LETHAL LECTURE

An Audience Participation Mystery

By Craig Sodaro

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PUBLISHED BY

ELDRIDGE PUBLISHING COMPANY

www.histage.com

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Every time Polly Peabody's in charge of something, it's murder. Literally! This time she's program chairperson for the League of Learners' Lecture Series, and tonight presents Prof. Hazelton Crandall speaking on "Journey Through the Pharaoh's Tomb."

Unfortunately, the poor professor needs his own tomb before the end of Act I because he's murdered. Miss Peabody narrows the suspects to four: Claire, the professor's estranged wife, who wants to sell the artifacts found in the pharaoh's tomb; Diana, the professor's vivacious, if vacuous, girlfriend; Dr. Hillary Scheckle, his longtime colleague and friend; and Jackson Phillips, a reporter who'd do anything to get a story and keep his job—maybe even murder?

The clues are right in front of the audience, and Miss Peabody begs for help in solving the crime. And the suspects don't waste time trying to pin the murder on each other by getting audience members to re-enact hilarious scenes of passion and deceit on the recent journey through the tomb. With the help of Miss Peabody, the audience captures the killer along with a million laughs.

Miss Peabody's in another audience participation play, JUST DESSERTS, also published by Eldridge Publishing.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(2 M, 4 W, Extras)

POLLY PEABODY: Amateur sleuth, civic volunteer, general busybody. She is in charge of the lecture series, and it certainly isn't the first time she's gotten herself involved in murder!

DR. HILLARY SCHECKLE: An Egyptologist of some renown, a dignified lady who's just a bit of a scatterbrain. But she has a cheery way and a winning smile.

DIANA DARLING: A young, vivacious intern on the most recent dig. She is childish, seemingly as dim as twilight, but likable in a weird sort of way.

CLAIRE CRANDALL: Wealthy wife of Prof. Crandall, a woman who has been wronged and who's clever enough not to get caught if she's the one seeking revenge.

PROF. HAZELTON CRANDALL: Renowned Egyptologist who's managed to secure more enemies than friends in his quest for treasures from the past.

JACKSON PHILLIPS: A reporter for the *Daily News* who's up against a wall: he'd better get a story and it had better be good or he's not with the *Daily News* for the next edition.

Also--

CUSTODIAN: An extra, non-speaking. Can be an audience member.

AUDIENCE MEMBERS: To re-enact scenes of passion and deceit.

SETTING

The stage is set up as if for a lecture. Chairs for the audience face a center podium. A table stands next to the podium and a large map of north Africa, with Egypt highlighted and various archaeological discoveries noted, hangs up right. The table is set with various items from Egyptian antiquity (see notes at the end). In the center of the table sits an object covered in a purple cloth. Six chairs sit behind podium for speakers. Because the show is a lecture, the house lights stay on through the entire proceeding, except for one brief blackout.

PROPS

HILLARY: Poncho, large bag brimming with papers, gun.
DIANA: Ancient bowl, white gloves, gum.
MISS PEABODY: Glass of punch, application.
CRANDALL: Notes, small statue, scarab, gold statue with purple cover.
CLAIRE: Cell phone.
JACKSON: Notes.
CUSTODIAN: Bucket (optional).

SOUND EFFECTS

Thunder
Sirens

NOTE: See back of script for additional notes.

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: HILLARY enters, wearing a rather stunning poncho, hooked at the shoulder. She also carries a large bag, brimming with papers.)

HILLARY: *(Out of breath)* Oh, dear! Am I in the right spot? It looks like this must be the place, but I'm not sure. I have the address here somewhere...*(SHE drops her bag, with papers tumbling about. MISS PEABODY rushes from back to help.)* Oh, dear, dear, me! I AM so disorganized! I sometimes wonder how I ever got to be a doctor. Oh, but don't worry! I'm not the kind of doctor who would cut you open or anything like that! Heavens! I'd probably leave my tools inside you and you'd have to walk around with saws and knives clanking about inside of you!

MISS PEABODY: Let me help, Dr. Scheckle. I'm Miss Peabody.

HILLARY: Aren't you a dear!

MISS PEABODY: I should have been outside waiting for you, but I stepped in to check on the microphone.

HILLARY: Oh, quite all right! I feel terrible being so late, but I wasn't sure this was the right place. As you can see, I'm not good at keeping small bits of paper that I've written addresses on, and so I just knew I was looking for *(reference to landmark near your theatre).*

(The WOMEN are now standing.)

MISS PEABODY: Well, we're here, and as you can see, you've got quite a nice audience. We don't usually get this many people for our lecture series, so we're all very excited.

HILLARY: It's the title. Dr. Crandall wanted something that would draw the people in. Personally, I think it's really quite misleading...a bit sensational...like something you'd find at the grocery store check-out stand.

MISS PEABODY: Regardless, I'm sure it's going to be a night to remember. *(THUNDER booms.)* And the storm outside's setting the perfect mood, I'm afraid.

HILLARY: *(At the table)* Well, I see Miss Darling's been here.

MISS PEABODY: She set everything up. You do have some wonderful things to show us.

HILLARY: And this is all just the tip of the iceberg, as they say. Of course, our most spectacular piece is the statue of the Pharaoh Tut-Mik-Raman himself.

MISS PEABODY: May I take a peek?

HILLARY: No! I mean, Miss Peabody, if you only understood... well, the ancient Egyptians were very superstitious...and they, well, they put great faith in their magic...and the statue of Tut-Mik-Raman is very magical in itself...and keeping with their beliefs, there are certain...well, incantations and so on....

MISS PEABODY: How thrilling!

HILLARY: Oh, dear lady, if you only knew the eggshells on which we walk when digging up the old boys!

(DIANA enters carrying an ancient bowl, and wearing white gloves.)

DIANA: Glad you could make it, Hill, darling.

HILLARY: Be careful with that bowl, Diana, dear. You know it's irreplaceable.

DIANA: And I'm not.

HILLARY: Oh, dear. I didn't mean it like that! After all, your internship is just about up and then you'll join the team as a full-fledged member.

DIANA: Really? Has Hazy...I mean Dr. Crandall said anything to you?

HILLARY: Oh, sweetie, I am SURE he'll want you, what with the way you two get along and all.

DIANA: What do you mean by that?

HILLARY: Why, nothing! You must control your paranoia, dear. Have you met Miss Peabody? She sets up these lectures here in...in...where ARE we, Miss Peabody?

End of Freeview

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