Madam's Been Murdered,

Tea Will Be Late

By Pat Cook

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Have you ever wanted to stay in an old, drafty English Manor with a serial murderer and a ghost running loose in the dark? Who hasn't? Houndstooth Manor simply abounds with atmosphere. "We're lousy with it," Epsworth, the butler, intones as he casts a suspicious eye over the paying guests, wondering who is next to be murdered.

Will it be the retired pompous Major Armbrewster, who's always going on about how he stopped some uprising "with just a few well chosen words and a flame thrower." Or maybe the honeymooning American couple who know more than they'd like you to believe. Or maybe the former school teacher, Matilda Trent, who's recovering from a nervous condition brought on when some of her students nailed her up in a keg. If hilarious dialogue, outrageous characters and a plot with more twists than a London road map is your cup of tea, you'll love this romp.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(7 M, 6 W)

***MADGE:** Crabby chambermaid.
EPSWORTH: The epitome of the English butler, the backbone of Houndstooth Manor.
MAJ. ARMBREWSTER: An old campaigner, a stodgy and pompous curmudgeon.
***JAGMASTER:** A scraggly fisherman. *(See Thorndyke)*
LADY FENSTER: A dotty woman, around 50, the soul of the upper crust.
BOBBY TOTTER: Her cocky nephew, late 20's.
MATILDA TRENT: A bookish woman in her 30's, very ominous.
KATIE BALFOUR: A manhunter in her late 20's, rather seductive.
MARK JACOBS: A pushy American, knows it all, in his 30's.
TRISHA JACOBS: Mark's ditzy wife, also in her 30's.
MacDONALD: The gardener, a bit rustic.
***DR. THORNDYKE:** A typical English physician, in his 40's. *(See Jagmaster)*
INSPECTOR MILO: The penultimate Scotland Yard detective.
***ELZBETH:** Overweight, talkative cook.

***NOTE:** Only one actor plays the roles of Jagmaster and Thorndyke. It is optional, however, to double the roles of Madge and Elzbeth.

SYNOPSIS

Act I - Sc. 1: Late one morning in spring.
Sc. 2: Several hours later.
Sc. 3: Two hours later.
Act II - Sc. 1: That evening.

SETTING

This little English mystery takes place in the sitting room/lobby of Houndstooth Manor, a very British household which has just been turned into an inn. The room is chocked full of furniture, paintings, crossed swords and other knickknacks prevalent in the best Old Country traditions.

There are three doors utilized in this floor plan. The first, or entry way, is a large wooden door, located SR. The second doorway is located USC and leads into the kitchen. The third door leads into the den and is situated SL. Also, a large ornate staircase is located on the US wall, just SR of the kitchen door. A large overstuffed sofa, which all but dominates the room, rests almost CS and has a matching chair next to it. Another, smaller chair is located near the fireplace, which resides on the DL wall. A writing desk sits near the SR wall with accompanying chair. A telephone and guest registry sit on the desk. The rest of the room is rounded out with other accouterments, such as a standing hat rack, occasional tables, plants and chairs. Obviously fallen on hard times, the room has about it the attitude of its tenants - upper crusty but reluctantly obliging.

Time: The present.
Place: Houndstooth Manor.

Scene 1

(AT RISE: Late one morning in spring. MADGE is dusting the writing desk and shaking her head. EPSWORTH enters down the stairs, carrying a tray of dishes. MAJOR ARMBREWSTER is sitting in the fireplace chair, asleep with a newspaper over his face.)

MADGE: *(Mumbling to HERSELF.)* Well, it's come to this and make no mistake. Down to taking care of the whole whatever and me up to me britches in chores, like a lorry horse. If m'lady can't make ends come together, then maybe it's time for her to take a long once-over in the looking glass. Wages, she donno, but when it comes to running down the dust beetles...

(EPSWORTH stops on his way to the kitchen and turns, interrupting MADGE'S soliloquy.)

EPSWORTH: Madge, stop that. *(HE nods once to make his point.)*

MADGE: Oh, excuse me, Mr. High-and-Mighty. I wasn't aware I was in the presence of royalty. *(SHE waves her duster in his face, scattering dust all over HIM.)* Don't you come in 'ere and read me the bleeding rancid, I know my place. I've a right to speak to myself in any tone I likes.

EPSWORTH: *(Trying to duck.)* What, in heaven's name, do you think you're doing?

MADGE: Dusting. *(SHE flicks the duster once to make her point.)*

EPSWORTH: You're doing an excellent job. I think you've covered everything. *(HE sneers and looks around.)*

MADGE: And just what's THAT supposed to mean, Mr. Butler-With-his-Nose-in-Everybody's-Business?

EPSWORTH: Well, I could be entirely mistaken, but isn't the idea to remove the dust from the premises, not redistribute it?

EPSWORTH: *(Cont'd.)* Oh, I can always tell where you've been by the trail of pollen and bacteria you leave in your wake. Just as I can tell where you HAVEN'T been by its spotless innocence, not knowing enough to fear your cloudlike arrival. I realize that, in your zeal to preserve the status quo, you have a knack for restoring not only the antiques but the original filth that came with them. However...

MADGE: And yer job is that of a butler so shouldn't you be butling?

EPSWORTH: Butling? I'll begin butling when you start maiding.

MADGE: There's no such word as "maiding."

EPSWORTH: *("Now you've got it!")* Ahhhh! Now, that we've increased your vocabulary skills by one hundred percent, shall we go on about our work? *(MADGE starts to speak.)* Don't interrupt while I'm talking.

MADGE: Don't talk while I'm interrupting.

EPSWORTH: You know, you ALMOST make sense. You have that unerring quality. You seem to almost come to the point and then shy away from it, mangling your way along like some great hog caught in quicksand.

MADGE: Well, I ain't treated any better than one, that's the God's honest truth.

EPSWORTH: Oh, I'm sorry, did we change subjects again? Yes, I can tell by the way my ears just popped. Besides, you mustn't wake up the Major.

MADGE: Only three things wake up that old bag of yarns. The call for breakfast, the call for luncheon and tea. Look at 'im. Lying there like so much wet laundry, reliving all his old campaigns like previews down at the cinema. Ready, at the drop of a yawn, to wake up and regale any and all unsuspecting souls of how he fought off the savage natives with nothing but his bare hands and a squeegee.

EPSWORTH: He's been decorated, you know.

End of Freeview

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