

MURDER UNDER THE BIG TOP

by Josh Nichols



MURDER UNDER THE BIG TOP

Written by Josh Nichols

This murder mystery can be adapted to various settings but was originally written as a dinner theatre with some interaction by audience members.

Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that this script is subject to a royalty. The rights to this script are controlled exclusively by the author. There may be no performance of the work without obtaining, in advance, the written permission of the author and paying the requisite fee. This script **MAY NOT BE COPIED** without explicit permission from Jay Bay Creates LLC.

2020

CAST OF CHARACTERS

JILLIAN ROSS: 30 - 50, female. The circus director, formerly the manager. She is stern and can be easily agitated. After the circus moved locations she is barely holding everything together.

STEVE JONES: 20 - 40, male. He is the ringmaster and feels he is the star of the show. He has an ironclad contract, or so he thinks.

DAISY SANDERS: 20 - 40, female. assistant to Jillian Ross. Timid and doesn't do well under pressure. Has a secret identity with a southern accent.

MADAME TALULA: 20 - 50, female. A psychic and fortune teller. She often accompanies her "visions" with a futuristic sound she makes with her voice. (similar to a theremin instrument)

BRIDGET MILLS: 20 - 40, female - a star acrobat for the circus and girlfriend of Sven Heimlich. She sustains an injury and is on crutches throughout.

SVEN HEIMLICH: 20 - 40, male. Boyfriend of star acrobat Bridget Mills. He has a heavy accent from an unknown origin and lacks much skill in the acrobatics department.

MARV QUILLSON : 30 - 50, male. A circus clown with a flirtatious attitude and an intelligence to match.

REGINALD WALABURTON: 20 - 50, male. A classically trained, though not a very good, actor playing a feral man in the sideshow.

PRE-SHOW NOTES:

This script was originally performed as a dinner theatre. Prior to the show starting and while the meal was being served, various characters were able to mingle throughout the audience welcoming them to the “circus.” This is at your discretion and certain characters such as REGINALD should not be seen before his scheduled entrance.

These interactions were in character and helped in establishing some character traits for the audience. This can be a very entertaining portion of the evening if you choose to implement it.

Additional “acts” such as jugglers, stilt walkers, etc could be used for pre-show entertainment as well. These individuals wouldn't need to be part of the actual cast.

ACT I

JILLIAN enters and heads center stage before speaking.

JILLIAN: Ladies and gentlemen, my sincerest apologies for the sudden change in venue for tonight's event. As you know our circus tent collapsed earlier today causing us to load up the trucks and come over to <INSERT VENUE NAME>. We aren't exactly sure what happened, but we are happy that nobody was injured and thrilled you could still join us. We're just finishing up preparations for tonight's performance and will be with you shortly. Obviously, we've had to make some minor adjustments to the show for your safety, but the Nichols-Becker Circus motto has always been, "if there's no show, there's no dough!"

STEVE bursts in.

STEVE: *(yelling)* This is ridiculous! Are we just about ready to start this thing?

JILLIAN tries to calm STEVE down.

JILLIAN: *(annoyed laughter)* Oh well if it isn't our ringmaster arriving before he is supposed to. *(whispers angrily)* We aren't ready yet! I'll come get you when it's time.

STEVE: *(mocking voice)* "We aren't ready yet! I'll come get you when it's time.." I'm ready now and I'm sick of waiting! We should have cancelled the damned thing. Now we're retrofitting a hotel *(adjust to your venue)* for "the greatest show on earth," are you kidding me?!

JILLIAN: *(annoyed)* We can't just cancel a show, there are bills to pay and people counting on me.

STEVE: You. Are. The. Manager. Start managing!

JILLIAN: Excuse me, my title is “director” now! Thank you very much.

STEVE: *(mockingly)* “My title is director now!” Who cares! Get this thing started soon or you won’t have a ringmaster. I get paid whether you have your crap together or not.

JILLIAN: *(small outburst)* I said I’ll come get you!

STEVE is shocked yet brushes it off and exits as though he chose to do so. As soon as he exits DAISY frantically enters from an opposite door.

DAISY: *(out of breath)* Miss Ross! Miss Ross! It’s Steve! He’s on his way to talk to you and boy oh boy is he upset! He’s doing that cute little thing where his nostrils flare up. *(laughs)*

JILLIAN: Oh really? Thank you, Daisy, for letting me know! That is so very helpful!

DAISY: Oh, you’re welcome! Just doing my job!

JILLIAN: If you hadn’t warned me, I might have had to confront him in front of all of these nice people!

DAISY: That’s what I thought, which is why I ran over.

JILLIAN: Daisy...

DAISY: Yea?

JILLIAN: Maybe next time get the lead out and let me know BEFORE someone gets here!

DAISY: But?

JILLIAN: *(yelling at DAISY but eventually remembering there is still an audience)* You are the most useless ass...istant on the planet! Am I the only one that does anything around here?

DAISY: I'm sorry miss...

JILLIAN: Just! Just stop. Did you shred those papers we discussed?

DAISY: Yes, but don't you need to complete those and turn them in? They seemed pretty important and... um... necessary to submit. I could complete them... again... and get them mailed out by tomorrow's deadline.

JILLIAN: Daisy, why don't you just let the adults do their jobs and you just stand there until I need a coffee or something, okay? *(to audience)* Apologies everyone, as I was saying, what a great show we're going to have.

TALULA bursts into the room yelling. Over dramatically and stealing focus with every line.

TALULA: *(yelling)* Tragedy!

DAISY screams loudly which frightens JILLIAN who reacts by screaming which frightens TALULA who then screams. They are all screaming at each other but then the JILLIAN stops them.

JILLIAN: Enough! What are you on about?

TALULA: Uh... where was I ... oh yes... *(yelling)* Tragedy! Pain! Suffering!

JILLIAN: Stop yelling and tell me what happened!?

TALULA: It is not what HAS happened but what WILL happen.

TALULA then makes futuristic sound she makes with her voice. (similar to a theremin instrument). She and other characters will make variations of her version of it when prompted to make the "future sound."

JILLIAN: Look! I don't have time for this right now.

TALULA: Time is winding down for all of us! Some sooner than others.

JILLIAN: Can you give me a break and let me get this thing ready?

DAISY: Um... yea... give her a break why dontcha?

TALULA: *(threateningly to Daisy)* You'll get a ...BREAK.... soon enough.... *(backing away and waving hands around)* soon.... soon....soon...

BRIDGET and SVEN enter. BRIDGET has hurt her leg and is hobbling in with assistance.

BRIDGET: I think I broke my foot!

SVEN: Help! Help!, we needden to helpish my sweet one.

As TALULA exits she makes her future sound as an "I told ya so"

JILLIAN: Oh dammit! Now what?!

SVEN: Mine snookumkins is on her bed of death!

BRIDGET: Honey, it's not that bad! I just hurt it. I think I'll be fine.

BRIDGET tries to walk and clearly is injured.

BRIDGET: Oww owww owww!

JILLIAN: What the hell happened, you're our biggest act?!
Daisy go get something to help the poor girl!

DAISY: Right away!

Daisy exits.

BRIDGET: We were practicing our act where I jump off a stampeding elephant through three fire hoops backwards then grabbing Sven's knife as I pass so I can accurately toss it severing a safety line that activates a counterweight for a rope that I grab after jumping on a trampoline where it then hoists me into the air allowing me to grab the trapeze do a quadruple flip over a net-less bed of nails before landing in Sven's arms... except my trajectory was slightly off and I missed his arms completely.

SVEN: Mine love was only a few inches off from landing-ish in my armikins.

JILLIAN: You dropped her you idiot!

SVEN abandons BRIDGET and she drops to the floor.

SVEN: You shut your mouth face! I'm never to drop mine loves!

JILLIAN: Look at her you halfwit!

SVEN rushes back and helps BRIDGET up gets behind her and poses as in the movie Titanic.

SVEN: It's like your American saying goes, I'll never let go... Yack. I'll never let go... Yack!

JILLIAN: That's *Titanic* you schmuck and guess what? She let him go!

BRIDGET: He didn't drop me because technically he never caught me. I missed his arms completely...

SVEN: Da!

JILLIAN: So, he couldn't move his arms two inches to save you?! (*to SVEN*) You are so useless! All you ever have to do is catch her after she does all of the work. I'd have you pack your luggage in a heartbeat if she wouldn't tag along with you. So now what?! You're our star act! This is just great!

BRIDGET: We'll figure it out.

JILLIAN: (*sarcastically sympathetic*) Oh you're right! Of course! We'll just have Sven do the routine alone! We'll let him stand waiting to catch stuff and you can toss things to him from your wheelchair and hopefully they'll land directly in his hands. Maybe we'll set off fireworks if he catches something, you know, just for a dramatic ending. You two figure out your act NOW! You're not getting paid unless you perform.

BRIDGET: But you can't do that!

SVEN: Ya!

JILLIAN: Like hell I can't! Sven, did you catch that? I doubt it... idiot.

JILLIAN exits.

SVEN: Sometimes-ish she makes me to crush her skull like she makes my heart crushed.

BRIDGET: Honey just ignore her.

SVEN: (*sinisterly*) Oh I'll nore her ig... oh yes.... I will-ish.

BRIDGET: Okay, so I can't... we can't... afford to lose our pay so we have to come up with another act quick.

SVEN: Wonderfullness. I trust-ish your skills and shall catch you with haste.

BRIDGET: Honey, I can't really move that well, so you'll have to do more than catch me.

SVEN: Correct, I'm willing catch me. Excuse English, I'm willing catch...YOU.

BRIDGET: Oh boy. Let's go practice.

SVEN: Good. Yes. Now.

SVEN starts to leave.

BRIDGET: Honey! A little help please.

SVEN comes back to help her exit. MARV enters with some props or items to setup the circus (see prop notes). He has some silent interactions with the audience, waving at them,

honking his nose, etc. He somehow smashes his finger and begins to cry loudly showing his finger to the audience. Eventually he walks over to an audience member to get a kiss on his finger. Once kissed all is better.

In the meantime Daisy enters with a crutch for the injured acrobat. MARV notices her entering and get poised with a mask to scare her.

DAISY: *(out of breath)* I got it! Here it is!

She notices they are gone and starts wandering closer towards MARV.

DAISY: Oh farts! I'm always too late! Oh hey Marv...

MARV turns quickly and begins to run towards DAISY squealing like a monster. DAISY is scared and breaks out some karate moves while screaming.

DAISY: Oh! Marv, you almost scared the P-O-O-P out of me.

MARV: *(reacts as though he is sorry, gestures to come over for a hug)*

DAISY: Oh no! No more hugs from you!

MARV: *(steps forward and gestures again for a hug)*

DAISY: *(putting up karate hands)* I said no more hugs!

MARV: *(takes another step closer)*

DAISY slaps MARV on the face and shames him like a dog.

DAISY: No! No! That's a bad clown... No!

DAISY exits. MARV holds his cheek and cries and goes back to the same audience member for a kiss. Once kissed on the cheek all is better. MARV starts to leave and waves goodbye to the audience, may have some additional interactions with the audience as he leaves.

JILLIAN entered followed by STEVE.

STEVE: I'm not waiting another minute! You either start now or I'm going into town for the night.

JILLIAN: Oh no you're not!

STEVE: You can't tell me what to do!

JILLIAN: I'm the director! That's my job!

STEVE: Listen, my contract clearly states that...

JILLIAN: (*mockingly*) My contract! MY CONTRACT! Contract, contract, contract!!! That's all you talk about is your contract. That stupid thing was signed before I became the director. If I were in charge, I wouldn't have hired you and you wouldn't have a contract. I wouldn't have hired you to shovel shit! And you know what, I'm about this close to being rid of you forever!

STEVE: You'll never be rid of me! The contract is good until I choose to leave or until I die, and I'll outlive you!

JILLIAN: Oh really... well I'd say your about one foot out the door. Death, voluntary separation... (*coyly*) loophole... I don't really care how you leave. Though if I'm being honest seeing you mauled to death would give me a warm fuzzy feeling

where my heart should be. By the way, you may want to go back and read your precious little contract.

STEVE: Oh yea! *(failing to insult her)* Well... maybe you're the one... that needs to be able to read it.

JILLIAN: Oh, good one!

JILLIAN laughs as she exits.

STEVE: "Death, voluntary separation... loophole "...could there a loophole?!

STEVE starts to exit quickly but the TALULA enters before he can leave, she is holding the contract.

TALULA: Looking for this? I knew you would be *(future noise)*

STEVE: Give me that!

STEVE rushes over to her and snags the contract. She makes it hard for him to get and teases him.

STEVE: I told you to quit going through my things!

TALULA is very over-the-top and at times creepy.

TALULA: I was just trying to help. I received a vision that you would need your contract and I was drawn to its location in the top drawer in your trailer under exactly 6 pairs of underwear... there definitely weren't 7 pairs... only 6 and none are missing currently.

STEVE: I knew I was missing underwear! Quit stalking me you freak!

TALULA begins to pursue STEVE.

TALULA: Damn right I'm a freak. I like it when you call me names... mama like!

STEVE: I said get away! I've got bigger things to worry about!

TALULA: Oh no! What worries my stud-muffin? I mean.. I know already (*pathetic version of future noise*) but tell me in your own words.

STEVE: I'm not worried! My contract is ironclad... but Jillian said something about a loophole. What could it be? She hates me, if she finds something, she'll cut me from the show!

TALULA: (enraged and creepy) If she tries to cut you then I'LL... CUT... HER!. Oh, she'll be sorry if she touches you. I'll cut her into pieces and feed her to the animals...

STEVE: Whooooaaaa! Enough with cutting and the killing.

TALULA: Death can be romantic, look at Romeo and Juliet. You and I can DIE together... but you first, I don't want to be away from my man one second longer than I have to.

STEVE: Okaaaaaaaay. A few things. "A" I'm not your man. "2" Death is not romantic. And "C", get help!

TALULA: Ooooooh I do need help. I need a big strong man to give me help. (*starts to chase him*). You look strong big boy. Want to "help" me! I'm a damsel in distress, help me! HELP ME!

TALULA chases STEVE who exits. Before the TALULA exits, BRIDGET enters with crutches and stops her.

BRIDGET: Oh Talula! Yoohoo!

TALULA: I'm getting the feeling you are wanting something from me. *(future noise)*

BRIDGET: *(amazed)* How. Do. You. Do. It. You are incredible!

TALULA: It is a gift.

While BRIDGET speaks TALULA gets distracted and takes a few sips from a flask.

BRIDGET: I need you to tell me about my future. You see, I'm working on a plan for me and my one true love to get out of this place for good. We just need a bit more money than our paychecks allow, and I've never done anything... *(whispers)* illegal before... I mean since I was a little girl the law was very important to me... I mean as I got older I started...O. M. G! I am so sorry to bore you, of course you know all of this already. I'm so stupid! So anyway, I just want to know if you think I'm doing the right thing and that everything will work out... will it?

TALULA: Huh? Oh sure.

BRIDGET: Ahhh!!! I'm so happy, you are the best!

TALULA: Tell me, honestly, *(disgusted)* what do you see if your one true love? He's such a clown.

SVEN bursts in looking for BRIDGET.

SVEN: Oh there be mine lovekins.

TALULA exits. MARV enters with more props or to continue setting up for the circus.

SVEN: Sweetums, we need to keep the practice of the rehearsals. Ya?

BRIDGET: Coming!

BRIDGET hobbles out of the room followed by SVEN. Eventually, JILLIAN enters frantic.

JILLIAN: Shit shit shit!!!

JILLIAN notices MARV. He gives her a worried expression. The remaining conversation consists of the JILLIAN speaking and MARV silently reacting and using expressions and hand gestures.

JILLIAN: Sorry.

MARV: *(sad face)*

JILLIAN: What?

MARV: *(sadder face)*

JILLIAN: What?! Stop looking at me like that...

MARV: *(steps closer with a sad face)*

JILLIAN: Nothing's wrong!

MARV: *(steps even closer)*

JILLIAN: Okay fine! Everything is wrong! I'm barely able to keep this shitshow together, I've got Steve threatening to leave before we've started, and now we've been robbed!

MARV: *(shocked face)*

JILLIAN: I know! robbed! I went back to my trailer and the safe was open and everything was gone!

MARV: *(gestures for a hug)*

JILLIAN: Umm... absolutely not.

MARV: *(persistent for the hug)*

JILLIAN: I'm fine leave me alone.

MARV: *(stomps foot and gestures again for a hug)*

JILLIAN runs to the clown sobbing and hugs him. He immediately moved into flirt mode and the audience can see this has all been a trick to get an embrace.

JILLIAN: (crying) I hate everything. This town, this circus, (to audience) these people, everything!

MARV continues hugging her during the next line. Eventually begins to sway a bit, and then finally moves hands down to grab her butt. JILLIAN reacts to the attempted butt grab by kneeing MARV in the groin.

JILLIAN: Not laughing now are ya chuckles?!

JILLIAN exits. MARV groans in pain and after a beat turns to the audience and cries as before while holding his groin. He tries to go to the same audience member as in the previous scene. There will be obvious resistance. MARV cries even louder, he then stops crying and starts negotiating. He silently

with gestures pleas for “just a little kiss” and points at his injury. Realizing it’s still a no go, starts to wail as loud as possible and goes to another audience member who will immediately reject him as well. Realizing he has pushed his luck too far again, he gives up. STEVE enters reading the contract followed by TALULA.

STEVE: There’s nothing here!

TALULA: Maybe... but I’m here big boy!

MARV: *(pretends to throw up)*

STEVE: No loophole! Ahhhh!! She’s in my head!

STEVE throws down the contract. MARV wanders over to pick it up and starts looking at it.

TALULA: And what a beautiful head it is, such silky hair, I’m about three small locks away from finishing my hair doll of you.

STEVE: *(creeped out)* What?!

TALULA: *(future noise)*

STEVE: *(changing subject)* I can’t let her get the best of me.

TALULA: Do you want me to stop her?! A little sleeping powder in her nightly tea, nighty night, slather her face with honey and oopsie! What’s this?! The cages for the dancing bears were “accidently” left open.

STEVE: You’re a nut!

TALULA: Shhhh... don't worry... I see some leftover honey in our future too (*sultry future noise*).

MARV: Holy shit! You really are a nut! (*hands contract to STEVE*) Section 7 subsection 2 line 14.

MARV exits. STEVE flips through the script and reads a line. He acts confused but then starts putting the pieces together and slowing gets a terrified look on his face.

STEVE: Oh crap!

STEVE exits quickly followed soon by TALULA.

TALULA: Oh you look petrified like a cornered animal about to be taken down by a predator. Soooooo hoooooot!

TALULA exits. JILLIAN enters.

JILLIAN: (*yelling off stage*) Okay, get moving and let's get this show going! (*to audience*) Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your patience! We are so sorry for the wait but we want to give you the highest quality show possible. The Nichols-Becker Circus, a proud member of International Circus Enterprises, welcomes you to a night of wonder and amazement

As JILLIAN continues everything is being setup for the beginning of the show as needed (see staging notes).

JILLIAN: Now I must remind you that there are absolutely no refunds. Oh, and you may or may not have read the fine print on your tickets but we are obligated by the courts from a previous ruling to also verbally state that we are not liable for

any accidents resulting in injury or death. Okay well I think that covers it! . Ladies and Gentlemen, on with the show!

Lighting effects, dim with spotlight. Dramatic music. STEVE enters.

STEVE: Ladies! Gentlemen! This is the moment you've waited for! Welcome to the Circus!! We have a very (*struggling to find the word*)... well we have a show for you tonight! Are you ready? I said, are you ready?! And now, prepare yourself for a death defying aerial...

JILLIAN runs close to stage and whispers loudly.

JILLIAN: It's not aerial anymore!

STEVE: (*looks annoyed*) And now... prepare yourself for our two world renowned acrobats and Wally the Elephant in an act...

JILLIAN: (*whispers*) No elephant!

STEVE: (*more annoyed*) And Noooooow... prepare yourself for an amazing act filled with fire and blades...

JILLIAN: (*whispers*) No more fire or blades!

STEVE: (*upset*) Oh hell just bring them out!

STEVE and JILLIAN exit. SVEN and BRIDGET enter to perform there. This act can be customized to your actors abilities and your venue. Essentially, BRIDGET is unable to do much which can be tied into the humor. (see staging notes) Both maintain their professionalism with big smiles, poses, and dismounts however unspectacular the act. After they have

concluded their attempted act, they should pose, bow and exit. STEVE returns to the stage. As STEVE speaks TALULA comes out to get placed for her act.

STEVE: A mystic. A psychic. A fortune teller. These are just a few names given to our next act. Her powers defy logic, space, and time and personal boundaries. I give you the Pscyhic Psychopath, The Deranged Debutante, the Bastion of Batshittery... MADAME TULULA!

STEVE exits giving focus to TULULA. Special lighting and a crystal ball or a LED sphere can be used for various effects if needed.

TALULA: I know already that you are excited to see me tonight (*future noise*). I see a vision. (*At this point Talula gives specific instructions of where to find the restroom in your facility the you are in. The following is an example - a ballroom leading to a hotel lobby and then to the restroom*). I am traveling north and I see a vast open space, a welcoming space, with travelers from many miles, I turn right down a narrow corridor, I arrive at a destination a place of great decision. Ancient symbols prompt me look inside myself and make a choice. (*first word purposefully hard to understand*) Veminins... or ... Mens. Yes it is all clear to me now. Those are the precise instructions for finding the restrooms when we arrive at intermission. If you can't follow these instructions go out door follow signs. (*future noise*).

TALULA is suddenly jolted. And let's out a little yelp.

TALULA: I feel a presence here in the room! A spirit from the great beyond. A ghost with unfinished business here on this earth. (*At this point Talula goes on to generically describe a real member of the audience whose name is known; the*

following is an example). I man. He is a short man. Dark Hair. SPIRIT! Tell me your name! (*pauses*) Hello SAM! I am here to help you find peace in death. Tell me your last name so that I might connect with your past. (*pauses*) SMITH. Okay SAM SMITH we know you have passed from this life but..

At this point DAISY interjects.

DAISY: Um... Talula!? SAM SMITH is actually... alive....

TALULA: (*still in fortune teller mode*) Yes... yes... SAM SMITH is actually alive...(breaking character) Alive?! (*pauses for a moment and then makes an over the top future noise*) SAM SMITH! FOLLOW MY VOICE! You still have work to do on this plain of existence. FOLLOW MY VOICE SAM! (*she thrashes her body around like an exorcism and then makes the future noise... she then peers into the dark audience*) Sam Smith, are you back with us?

The audience plant, MARV or the audience themselves will point out to TALULA.

TALULA: It is a miracle! Madame Talula is all powerful, she has risen SAM SMITH she has conquered death itself! (*future noise*). Thank you! I must now go regain my powers!

TALULA exits and STEVE comes back on stage. During this time the covered cage is wheeled out.

STEVE: So SAM SMITH you were dead for a while. Amaaaaaazing! I should be so lucky. And now, from the tropical region of some tropical area. We bring you a monster, a freak, a feral man raised in the wilderness of some tropical type area. Half wild, half man, half beast... shield your eyes or feast with them if you dare on... THE CREATURE!

REGINALD enters running ape-like through the audience. He can interact with the audience as needed, possibly eating food items, scaring people, etc. Eventually he approaches the stage. Shortly after he arrives similar noises to those made by the creature are made offstage and then the door opens. JILLIAN stumbles in groaning. Eventually REGINALD stops growling and everyone is focused on JILLIAN who is revealed to be stabbed in the back. As the elaborate death unfolds the other characters enter from various entrances to observe, the lights are turned back on and eventually JILLIAN collapses. BRIDGET has some red clown makeup smeared around her mouth. MARV runs over to check on the body.

MARV: ... Yea...she's dead.

EVERYONE: GASP! (*actually say the word "gasp"*)

TALULA: (*upset*) What?!

SVEN: The body-type boss lady is how does one say crooked... croquet....crock pot.

STEVE: Croaked you idiot!

BRIDGET: How did this happen?!

STEVE: Hmmm... maybe the knife sticking out of her back could give you a hint!

MARV: Hey back off the lady!

TALULA: (*upset*) Oh no! This isn't going to end well! (*a half crying future sound*)

REGINALD: (*British accent*) Poppycock! The show must go on!

SVEN: When did the scary man learned the words-ish?

STEVE: Are you kidding me? A woman just died! We can't "go on."

REGINALD: (*this should be impossible to understand*) Typical! Why you were hired I'll never know.

DAISY: What?

REGINALD: (*again, impossible to understand*) Typical! Why you were hired I'll never know.

All of the cast are shrugging, unable to understand.

REGINALD removes his fake teeth and can now speak very clearly.

REGINALD: Typical! Why you were hired I'll never know. If I were the master of the rings the show would always go on!

STEVE: Oh yea, you'd be great.

REGINALD: How dare you, swine! I am a thespian of the highest order! I have played Richard the Third, Hamlet, King Lear, Lord Farquaad... Rumpus Cat!

MARV takes off his wig and pulls out a gun.

MARV: Nobody move FBI!

STEVE: FBI?!

REGINALD: Whaaaaatttt?!

TALULA: I did not see that coming!

REGINALD: You were an FBI agent this whole time?!

MARV: *(laughing)* Are you kidding me?! I'm just screwing with you! The look on your faces!

TALULA: You idiot!

DAISY: *(uses a southern accent for the remainder of the show)* Nobody move ICE!!!

SVEN squeals.

MARV: Oh, shut up Daisy!

DAISY: No really! I'm with ICE! Sooo.... freeze...

SVEN: I am the frozen one, please don't shut me! I'm not to go home!

STEVE: *(laughs)* Oh yea right. Agent Daisy, the big bad immigration agent! Cutest ICE agent I've ever seen.

DAISY: You think I'm cute. I mean...Nevermind! I'm not **that** kind of ICE agent. International... Circus... Enterprises.

Daisy takes off zip up to reveal an ICE shirt.

EVERYONE: GASP! *(actually say the word "gasp")*

SVEN: Oh, thanks be to the stars and such.

DAISY: That's right, they sent me here and I've been undercover for a long time documenting every code breach, red nose, and financial blunder. And now I get to add suicide to the long list of infractions.

BRIDGET: Suicide?

SVEN: I hadn't known her name was Sue.

REGINALD: We have officially found the missing link.

STEVE: You think she stabbed herself in the back?

DAISY: (*knowing it wasn't suicide*) If it wasn't suicide... well.. how'd she die... huh? Huh?

TALULA: Um... I'm gonna go out on a limb here and say... murder (*an "isn't it obvious" future noise*).

REGINALD: Some ICE agent you are.

DAISY: Okay fine! Yea she was likely murdered but if my bosses find out someone got murdered on my watch, I could lose my job. (*starts pacing*) Ooooh what am I going to do! I can't leave here until I find out who did it so I at least have a chance.

BRIDGET: Don't worry Daisy! Your problems are solved! You're forgetting we have a world-famous psychic right here! Madame Talula tell her what happened and don't leave out ANY details!

TALULA is silent. Everyone else is kind of smirking and giggling under their breath.

BRIDGET: What's wrong? Are you weak from performing earlier?

TALULA is silent. Everyone else is having a harder time holding it together.

BRIDGET: TALULA aren't you going to say something.

TALULA: Honey... You know I'm full of shit, right?

BRIDGET: What?!

Everyone begins to laugh not being able to hold it anymore.

STEVE: I can't believe you actually thought she was for real.
(attempts a future noise)

SVEN: Like she could know future things and such! *(attempts a future noise)*

MARV: Okay, hey look, leave her alone okay!

BRIDGET: You mean... you can't see the future... and you're a fake? *(getting angry)* So when I asked you about a very real problem earlier and whether everything would be alright and you said "sure" *(adds in her version of the future noise)* you really had no idea? *(raging)* I'll kill you!

BRIDGET does the best she can on her crutches to get to and "kill" TALULA. Eventually she tires out or someone stops her.

DAISY: Okay seriously we need to figure this thing out!

MARV: Wait, aren't I supposed to be the clown here? You think we should help you after you lied to us and have been investigating us right under our noses?

DAISY: I was just doing my job. International Circus Enterprises only certifies the best of the best. The reports Ms. Ross... I mean Jillian submitted weren't adding up. They sent me in to find out what was going on. I don't know what she was doing but it wasn't her job. There were discrepancies in animal inventory, dwindling numbers and all sorts of other stuff she was trying to sweep under the tent.

REGINALD: What a wonderful monologue, gripping really but are you almost to the part that matters to any of us?

DAISY: A woman died! Someone killed her! We don't even know why they did it and frankly you could be next.

REGINALD: Touché.

BRIDGET: How are we supposed to figure out who killed her? It could have been someone in the audience for all we know.

TALULA: Yea don't think so... the audience sits in the audience and ol' Voldemort was backstage with all of us before she wobbled out. If she was murdered it had to be one of us.

SVEN: GASP-ISH!

Everybody looks at him like he's an idiot.

SVEN: Oh, are we not-in do-in that-in anymore?

DAISY: You are about as useless as a screen door on a submarine.

SVEN: Thankswelcome!

DAISY: Alright, enough. As the authority figure here...

MARV: Authority figure of what? Lions and tigers and corpses oh my?

REGINALD: Ooooh you are soooo bad!

DAISY: *(trying to convince)* I'm a real ICE agent people! With like, credentials and everything! Look, if you don't cooperate here, you'll never work in the industry again and I doubt your transferrable skills will add up to a hill of beans.

MARV: Speak for yourself.

REGINALD: You shrew! I was in a national car insurance commercial!

DAISY: Don't get your knickers in a bunch! The headline here is that the only job you might be able to find is in the prison library as that's where we're all going if we can't pinpoint who did this.

MARV: Let's just listen to her and figure this thing out alright?

DAISY: Finally, someone is being an adult around here.

MARV does something silly, honks a horn or his nose or something clown-like.

TALULA: I may not know the future but I do know the present. She has a knife sticking out of her back. If we find out who the knife belongs to, we find the killer.

SVEN: Oh, it is mine fer sure.

TALULA: Wow... I'm good. Lock him up!

BRIDGET: Whoa! It's his knife from our act but when I hurt my foot we couldn't do any of our normal routines and so the knives were backstage for any one of us to use. All of us had access to them.

DAISY: She's right. This isn't going to be easy but we have to do it. Okay, first, let's get the body out of here. Marv and Sven, go take her away.

MARV and SVEN approach the body trying to figure out how to remove it.

STEVE: I'm going to get a drink.

TALULA: I got a tall one for you right here.

TALULA walks provocatively towards him and STEVE evades her.

STEVE: On second thought I think I'll help with the body.

TALULA exits. STEVE, MARV and SVEN work to comedically remove the body from the room (see staging notes). Eventually they exit with the body. BRIDGET is still in the room. REGINALD is composing himself, dabbing his brow, perhaps making a cup of tea out of nowhere, being a diva. DAISY approaches BRIDGET noticing she has red smudges on her face.

DAISY: Oh my gosh BRIDGET! Is that blood on your face?!

BRIDGET: What?! Where?! (*touching her face trying to figure out what she is talking about*)

DAISY: You have red all over your mouth.

REGINALD: Good heavens, like some cannibal! If this night couldn't get any worse!

BRIDGET: I'm not a cannibal!

REGINALD: Oh, I know that! But you just stirred a tragic memory. I remember it like it was years ago... the time I lost the role of a lifetime to play one Hannibal Lecter opposite dame Jodi Foster to some two-bit actor, some hack. (*yelling to the sky*) DAMN YOU TONY HOPKINS!

DAISY is wiping her face trying to clean it.

BRIDGET: (*hiding something*) Blood! Yes blood! I guess Sven must have split my lip during our very unpracticed routine. What a clumsy fool I am. I had better go get this cleaned up quick!

DAISY: Are you sure you're okay?

BRIDGET: Yes! Fine! Blood! Got it!

BRIDGET exits. STEVE reenters carrying a bunch of random papers and he is writing on them. He is being followed by TALULA.

TALULA: What are you up to lover?

STEVE: Would you please leave me alone! Don't you have anything better to do?! Any underwear to steal.

TALULA: Oooohhhh... you have a point. You aren't in your room. Thanks deary!

TALULA exits.

STEVE: Oh come on! I was just... nevermind. Daisy! I need your help!

REGINALD: Excuse me Mr. Rude but Daisy and I were in the middle of something and you can't just interrupt!

STEVE: I'm sorry, I can wait.

All are awkwardly silent for moment.

REGINALD: Nice chat Daisy dear. Toodles!

REGINALD exits.

STEVE: What a weird man... anyway, Daisy! (*scrambling through papers*) I need some number... the CID number and the classification protocol code for our circus agency license....or something. And some live entertainment credential.

MARV bursts in.

MARV: Agent Daisy! There's been another murder, come quick the body is in the back!

DAISY: Oh no, not another one! (*to audience*) Okay look! Everybody just... you know... like stay here and stuff while I go pick up the pieces of my career...get some concessions or a snack or something... Okay bye!

DAISY runs to exit and the clown holds the door open for her and lets it close. STEVE is going to follow shortly but is gathering his unorganized paperwork.. MARV then busts out laughing.

STEVE: What's so funny!

MARV: *(laughing)* She believed it! Oh, that's too easy. Man being a clown is great!

STEVE: That's not funny! You can't just fake someone's death for laughs!

MARV: *(seriously)* I didn't. I'm not that mean. There really was a murder, Madame Talula is dead.

STEVE: *(joyfully)* What! Really?!

MARV: *(pauses a moment then burst out laughing)* Oh oh oh... the look on your face!

MARV exits and STEVE follows.

STEVE: You jerk!

MARV: Damn I'm good. All kidding aside, I did see her running away with some of your underwear.

End of Act I

INTERMISSION

In a dinner theatre setting the characters were able to return after a few minutes to mingle around and interact with the audience answer questions and trying to throw off suspicion. In our showing this was a time were dessert was served. We also allowed the audience to make guesses at this time and

they were entered into a prize drawing if they made the correct guesses. The winner was announced at the conclusion of the show.

This portion of the evening is not necessary, but the audiences seemed to enjoy interacting with the actors in character and some who were mystery fans would be very inquisitive of the characters and try to figure out who done it.

END OF ACT I SAMPLE

Murder Under the Big Top continues in Act II, where the case gets solved.

Request the complete script free at
joshnichols.me/murder-mystery-scripts/

Licensing is \$120 per performance, or \$100 each for three or more.

This sample is for reading only and does not grant performance rights.

© Josh Nichols / Jay Bay Creates LLC. contact@jaybaycreates.com