trunk.

CURLEY. I won't.

PITT. Don't!

CURLEY. (*Throws hands up*) On my honor!

PITT. That's what I'm afraid of. (*Pitt exits. Curley shakes some more water off, and then pushes the trunk off stage.*)

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SCENE 2: THE DINING ROOM

The dining room of the Mississippi Belle is ornately dressed. The centerpiece of the dining room is a large, gold EGYPTIAN MUMMY SARCOPHAGUS. Professor JULIUS T MAYBERRY stands proudly beside the sarcophagus, joined by his two "graduate students," HASHER and BASHER. A crowd of adorers stands ooh-ing and aww-ing. In the crowd in particular are: MELINDA COATES-ROBERTSON, a wealthy high-society lady, and her teenage daughter VIOLET, who is less than thrilled to be there. DOCTOR ANNABELLE BENNETT, Dean of Faculty at Tulane University - a very proud woman (can also be played by a male, as Andrew Bennett), with her children HARPER and SAWYER (gender-flexible). HARPER is the more mature one of the two. SAWYER is very bratty and has poor impulse control. DETECTIVE ELOISE STOUT, a famous private-eye. SYLVIA DARLING - very, very, very old... and hard of hearing. Everyone is gawking at the mummy, except for Sylvia, who could care less. Bennett keeps trying to restrain Sawyer, who keeps running away. Among the extras in the crowd are passengers and nicely-dressed waiters and servants, mingling about and preparing the tables for dinner. After a bit, Pitt joins, along with a now tuxedoed and dry Curley.

PROFESSOR. Yes, this sarcophagus carries the mummified body of one Pharaoh Neferhotep the Third, of the Sixteenth Dynasty of Egypt. (*ignores his two students*) Who I recently discovered in the Valley of the Kings.

CROWD. Oooh! Ahhhh! Etc.

SYLVIA. You should've left it where it was. It's probably cursed.

STOUT. The Valley of the Kings, did you say?

PROFESSOR. I'm sorry, and you are?

STOUT. My apologies. Detective Eloise Stout, Private Eye. (*The crowd gasps. She's rather famous.*)

CROWD. (*ad lib*) She's famous. Is that really her? Didn't she solve that one case? I heard she can talk to the dead. Etc.

PROFESSOR. Yes, in the Valley of the Kings. You see, it's really quite extraordinary...

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STOUT. *(interrupting)* In the Sixteenth Dynasty, you say?

PROFESSOR. *(annoyed)* Yes, the Sixteenth Dynasty of Egypt. Now, as I was saying...

MELINDA. Excuse me, Professor? Sorry, Melinda Coates-Robertson... you've probably heard of me... perhaps one of your students could explain the role they played in the discovery? You know, to set a good example for my dear child Violet? *(Hasher and Basher look simultaneously nervous and excited.)*

PROFESSOR. *(rudely)* No, that won't be necessary. You see, finding a new mummy in the Valley of the Kings-

STOUT. From the Sixteenth Dynasty?

PROFESSOR. FROM THE SIXTEENTH DYNASTY! *(Clears his throat)* Sorry... finding a new mummy requires a vastly superior intellect, *(proudly)* which I have. *(Enter LEO APPLEBOTTOM, Chief Steward of the Belle.)*

APPLEBOTTOM. And Professor Mayberry will detail all of his exploits in his afternoon lecture tomorrow. And with that, dinner is about to be served. Would you all please take your seats at your tables?

SYLVIA. That thing shouldn't be in here. It's probably cursed. *(All of the wait staff, including Pitt and Curley, assist diners to their tables, pulling out chairs and filling water glasses. Doctor Bennett hands Sawyer over to Harper and grabs Professor's attention.)*

BENNETT. Excuse me, Professor. I'm Doctor Annabelle Bennett, Dean of Faculty at Tulane University. Are you aware we have an opening for a visiting professor of history? An Egyptologist might do quite nicely!

PROFESSOR. I'll take it!

BENNETT. Not so fast! But I will say, I think we should get to know each other on this trip. *(STOKER CARL walks through the dining room, filthy, covered in coal soot, with a large coal shovel. His stench repulses all of the passengers.)*

APPLEBOTTOM. Hey! You're not allowed up here!

CARL. *(ignoring him)* Bathroom.

APPLEBOTTOM. You have a bathroom below decks!

CARL. It sucks. *(The fancy crowd recoils at his language.)*

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APPLEBOTTOM. Mind your language!

CARL. (*sarcasm*) Oh, sorry. It "blows."

APPLEBOTTOM. I can have you dismissed for this!

CARL. (*indicating to his shovel*) Then you won't be going nowhere.

(*Exits*) (*At one long table are all of the main characters - Professor, Hasher, Basher, Bennett and kids, Sylvia, and Stout. There remains at the table one empty chair.*)

VIOLET. (*almost rude*) Who's missing?

APPLEBOTTOM. It seems that Professor PJ Ricketts is tardy for dinner. (*snaps his fingers. A waiter - not Pitt or Curley - answers.*) Make your way to room 217 and call on Professor Ricketts to join us? (*The waiter nods and runs off.*)

PROFESSOR. I'm sorry, did you say PJ Ricketts?

APPLEBOTTOM. That's correct.

PROFESSOR. Why, he's the Egyptian History professor at the University of New Orleans.

VIOLET. Two Egyptologists on the same boat? That's a co-eeen-key-deenk.

MELINDA. Violet! Watch your manners!

STOUT. There's no such thing as a coincidence.

VIOLET. This is the most boring boat ever. Why did you have to bring me?

MELINDA. You're not mature enough to be left at home, dear. Now shush.

VIOLET. I can fend for myself, all I need is a... (*She holds up a knife as though she's about to stab someone.*)

MELINDA. Dear Violet! Enough of that. Put it down. (*Violet stabs the end of the knife into the table, leaving the handle sticking straight up, then smiles at Melinda. The waiter reenters, struggling to remain calm, and whispers something to Applebottom. They both run off together.*)

STOUT. So tell me, Professor, of your excursions into the Valley of the Kings.

PROFESSOR. Well, my students and I are on the cutting edge of research in interpreting hieroglyphics to lead to the location of long lost tombs.

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STOUT. Fascinating! *(To students)* Tell us about it?

SYLVIA. Dear Lord, you all are so uptight.

VIOLET. Thank you!

SYLVIA. I've been alive for ninety-something years.

STOUT. You don't know your age?

SYLVIA. Losing track is easier than you think!

APPLEBOTTOM. *(Running in, yelling)* Detective! Detective! *(Stopping and putting on a false calm)* Sorry everyone, no need to be alarmed.

Detective, would you mind allowing me to show you something?

Something that is not wrong... because there's nothing wrong... *(Stout excuses herself and follows.)*

APPLEBOTTOM. No reason for anyone else to follow. *(Stout and Applebottom exit together. After a few moments, with curious eyes darting across the room to each other, everyone (except Sylvia) instantly and simultaneously jump up from their chairs and dash out of the dining room.)*

SYLVIA. *(oblivious)* Why yes, thank you, I'll have the crab cakes. *(Blackout.)*

SCENE 3: RICKETTS' ROOM

Lights up on Ricketts' empty room. The bed and floor are dripping with fresh blood! The steamer trunk is open and empty. Items are strewn about, and the room is a mess. The stateroom window is open. Stout runs in, followed by Applebottom... and then the rest of the crowd.

STOUT. My... oh my. *(Violet is the first one to break through the crowd.)*

VIOLET. *(awestruck)* Woooooow...

STOUT. Don't touch anything. Mister Applebottom, who was the last one in here? Besides Doctor Ricketts of course?

CROWD. *(ad-lib)* Not me. It wasn't I. Certainly not me, etc.

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STOUT. Professor? A word. *(Pulls Professor aside)* It's unfortunate to say, but I do believe I saw your students in this area here alone after we departed.

PROFESSOR. If you need to do a quick search of their cabin, I can watch them here.

STOUT. Everyone stay... well lookie here, everyone followed us up. Mister Applebottom, ensure nobody leaves the premises, and don't touch anything! *(Stout runs out. As soon as he leaves, chaos erupts.)*

CROWD. *(ad lib)* A murder on the ship! Was it you? It wasn't me? Etc. *(Pitt and Curley attempt to quietly back out.)*

APPLEBOTTOM. Stewards! Block the door. *(They stop, and stand guard in the doorway.)*

MELINDA. What do we do, Applebottom? Are we in danger? *(Violet grins with barely-contained excitement.)*

APPLEBOTTOM. I don't know. I think we're safe in numbers as long as we stay here.

BENNETT. Would it be prudent to dock the ship?

SAWYER. This is like that time Harper pricked his finger... if only we heard him screaming bloody murder!

BENNETT. Sawyer! Don't say murder!

SAWYER. Whaaat? *(Meanwhile, Violet is inspecting the steamer trunk. She picks out a note and inspects it.)*

VIOLET. What's this? *(Stout reenters.)*

PROFESSOR. Detective? *(Stout shakes her head to indicate, "nothing.")*

APPLEBOTTOM. We seem to have found something.

VIOLET. It's a list of everything that is... *(looks down)* ...was... in the steamer trunk.

STOUT. *(reading)* Two thousand dollars in gold coin... one hundred pounds of ancient Egyptian pottery... four volumes of my recent textbook, "Interpreting Egyptian Art."

VIOLET. Wherever did it go?

STOUT. *(Reveals a revolver)* Applebottom, ensure everyone proceeds to the dining room immediately. I'm going to conduct a room-by-room sweep of the staterooms. Nobody leaves the dining room, and don't touch

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anything in here! Passengers, I regret to inform you that there is a murderer aboard this vessel. *(Shouts and screams. Blackout.)*

SCENE 4: THE DINING ROOM

Completely unaware anything has happened, Sylvia waits at her table. Pitt and Curley come running in ahead of everyone.

PITT. It was you, wasn't it?

CURLEY. *(having fun)* J'accuse!

PITT. You're a liar, a cheat, and a thief, and for two thousand dollars in gold coin, I'm pretty sure you'd murder.

CURLEY. *(joking)* And you wouldn't?

PITT. You betrayed our parents for less.

CURLEY. *(suddenly very serious)* Hey now, you weren't there.

PITT. I didn't need to be. *(beat)* You were in the room by yourself.

CURLEY. *(taken aback)* With the trunk? *(beat)* I swear to you, this wasn't me. I've done a lot of things... but this wasn't me.

PITT. I won't say anything. But if I find out it WAS you, I won't lie to them.

CURLEY. You won't need to. *(The rest of the crowd enters and shuffles to their seats. Pitt and Curley play calm and try to begin serving drinks, as though nothing is wrong.)*

SAWYER. Who do you think he's coming for next?

HARPER. Sawyer!

SAWYER. Oh. I'm sorry. *(beat)* Could be a she. My bad. *(Stoker Carl walks through.)*

APPLEBOTTOM. Carl! I told you to stay below decks!

CARL. Okay. Who killed the party? *(The crowd gasps.)*

APPLEBOTTOM. Haven't you heard? There's a dead man aboard.

SAWYER. Actually, there's not. There was no body.

HARPER. Sawyer!

SAWYER. What? You want me to lie now? Geez, there's no winning with

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you.

BENNETT. The curse of smart children.

CARL. Let me know if you want me to stop the ship.

PROFESSOR. Excuse me, kind sir. Someone of my vastly superior intellect understands this, but for the mere commonfolk, can you explain exactly how you... "stop the ship?"

CARL. *(very slowly)* I give coal... coal make boat go... I stop, boat stop.

PROFESSOR. *(annoyed)* Indeed. *(Carl exits.)*

APPLEBOTTOM. I think we call this voyage to an end and invite the police aboard.

MELINDA. The police?

APPLEBOTTOM. Yes. I think that's the right call, don't you? The murderer might... is probably aboard. For our own protection, we should disembark immediately.

MELINDA. But the police...

PROFESSOR. Are you afraid of something, Mrs. Coates-Robertson?

BENNETT. No need to pry, Professor.

VIOLET. She's afraid of a scandal and doesn't want to be associated with it.

MELINDA. Hmph... oof... ugh... I...

VIOLET. These are the sorts of things that happen to poor people.

MELINDA. Violet! What I mean is we should handle it internally. Have the murder solved before we dock.

PROFESSOR. We do have people aboard with the intellect needed for such a task. Referring to myself and Doctor Bennett of course.

BENNETT. I am an expert at very few things, Professor. Of those things, I am one of the foremost experts, but criminology is not one of them. We should let the professionals handle it.

PROFESSOR. *(faking politeness)* Indeed. *(Stout reenters.)*

STOUT. Well, ladies and gentlemen, I have conducted a thorough search of your staterooms and the cargo hold and found no one nor no item amiss.

MELINDA. Did the murderer escape?

SYLVIA. Yes, I too would like my steak!

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STOUT. Not at all, not at all. In fact, I'm quite sure the murderer is right here in this room! *(Gasps and finger pointing! Ad lib accusations.)*

STOUT. Quiet! We also have the missing treasure, and there is one place I have not yet looked.

VIOLET. *(Jumps up and dumps her purse out on the table.)* I swear to you it wasn't me! This is all my stuff. Mine! I swear. I didn't steal this stuff from anybody... aboard this ship.

STOUT. Interesting new development I'm sure we'll talk about later.

(Violet sees the knife she stabbed into the table, and quickly removes it.)

STOUT. No, there is one place big enough and private enough to hold the treasure that we have not yet opened.

CROWD. *(Ad lib wondering aloud. Stout turns and slowly approaches the mummy coffin.)*

PROFESSOR. What are you doing?

STOUT. Leave no corner unchecked, Professor.

PROFESSOR. No! You can't open that! It belongs to the St Louis Museum of History! *(Basher and Hasher jump up and start to rush the coffin.)*

STOUT. It must be done, professor! *(Sawyer and Harper jump up and trip Hasher and Basher as they try to rush the coffin! The crowd gasps!)*

PROFESSOR. I assure you detective, there's no treasure in there! *(Stout unlocks the coffin.)*

SYLVIA. Is she about to open that? The curse!

PROFESSOR. Detective, no! *(With a flourish, Stout opens the coffin. The crowd gasps! There's no mummy. There's no gold. There's no treasure. Just a pile of red masonry bricks. Sylvia stands and passes out! Some of the crowd tends to Sylvia, some rush to inspect the coffin, some stand and accuse each other of murder and thievery! Sawyer rushes up and grabs a brick. Harper chases him around. Bennett is too distracted to notice. Professor pulls Basher and Hasher aside, to the front of the stage.)*

PROFESSOR. What happened to our gold, you nitwits?

BASHER. I dunno, boss.

HASHER. I swear to you, we haven't opened it since we locked the gold inside yesterday!

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PROFESSOR. Fools! We almost died robbing that bank! If I can't have that gold, I'll have your heads!

HASHER. The murderer must've taken it!

PROFESSOR. *(mocking)* "The murderer must've taken it!" What a stupid... *(Detective Stout interrupts their circle.)*

STOUT. Are you sure the mummy was inside when you brought it aboard?

HASHER. The murderer must've taken it!

STOUT. There's undoubtedly a connection.

PROFESSOR. *(suddenly very professional)* Yes, that's what we were just discussing.

STOUT. What's the value of the mummy?

PROFESSOR. About five hundred thousand dollars.

STOUT. Black Market?

PROFESSOR. There are collectors, unfortunately.

STOUT. Interesting. *(Stout walks off. Suddenly, a hush falls over the room. We hear the heavy footsteps of CAPTAIN BARNABUS BRIGGS. He stands at attention in the room, saying nothing. Everyone stands uncomfortably, waiting for what's next.)*

PITT. *(quietly, to Curley)* Get outta here.

CURLEY. What?

PITT. Leave. Now! *(Curley dashes off stage. The crowd, not noticing their conversation, continues to stand in reverence to the Captain. After a few moments, Violet rushes the Captain.)*

VIOLET. Captain, we have a... *(The Captain recoils in horror, as though he's scared of Violet.)*

APPLEBOTTOM. Sorry, that's Captain Briggs. He's afraid of passengers.

MELINDA. Afraid of passengers? What kind of ship is this?

APPLEBOTTOM. Our old captain disappeared, and he was a tugboat captain with no boat.

STOUT. Captain, there's been a murder aboard your vessel.

CAPTAIN. This is why I don't do... *(gestures)* ...people.

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STOUT. I'm not an officer of the law. I only have the investigative authority you grant me. *(Stout waits for a response, assuming the Captain knows how to respond. But she's wrong, so she continues.)* So... do you give me the authority to conduct an investigation aboard the Mississippi Belle?

CAPTAIN. Yes... just leave me out of it... *(turns and flees. The room turns toward Detective Stout.)*

APPLEBOTTOM. What do we do?

STOUT. *(Sits at table)* Nothing. I'm on vacation.

BENNETT. But we have to find the murderer! There are kids aboard!

PROFESSOR. And the thief!

SYLVIA. *(aloof)* I'm still waiting on my drink!

STOUT. Me too, miss. Me too. There's nothing I can do. And nothing I need to do.

MELINDA. Why would you ask for permission to investigate and then not investigate?

STOUT. *(Flips through dinner menu)* Deep down, every criminal *wants* to be caught. The smarter they are, the more planning that went into the crime, the harder it is to accept not getting credit for their work. *(Stout stands, front and center.)* As long as the murderer remains aboard this vessel, they will make a mistake. *(Directly to Applebottom)* I've never found a criminal, Mister Applebottom. They always find me *(turns to exit)*. I'll be in my cabin. I'm on vacation. *(Exits. Everyone stands in shock for a moment. Suddenly, Sylvia stands.)*

SYLVIA. The service on this ship blows! *(After a stunned moment, everyone returns to background arguing. Curley enters, cautiously.)*

APPLEBOTTOM. Excuse me? *(Everyone ignores him and remains infighting.)* Excuse me? *(Again, ignored.) (shouting at the top of his lungs)*

EXCUSE ME! *(Silence)*. That's better. Now, yes, there's been a murder. Yes, the murderer may be one of you. The way I see it, you all paid a lot for this voyage and you're all probably hungry. As long as no one goes anywhere alone, there's no reason why you can't enjoy a meal.

MELINDA. Excuse me, Applebottom?

APPLEBOTTOM. *(annoyed)* Yes?

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MELINDA. *(climbs up on a chair to address the crowd.)* A hem. Thank you. My name, as you know, is Melinda Coates-Robertson, purveyor of fine women's clothing.

HASHER. Doesn't that make you rich?

MELINDA. *(delighted)* It's rude for me to say so myself, so I was hoping someone would say it for me. Yes, yes it does. And as a... a, um... person of means...

BASHER. Does that mean rich person?

MELINDA. *(smiling)* Yes. Yes it does. As a *person of means*, I can offer up a reward if we find the person who killed Professor Ricketts. One million dollars! *(Basher grabs Hasher and thrusts him forward.)*

BASHER. He did it!

PROFESSOR. Students!

BASHER. It was him! He did it!

MELINDA. It would require incontestable proof that can withstand an inquiry in a court of law.

BASHER. *(sheepish)* Oh. Never mind.

HASHER. *(to Basher)* Thanks a lot! *(They start hitting each other, and wrestle on the floor. Professor steps in and grabs them.)*

PROFESSOR. That's enough! I apologize for the contemptible behavior of my students. *(The crowd starts fighting again. Curley pulls Pitt front and center.)*

CURLEY. Hey, got any free rooms?

PITT. I told you to get lost.

CURLEY. We'll figure that out later. A million dollar reward!

PITT. What?

CURLEY. I have an idea. You serve dinner. I'll be back. Hey, where do you keep the passenger log?

PITT. In the Purser's office. But it's locked up.

CURLEY. *(chuckling)* You're funny. I'll be back. *(Curley runs off stage.)*

PITT. What? Curley!

PROFESSOR. *(pulls Hasher and Basher to the front of the stage.)* We better find who took our gold!

HASHER. You mean the Bank of New Orleans' gold?

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PROFESSOR. (*whacks Hasher upside the head.*) If they can't secure it they don't deserve to keep it. (*whacks Basher upside the head.*)

BASHER. Oww! What was that for?

PROFESSOR. You're about to say something dumb.

BASHER. I haven't thought of anything yet...

PROFESSOR. Good. If we don't find our loot, you're going home empty-handed and I'll dump you in the poor slum I found you in, got it?

HASHER AND BASHER. (*both nodding*) Yes, Professor.

APPLEBOTTOM. (*The crowd is still infighting.*) SILENCE!!!!!!! (*The fighting immediately stops.*) Good. Now, I beg of you... take your seats, and let us serve dinner. Just don't go off alone. Stewards! (*Pitt steps up.*) Where is... (*can't think of Curley's name*) ...the other one?

PITT. He went off alone.

APPLEBOTTOM. Well, okay then. Let's begin serving dinner.

HASHER. What do we do, Professor?

PROFESSOR. Just eat dinner. I'll think of something.

BASHER. I'll let you know if I have an idea.

PROFESSOR. Please don't. (*The guests nervously take their seats at the table. Sawyer and Harper bicker.*)

BENNETT. Children! Your manners, please.

SAWYER. There's a murder and you expect us to have good manners?

BENNETT. There'll be another one if you don't!

PROFESSOR. Someone on this vessel has had means, motive, and opportunity. Students, as soon as we boarded the vessel, I sent you upstairs to put on a proper change of clothes. Did you see anything? (*Hasher and Basher shake their heads, no.*) You saw nothing upstairs when you were up there... alone? (*Again, no.*) When you passed Professor Ricketts' room on the way to your own? (*No once more.*)

BENNETT. An expert in criminal investigation now, Professor Mayberry?

PROFESSOR. Trying to establish if anyone had opportunity to find themselves alone with Professor Ricketts. I may be a professor with superior intellect, but money also buys things.

BENNETT. And your students?

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PROFESSOR. (*covering for himself*) And I can't waste an opportunity to teach my students some deductive logic. They're but poor, struggling students.

VIOLET. (*sarcasm*) I'm so sorry you're not all millionaires. Life must be awful.

MELINDA. Anyone who's not a millionaire is simply too lazy to become one. All it takes is a bit of hard work, grit, and a good idea.

SAWYER. How'd you become a millionaire?

MELINDA. My father died. (*beat*) Well it wasn't so easy! I had to wait his entire life! (*beat*) Now, I just want to make sure my Violet doesn't get murdered, so she can find a good man, settle down, and lead a nice life.

VIOLET. I am in college, you know.

BENNETT. Congratulations.

VIOLET. (*sarcasm*) I'm there to get my M R S. (*Professor chuckles.*)

HASHER. (*whispering to Professor*) I don't understand the joke...

VIOLET. It means I'm only there to find a husband and get married!

PROFESSOR. Academia isn't suited for everyone, dear Violet.

VIOLET. Certainly not for any potential husbands.

MELINDA. Pardon?

VIOLET. Where are the bold? The brave? The daring? In the classroom? I think not. College is full of the bookish types. I want to meet someone flamboyant and worldly!

CURLEY. (*Makes a grand entrance, dressed in flamboyant men's clothing, having adopted the alias of "Abel Underwood," an outgoing and jovial world traveler with no roots to speak of.*) I'm sorry I'm late, ladies and gentlemen. Is there still an open seat at the table?

PITT. (*quietly*) What are you doing?

CURLEY. Yes, thank you, I'll take that seat.

APPLEBOTTOM. Pardon me, sir, might I ask your name?

CURLEY. Mister Abel Underwood, at your service.

APPLEBOTTOM. I apologize, I don't recall an *Abel Underwood* on our passenger list.

CURLEY. (*chuckles*) I don't fault anyone for an erroneous memory, kind sir. I sometimes fail to remember what country I'm waking up in!

NOT A MURDER MYSTERY

APPLEBOTTOM. You won't be offended if I check the passenger log book?

CURLEY. Why would I? (*Applebottom walks off. Curley takes the empty seat next to Violet.*) How do you do?

VIOLET. (*nearly choking*) Hi.

CURLEY. Excuse me, waiter? (*Pitt approaches.*) Could I please have a glass of lemon water? No more than a quarter squeeze of a lemon wedge so that the water gets that slightly tart taste without becoming too bitter. And if you would be so kind, I do love that delightful ring of sugar around the glass!

PITT. (*Nods. Annoyed*) Coming right up, Mister Underwood.

APPLEBOTTOM. (*Reenters*) My apologies, Mister Underwood, your name was right there in the log book in my own handwriting. I must have simply forgotten. I'm sorry for the trouble.

CURLEY. None to be had, Mister Applebottom. Now, has anyone found the murder weapon?

BENNETT. Pardon?

CURLEY. The murder weapon? Raise your hand if you heard a gunshot? Anyone? (*looks around*) No? Okay, then the murder weapon is likely a knife. Anyone found a bloody knife? Anyone? (*After a moment's pause, the entire dining room jumps up all at once and runs off stage, except for Curley, Violet, Sylvia, and Applebottom.*)

APPLEBOTTOM. But... dessert!

CURLEY. Not sure dessert is in order. Everyone's trying to save room for... a million dollars! (*Applebottom throws a mini-tantrum, then leaves.*)

CURLEY. And what's your name?

VIOLET. Violet. But it's just a placeholder until I become "Missus Somebody Else."

CURLEY. That's too bad. Violet's a nice name. It's a lot better than Cu-

VIOLET. Abel?

CURLEY. Yes, Abel.

VIOLET. Mother offered a million dollar reward, and then nobody did anything.

NOT A MURDER MYSTERY

CURLEY. Ah, paralyzed with fear. I've seen it before. I once happened upon a civil war in Tunisia and experienced that phenomenon with the villagers. I just had to break their momentum.

VIOLET. You know who did it?

CURLEY. I have an inkling. Just need proof.

VIOLET. What if someone else finds the knife?

CURLEY. It'll what? Prove he was murdered? We already know that.

VIOLET. *(Smiles, and then dismisses herself from the table.)* I'm going to help Mother. But I'll be rooting for you, Mister Underwood.

CURLEY. Farewell.

VIOLET. For now. *(Exits. Pitt enters with the glass of water.)*

SYLVIA. She your girlfriend now?

CURLEY. Pardon? Oh, heavens no.

SYLVIA. What kind of boat is this? The service blows.

PITT. What are you doing?

CURLEY. A million dollars, Pitt. A million dollars!

PITT. I know! What are you doing?

CURLEY. You know who did the murder, brother?

PITT. Enlighten me.

CURLEY. Why, "Abel Underwood," of course. I establish that Abel Underwood had means, motive, and opportunity, and then let Curley present the evidence.

PITT. And then what happens to Abel?

CURLEY. Abel jumps overboard, and Curley becomes a millionaire. *(Leans back and takes a generous sip of water.)* And get this poor woman her dessert. *(Pitt nods an apology to Sylvia, and then exits. Blackout.)*

NOT A MURDER MYSTERY

SCENE 5: THE DINING ROOM

The lights are dim for after-dinner in the dining room. The room is empty. Professor pokes his head in through one door and, seeing the room clear, enters. As he enters, Hasher and Basher enter through the other side. Professor turns to go back out, but is stopped.

HASHER. Hey!

BASHER. Hey, Professor!

PROFESSOR. *(He's cornered, hides his expression, and turns around with a friendly grin.)* Hasher! Basher! Gentlemen. Friends. Comrades. How are you this evening?

HASHER. You're still gonna pay us, aren't you?

PROFESSOR. How can you be thinking about something like that while there's a murderer on the loose on a boat as small as this one?

BASHER. *(intimidating)* We robbed the Bank of New Orleans for you.

HASHER. And loaded the money in that there coffin.

BASHER. You weren't tough enough to get your hands dirty.

HASHER. *We're* tough enough to get our hands dirty.

BASHER. You know.

PROFESSOR. Gentlemen, gentlemen! Of course I'm gonna pay you. I am but a man of my word.

BASHER. The word of a thief?

PROFESSOR. Have I ever let you down?

HASHER. You literally just hired us.

BASHER. We barely know you.

PROFESSOR. This is true... *(scrambling)* Uh... there's a bond among thieves. We robbed the bank together!

HASHER. WE robbed the bank.

BASHER. YOU sat outside.

PROFESSOR. And I was still there when you finished! And I'll always be there... for you.

BENNETT. *(Enters)* Oh, sorry, am I interrupting anything?

NOT A MURDER MYSTERY

PROFESSOR. Nothing! Nothing. In fact, I'm SO glad you're here. In fact, I was, uh, just teaching a little lesson to my students.

BENNETT. A good professor never misses a chance to teach. About what?

HASHER. About how despotic rulers who don't keep their promises often get their heads cut off.

PROFESSOR. *(gulps)* But if you find the... mummy... or win the reward... we have nothing to worry about.

BASHER. *(Hasher and Basher leave, nodding to Bennett on the way.)* We'll be on our way. Dr. Bennett.

HASHER. We may already know who the murderer is!

PROFESSOR. You what???

BENNETT. Enjoy your evening! Pleasure running into you! *(to Professor, after they leave)* You're into contests, Professor Mayberry?

PROFESSOR. *(distracted)* Hmm? Oh... oh, uh... *(come to, formal, covering)* A simple game of deductive logic can only benefit young graduate students, is that so, Doctor?

BENNETT. You're a hands-on instructor?

PROFESSOR. No better way! What brings you here this evening, Doctor?

BENNETT. My hunger's more powerful than the threat of murder. But I see the kitchen's closed.

PROFESSOR. While you're here, might we discuss your open professor position?

BENNETT. Tomorrow, Professor. With kids on the loose, our vessel might sink if I leave them alone but a few minutes longer.

PROFESSOR. I understand. Goodnight, Doctor.

BENNETT. But I very much look forward to your lecture tomorrow! By the way, Mister Deductive Logic, who do you think the murderer is?

PROFESSOR. Doctor, I've already had a mummy stolen from me, I'll not have my million dollars as well.

BENNETT. *(smiling)* See you tomorrow, Professor. *(Exits)*

PROFESSOR. Argh, where's a good murdering axe when you need one! *(Professor turns to run off, but Stout enters, stopping him.)*

NOT A MURDER MYSTERY

STOUT. Something frustrating you, Professor?

PROFESSOR. *(startled)* God! Ugh... *(gaining composure)* I mean, my mummy's missing, and there's a murderer on the loose.

STOUT. If that were true, it'd be dangerous to be down here alone.

PROFESSOR. You're down here alone. *(Stout shows him her gun, then places it on the table.)* I hope you're a good shot in close quarters.

STOUT. *(sitting)* If you've never fired a gun, you wouldn't know a real one if you held it.

PROFESSOR. Do people just pop down to a closed dining room in the middle of the night?

STOUT. With a murderer on the loose and a million dollars to win, how could anyone sleep?

PROFESSOR. Sorry, Detective Stout. I really must be going. *(turns to leave.)*

STOUT. Tell me you're not after that fool's errand of a prize. Let fools be fools and leave the intelligent men to make their own way.

PROFESSOR. *(Stops in his tracks.)* Noooo, I'm not actually trying to win the prize. My students will just work harder at it if they think they have to beat me, is all.

STOUT. You must be quite a professor.

HARPER. *(Harper and Sawyer run through the dining room.)* I heard there's some clues on the other side of the boat!

SAWYER. You did not! Come back!

HARPER. I'm gonna be a millionaire! *(They exit.)*

STOUT. *(chuckling)* Can you imagine if they won? Children!

PROFESSOR. Detective Stout! There is still a murderer on the loose.

STOUT. Supposedly.

PROFESSOR. Pardon?

STOUT. *(Gets up to leave)* There's something strange about this. There may not have even been a murder at all. This whole thing may not even be a murder mystery.

PROFESSOR. But you saw the blood, just as I did.

NOT A MURDER MYSTERY

STOUT. Indeed, but I am often wrong. Detectives often falsely accuse two or three wrong people before finding the real culprit. *(beat)* You're not the murderer, are you?

PROFESSOR. *(joking)* I could be the thief. *(Stout smiles, "fires" at him with a finger gun, and leaves. Professor sees the gun on the table and picks it up.)* Detective, you forgot your... oh, I might as well. *(stuffs the gun in his belt and exits. Blackout.)*

SCENE 6: RICKETTS' ROOM

Violet and Melinda quietly sneak into Ricketts' room.

MELINDA. Where do you think it would be?

VIOLET. Do you see a notebook or a folder or anything?

MELINDA. Check the drawers.

VIOLET. It's the middle of the term, so Professor Ricketts is probably traveling with a gradebook or something. Maybe even my research paper on King Tut.

MELINDA. Surely you aced that paper.

VIOLET. Ha.

MELINDA. B?

VIOLET. *(awkwardly)* Heh...

MELINDA. *(shaming)* Violet!

VIOLET. I failed it, Mother. I don't care about King Tut.

MELINDA. Did Professor Ricketts like you?

VIOLET. You mean as a friend or...?

MELINDA. Violet!

VIOLET. Mom, I hate his stupid class, okay!

MELINDA. You didn't...? *(makes a stabbing motion.)*

VIOLET. No, Mom, I haven't been alone since we boarded.

MELINDA. Except you were. While we were getting dressed for dinner.

VIOLET. Why didn't you kill him? He gave your daughter an F.

MELINDA. Well maybe I should have!

NOT A MURDER MYSTERY

VIOLET. A ha! (*sarcasm*) Detective Stout! I know who the murderer was!

MELINDA. Stop it!

VIOLET. I'm alone in the room with her and I'm scared!

MELINDA. Shush!

VIOLET. Can we just focus on what we came here for?

MELINDA. Yes. Remove evidence that you're one of his students. (*They look around some more. Nothing.*)

VIOLET. This is so weird.

MELINDA. You're clearly better at mischief than I am... which is something we'll talk about later.

VIOLET. No, not that. Doctor Ricketts always has his briefcase with him. I've never seen him without it. That's where he keeps all his school stuff.

MELINDA. I haven't seen a briefcase.

VIOLET. That's the weird part.

MELINDA. Maybe the murderer took that, too?

VIOLET. A million dollars in gold and artifacts... and a briefcase full of lesson plans and failing students' work? (*A moment of introspective silence. Curley enters. Upon seeing the women, tries to back out slowly, but is caught.*) Mister Underwood!

CURLEY. (*tips hat*) Ladies.

MELINDA. What are you doing in here?

CURLEY. I simply entered the wrong room. My apologies. (*beat*) Why are YOU in here? (*Melinda and Violet look at each other, trying to hide their panic.*)

MELINDA. We, um...

VIOLET. Uh...

MELINDA. We...

VIOLET. Thought we, uh...

MELINDA. Um...

VIOLET. Heard... um...

MELINDA. ...the voice... of... um...

VIOLET. The murderer!

MELINDA. The murderer? (*Violet shrugs - "go with me on this."*)

NOT A MURDER MYSTERY

CURLEY. Surely you brought a weapon.

VIOLET. *(rage face)* I'm scrappy.

CURLEY. I see.

VIOLET. *(clears throat)* A hem... why are you here, Mister Underwood?

CURLEY. Well, being an acquaintance of Doctor Ricketts and an expert on ancient Egypt, I thought if there were any clues I could uncover to lend a hand...

MELINDA. Isn't it odd how there happens to be three Egyptologists on the same boat?

CURLEY. Well I'm more of an enthusiast.

MELINDA. I see. *(grabs Violet's hand)* Violet, it's time to go.

VIOLET. Mother!

MELINDA. Mister Underwood needs to work, you'd be no good.

CURLEY. I'm sure that's not true!

VIOLET. See, Mother? It's not true! Mister Underwood, tell Mother how it's not true.

CURLEY. *(stumbling)* Um, well, uh... I mean... did you know Professor Ricketts?

VIOLET. *(Rapidly)* Yes.

MELINDA. No!

VIOLET. No!

CURLEY. Yes?

MELINDA. No!

CURLEY. No?

MELINDA. Yes!

VIOLET. No!

CURLEY. Pardon?

VIOLET. I mean... maybe... I saw him. But I didn't really know anyone at that point.

MELINDA. See, no help.

VIOLET. But I did know-

MELINDA. Violet!

CURLEY. *(stern)* Stop talking over her, Ma'am. It really doesn't flatter you. *(Everyone stops. Melinda isn't used to being talked to in this way.)*

NOT A MURDER MYSTERY

MELINDA. Mister Underwood! Who do you think you are?

CURLEY. Truth be told, Madam, that's very much an open question.

MELINDA. Fine, Violet. You want to be on your own? Be on your own.
(Exits with a huff)

VIOLET. *(Throwing herself into Curley's arms)* I love you!

CURLEY. We just met. I barely know you.

VIOLET. Plenty of time for that later.

CURLEY. No, Violet. Sorry. I need to see that list of items Professor Ricketts left in his trunk. *(Goes to look in the trunk.)*

VIOLET. You could get to know me now.

CURLEY. It's not here.

VIOLET. No one's ever stood up to my mother like that. *(Ashamed)* I wish I could.

CURLEY. Is that note anywhere in the room?

VIOLET. *(Reciting)* "Two thousand dollars in gold coin... one hundred pounds of ancient Egyptian pottery... four volumes of my recent textbook, 'Interpreting Egyptian Art.'"

CURLEY. That doesn't help me.

VIOLET. I have a good memory.

CURLEY. It's very important that I SEE the note. *(Violet grabs Curley and pulls her close.)*

VIOLET. You see me. *(Curley takes a moment to ponder the next move.)*

CURLEY. Uh... Do you know where the note is? *(Violet leans in for a kiss. Curley pulls back.)*

PITT. *(Entering abruptly)* Cur-! Whoa. *(Violet and Curley separate. Pitt is clearly surprised. Curley, for once, doesn't know what to do. A quick-thinking Violet slaps Curley across the face!)*

VIOLET. Mister Underwood! That's no way to treat a lady. *(stomps out past Pitt.)* Good day to you, sir!

PITT. *(Pitt and Curley stand, stunned.)* Well, you're picking up this "being a guy" thing pretty quick.

CURLEY. What do you want, Pitt?

PITT. You need to stop this foolish adventure.

CURLEY. Oh, c'mon.

NOT A MURDER MYSTERY

PITT. Leave it to the professionals.

CURLEY. I've been in scrapes worse than this. This isn't even a scrape! This is... this is a... oh, I don't know, a-

PITT. Catastrophe?

CURLEY. Exaggerate much?

PITT. This is only going to work out badly for you. This is why Mom and Dad tried to keep you from-

CURLEY. I had to leave. If I didn't leave, I never would have become anything. You guys wouldn't let me. *(Beat. Pitt lets that soak in.)*

CURLEY. Look. It's never been easy. I've tripped and fallen down a LOT. But each time, I get back up. Each battle I've fought has made me a little stronger. And now, look at me! I'm doing alright.

PITT. *(Indignant)* You- are- a- CRIMINAL!

CURLEY. *(Smiling)* Yeah, but I'm a darn good one!

PITT. *(Paces, frustrated)* Why are you in here?

CURLEY. I gotta see that note, Pitt. Ricketts' handwriting, I need to see his handwriting. I can copy anyone's handwriting if I see it.

PITT. You promised me you were leaving crime behind you and going straight, but since you got on this boat, you've done nothing but lie and cheat.

CURLEY. Ah, but I haven't stolen!

PITT. What are you going to do when you get into Mom's store - a store that hasn't turned a profit in three years?

CURLEY. What I always do-

PITT. That's what I'm afraid of.

CURLEY. What I always do is find a way - any way. I may be a cheat, but I've never gone hungry, I don't depend on anyone, and I'm nobody's servant.

PITT. Did you kill Doctor Ricketts?

CURLEY. If I said no, would you believe me?

PITT. *(thinks for a moment.)* I won't turn you in. But if anyone asks, I won't lie and tell them you're not capable. *(Exits)*

CURLEY. *(Paces for a moment)* Who has that note? *(Exits. Blackout.)*

NOT A MURDER MYSTERY

SCENE 7: THE DINING ROOM

Captain, Stout, and Applebottom huddle in the dining room.

CAPTAIN. Tell me what we know so far, Detective.

STOUT. The Professor's assistants both had opportunity to be alone with Doctor Ricketts.

CAPTAIN. Is that all?

STOUT. Mister Pitt, the steward, moved the trunk into his room?

APPLEBOTTOM. Yes, I sent Pitt to retrieve the trunk from the cargo hold.

STOUT. And Violet also had opportunity to make her way to Ricketts' room.

APPLEBOTTOM. So our suspects are the students, Pitt, and Violet?

CAPTAIN. Is it problematic that there's no body?

STOUT. It may have been thrown overboard.

APPLEBOTTOM. What else do we know?

STOUT. Mayberry's students reported missing a small bag of personal effects. A bright yellow handbag. *(Professor enters in the background carrying the bright yellow handbag. Upon seeing the group, he panics, and backs out. The group doesn't notice.)*

CAPTAIN. What about the mummy?

STOUT. That's the mystery, Captain. Since this coffin was brought on board, it's not been left unattended. And the whole vessel has been turned over top to bottom! *(Stoker Carl enters, dirty, with his coal shovel.)*

APPLEBOTTOM. I think... CARL! I told you never to come in here!

CARL. And I told you to bring me water.

APPLEBOTTOM. For the last time, you don't give the orders!

CARL. Sure, let me die of thirst! Then this whole thing is just fancy driftwood. And you'd all spend three days bumbling around trying to find out why before anyone thinks to check on me!

APPLEBOTTOM. Carl! Not in front of the Detective!

CARL. *(mocking)* "Gee, why have the engines stopped?" "I don't know, maybe the mummy cursed them?" *(Carl goes into the kitchen.)*

NOT A MURDER MYSTERY

STOUT. Captain, you know this ship better than anyone.

CAPTAIN. No, I don't. I don't know this ship.

APPLEBOTTOM. *(remembering)* You're a tugboat captain!

STOUT. Then who does know this ship better than anyone? *(Beat. They look at the kitchen door.)*

ALL. CARL!

CARL. *(comes out with a glass of water.)* Fine, fine, I'm going back down.

APPLEBOTTOM. No, no, Carl, buddy... *(Moves to hug him, but stops short, noticing the coal soot.)* I need you to use your full knowledge of the underbelly of this vessel to give Detective Stout here a tour.

CARL. No.

APPLEBOTTOM. What?

CAPTAIN. I order you.

CARL. No can do, Cap.

APPLEBOTTOM. Carl!

CARL. Who'll shovel coal? Every moment I stand here, the engine's losing steam. *(Stout takes Carl's shovel and hands it to Applebottom.)*

APPLEBOTTOM. *(indignant)* What?

CARL. That works. Detective, where do you wanna start? *(Carl and Stout walk off together.)*

CAPTAIN. *(pats Applebottom on the shoulder.)* Better get to work, Applebottom, we're losing steam *(Exits).*

APPLEBOTTOM. Mister Pitt!

PITT. *(Running in)* Sir?

APPLEBOTTOM. Grab, um... the other one... start setting the tables for lunch.

PITT. Yes sir *(Runs out. Applebottom huffs, grabs the shovel, and also exits. Professor enters, carrying the yellow bag. Bennett, Sawyer, and Harper enter opposite. Professor panics and throws the yellow bag under a table.)*

BENNETT. Children, you stay out of trouble. Professor, you ready for our interview?

PROFESSOR. Now?

BENNETT. At my college, you must be ready for anything.

NOT A MURDER MYSTERY

PROFESSOR. Then now it is! *(They sit. Professor has to think fast and make up everything he says.)*

BENNETT. Your latest find, Pharaoh Neferhotep... however did you find him?

PROFESSOR. Well, you see, Doctor, it wasn't a hunt for Neferhotep. It was finding a tomb and then using the clues inside to deduce who it was.

BENNETT. Much like solving a murder.

PROFESSOR. The skills do indeed overlap. It requires a highly developed intellect.

BENNETT. How are you doing, solving this murder?

PROFESSOR. I'm... hey, now, Doctor - not so fast! *(They chuckle.)*

BENNETT. Forgive me, Professor. *(In the background, Harper and Sawyer, having crawled under tables, have found Professor's bright yellow bag. Professor notices but, stuck in the interview, can't do anything. He struggles to maintain his composure.)*

BENNETT. How DO you deduce to whom the tomb belongs?

PROFESSOR. *(distracted)* The text... the paintings... the um... um...

BENNETT. Hieroglyphics?

PROFESSOR. The what? Yes. Yes. Hieroglyphics. They, um... *(Harper and Sawyer dig in the bag and remove A BLOODY KNIFE! Bennett does not see, but Professor, Curley, and Pitt sure do! Sawyer plays with the knife, and Harper removes from the bag the NOTE that was once in Ricketts' luggage - the note Curley has been looking for! Curley sees this too and starts punching Pitt on the arm to look and notice. All the while, the interview continues.)*

PROFESSOR. *(reacting)* Dear God No! *(covering)* I mean... they tell a story... about the gods. The gods of ancient Egypt. And we've been able to piece together over years how depictions of the gods change across dynasties. So, *(sees Sawyer chase Harper)* What is happening?!?!?! *(Pitt exits into the kitchen.)*

BENNETT. You're able to match the depictions of the gods in the tomb to your timeline, identifying the tomb as being from the Sixteenth Dynasty.

PROFESSOR. Hmm? What? Yes, yes. That's it. What- what you said.

NOT A MURDER MYSTERY

VIOLET. (*Enters. Curley covers her face with a drink tray. Sawyer hides the knife behind his back.*) Mister Underwood? Mister Underwood?

BENNETT. I'm sorry?

VIOLET. Have you seen Mister Underwood?

PROFESSOR. Can I suggest the possibility that he threw himself overboard?

VIOLET. That's unlikely, we were, um... (*sheepish smile*) I shouldn't say.

BENNETT. Maybe the steward here can help. (*Curley, face hidden behind the tray, vehemently shakes her head, "no."*)

VIOLET. Excuse me, have you seen Mister Underwood? You'll recognize him - strong, impeccable posture... handsome? (*Curley again hides face and shakes head*). He might stand out to you because he's the only man on this boat that treats women with respect?

BENNETT. I knew there was a reason I liked that Mister Underwood.

VIOLET. You keep your paws off him! He's mine! Mine, I say!

CURLEY. (*disguised voice*) He may be taking a pre-lunch nap.

VIOLET. In his room? (*Curley nods. Violet dashes off. Sawyer starts chasing Harper with the knife. Curley moves in to try to grab the bag, but Sawyer grabs it and takes it at the last second. Curley begins chase.*)

BENNETT. If you got the job, you'd spend three years under supervision.

PROFESSOR. Supervision?

BENNETT. Probation. Standard practice.

PROFESSOR. Someone of my intellect? (*Curley is still chasing Sawyer and Harper. Pitt comes out of the kitchen, sees the situation, and grabs her, holding her back. They argue in the background.*)

BENNETT. Surely someone of your intellect can understand why each step of the career ladder is important?

PROFESSOR. (*slightly defeated*) Certainly. Yes.

SYLVIA. (*enters slowly and takes a seat at the same table.*) Why is nobody telling me that lunch is being served early?

BENNETT. Children!

SAWYER AND HARPER. (*Sawyer hides the knife behind his back, and the children stand at attention, in unison - the image of polite, well-trained children.*) Yes, mother?

NOT A MURDER MYSTERY

BENNETT. Go clean yourselves up for lunch.

SAWYER AND HARPER. Yes, mother! *(Still hiding the knife, and the bag, they exit. An exasperated Curley motions his displeasure toward Pitt. Professor also recoils at seeing the children leave with his yellow bag.)*

BENNETT. I'm looking for professors of achievement, but also ones of potential. Steward?

CURLEY. Yes?

BENNETT. Fetch Mister Underwood. I'd like to have this same conversation with him.

CURLEY. *(A bit unsure, nods, then whispers to Pitt)* Help me get that note?

PITT. No. *(Curley huffs, and exits.)*

PROFESSOR. But...?

BENNETT. Something intrigues me about that young man. Perhaps you can be partners! Maybe you can mentor him.

PROFESSOR. Mentor?

BENNETT. Or maybe he can mentor you!

PROFESSOR. *(Face turns sour)* Indeed. *(Bennett smiles and leaves. Professor remains indignant)* Partners. Hmph. *(stomps out)*

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