

MURDER, MAYHEM, AND MARSHMALLOW SALAD

by Shelly Sellepack



CHRISTIAN PUBLISHERS

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Murder, Mayhem, and Marshmallow Salad

A murder mystery
dinner theatre comedy

by Shelly Sellepack

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS
(Starting time: 7:00 p.m.)

Murder, Mayhem, and Marshmallow Salad is a dinner theatre featuring a four-course meal. The dramatic action is interspersed with the dining. Although times for the various courses and scenes are suggested, they are merely a guideline to assist in your planning. Actual times may vary.

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| 6:45 – 7:00 p.m. | Hors d'oeuvres are served in the foyer or fellowship hall. |
| 7:00 – 7:10 p.m. | Cast arrives and mingles. |
| 7:10 – 7:25 p.m. | Scene 1 (A Shocking Discovery) |
| 7:25 – 7:30 p.m. | All are invited to move into the dining area and be seated (salads are set at each place). |
| 7:30-7:40 | The salad course is served. |
| 7:40 – 7:55 p.m. | Scene 2 (Breaking Bonds) |
| 7:55 – 8:00 p.m. | Entree is served. |
| 8:00 – 8:30 p.m. | Scene 3 (Conversations with Dinner)
Second helpings are served. |
| 8:30 – 8:35 p.m. | Scene 4 (Something Is Brewing) |
| 8:35 – 8:45 p.m. | Dishes are cleared, coffee is served. |
| 8:45 – 8:55 p.m. | Scene 5 (Airing Dirty Laundry) |
| 8:55 – 9:15 p.m. | Dessert buffet is served in the foyer. |
| 9:15 – 9:25 p.m. | Scene 6 (How Would You Like Your Chicken?) |
| 9:30 p.m. | The cast says good night. |

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CAST OF CHARACTERS *(With costumes)*

Pastor Evan Keal (PASTOR): The church minister, Pastor Keal, is humble, nervous, and nerdy. He is easily excited, and he doesn't have the tools for reacting in a crisis. He doesn't like the spotlight and dreads speaking in front of others. Pastor Keal speaks slowly, deliberately, and with a pronounced nasal quality. His wife tries his patience, and he can't help rolling his eyes and ignoring her when she talks. When in doubt, Pastor should stand in front of folks and look worried or bored, or flip through his Bible for an appropriate passage. Hair should be parted down the middle; geek glasses are a must. His wife pronounces his name like "even."

Mrs. Molly Devaro Keal (MRS. KEAL): The Pastor's wife speaks with a Southern accent. She is bold, flamboyant, and has her nose and her fingers in absolutely everything. She is overbearing and doesn't care. She secretly doesn't like being a pastor's wife and has always dreamed of being an actress in New York City. She doesn't listen well, but talks incessantly. During times when she is not speaking, Mrs. Keal should fan herself, check her nails, or pat her hair. She changes clothes at every opportunity, with attention to flamboyant accessories (as in a boa or large hat). She should retain one significant item — her large purse — so that the audience will not mistake her for a new character. Her purse should be filled with a magazine, lotion, compact, and other "necessities."

Reverend Peter Piper Porcupine, Previous Pastor of Pleasant Valley Pious Church in Pleasant Valley Pennsylvania (REV): The visiting guest speaker is flashy, cold, and a man of a thousand words and no real thoughts. Rev is always promoting himself like a politician, passing out business cards that he takes in massive stacks from his pockets (dropping several in the process), shaking hands, and kissing babies. He secretly wants to be pastor of the church. During times when he is not speaking, Rev should check his breath or pass out business cards, being careful not to distract from the action. Rev speaks with a lisp.

Sister Polly Piper (SISTER POLLY): Rev's lovely wife. She rarely speaks, instead murmuring words of encouragement and support to Rev and clinging to his side. Sister Polly has an issue with food, sneaking it off people's plates and shoving it in her mouth and purse. Sister Polly has a dramatic blond wig and heavy makeup.

Tess T. Honcho (TESS): The matron of the church, Tess is the one who is the head of every event. She organizes everything, but takes her power too seriously. She likes things done one way — *hers* — and she makes a loud ruckus when things aren't going according to her schedule. Tess tends to overreact. She secretly despises the Pastor for being too wishy-washy and soft-spoken. When she is not speaking, Tess should stand with arms crossed, looking vexed. Tess speaks loudly and obnoxiously, in a shrill voice.

Philosopher (PHIL): The resident truth-seeker, Phil dresses all in black and carries a battered book or two. Possibly speaking in a proper English accent, Phil uses heady language or ironic rhyme to comment dryly on what's going on. He acts bored and unexcited in every circumstance. He doesn't like or approve of the Pastor, but hey, he doesn't like or approve of much of anything. When he is not speaking, Phil should refer to a worn book of poetry or stare intensely at others or into the distance. Although referred to as a male, this character may be either male or female.

M.T. SOCKET: Head trustee M.T. Socket is a specialist in electronics and computers. He is a computer geek, complete with pocket protector and some kind of tool belt with small electronic tools. He is amiable, friendly, and always smiling. He has the stance and swagger of a cowboy. Secretly, M.T. despises the Pastor for constantly crashing his computer. M.T. is stealing from the church cashbox during fundraising events, and the Pastor is on to him. When he is not speaking, M.T. should check his tool belt or the nearest electrical object. He has a loud, unusual laugh, too high-pitched for his size and swagger.

Lorraine (MUSICIAN): The Musician plays the keyboard throughout the evening. At seemingly inappropriate times, she launches into a song. She secretly despises the Pastor for leading hymns and choruses at the wrong tempo, and for picking songs she doesn't like to play. She longs to shake things up and play how she'd like. Dressed as either a flower child or a punk rocker, Musician should be significantly crazy in dress, complete with crazy hat. She is nutty as a fruitcake and should let everyone know this. Although referred to as a female, this character may be either male or female.

SUPPORT PERSONNEL

The following persons, though not part of the drama, are vital to the overall success of the evening.

KITCHEN HELPERS: Organizers and cooks to plan the menu and prepare the meal.

WAITERS/WAITRESSES: To serve the meal in courses and attend to the guest's needs. For added fun, they may dress alike — e.g., white shirts, black pants, black bow ties.

HOST/HOSTESS: To greet the guests and give the welcome. May also assist the kitchen staff.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Setting:

Creating the set couldn't be easier, as the play's setting is a church potluck. You won't need to change a thing!

The setup and placement of your tables depends on your physical space. Dinner theatre is performed in a variety of banquet halls, church basements, fellowship centers, gymnasiums, etc., and seldom on a regular stage. The script suggests tables of ten to twelve each, but this may be adapted if your available tables are smaller or larger.

Music:

A wide variety of songs are suggested within the script for the musician to play on a keyboard, from hymns to oldies to TV theme songs. You will need a musician with an extensive music library and/or one skilled in improvising. The suggested songs may be changed to fit your audience and the musician's preferences. Have fun with them!

Lighting:

The only specific lighting instruction is at the beginning of Scene 4, when the lights flicker, go out, and then come back on, dimmed. Use a dimmer switch if your room has one; otherwise you can experiment with turning some, but not all, of the lights on to create a dimmer effect.

PROPS

(By scenes)

Scene 1:

Sign-up sheet (Sheet should be poster-board size. The words "Dessert for 12" and the date and time of the potluck should be written at the top, and the numbers 1-10 written down the left side of the page. It should be shown that Mrs. Smith has signed up for all ten slots.)

Large disposable box container, "SMITH" printed on the side in large letters. This box should hold the remains of green marshmallow salad (see page vii for recipe).

Large spoon

Plane ticket for Mrs. Keal's purse
 Lead pipe or large wrench for Mrs. Keal's purse
 Spoon, placed on keyboard
 Compact for Mrs. Keal
 Bible for Pastor

Scene 2:

Small bowl of marshmallow salad for each table (see recipe on
 page vii)
 Cash box
 Calculator
 Notepad and pencil
 Stack of index cards, taped together, as crib notes for Rev's
 speech

Scene 3:

Prop letter (see page vii)

Scene 4:

Compact for Mrs. Keal
 Large flashlight on M.T. Socket's tool belt
 Large, heavy tray or cookie sheet

Scene 5:

Hanky for Mrs. Keal
 Handkerchief for M.T. Socket
 Prop letter (see page vii)

Scene 6:

Large canvas or duffel bag, filled with the following clues:
 Compact from Mrs. Keal's purse
 Lead pipe or wrench from Mrs. Keal's purse
 Plane ticket from Mrs. Keal's purse
 Tray or cookie sheet from Scene 4, bent and misshapen
 Electrical cord, as from electric percolator, frayed and
 damaged

(The following is the prop letter used in Scenes 3 and 5.)

To Whom It May Concern:

Our Pastor, Evan Keal, must be stopped! We cannot run a successful church with him as our leader. He refuses to go along with the way things have always been done around here, and he is constantly trying to expand our ideas of ministry. New ideas?? What a crock! We don't need to think, we just need to follow last year's plan! Come to next month's council meeting, and let's get rid of Pastor Evan Keal, by ANY MEANS NECESSARY!!!

T.T.H.

(Use the following recipe to make the marshmallow salad needed for Scene 2)

Green Marshmallow Salad

- 1 package (3.4 ounces) instant pistachio-flavored pudding mix
- 1 carton (8 ounces) frozen whipped topping, thawed
- 2 tablespoons salad dressing or mayonnaise
- 1 can (16 ounces) fruit cocktail, undrained
- 1 can (8 ounces) crushed pineapple, undrained
- 2 cups miniature marshmallows

In a large bowl, combine pudding mix, whipped topping and salad dressing; mix well. Fold in remaining ingredients. Leave in bowl or spoon into individual serving dishes. Serve chilled.
6-8 servings.

Scene 1
(A Shocking Discovery)

(Scene 1 takes place in the foyer area, or in room other than the one in which dinner will be served. Hors d'oeuvres have been set out before people arrive, so people should be snacking, milling around, and talking. MUSICIAN is at the keyboard, melodramatically playing familiar songs incorrectly (i.e., "In the Garden" way too fast with a calypso beat, or "In My Heart There Rings a Melody" with a slow blues beat). The others in the cast should arrive at staggered times, making loud introductions and using flamboyant gestures, so there is no doubt the audience knows who they are. TESS makes comments about having to be in the kitchen and exits. All others continue milling around. Once the following announcement begins, the CAST should move toward the front.

Scene 1 will begin immediately following a brief announcement by the director or host. The announcement should contain words of welcome and the grace for the meal. An explanation of how the evening will progress follows. The end of this announcement should contain: "And now, ladies and gentlemen, we proudly present Murder, Mayhem, and Marshmallow Salad."

Following the announcement, MUSICIAN will loudly play the familiar baseball game cheer [at the end of which the crowd usually yells "Charge"]. At the exact same moment when the word "Charge" is usually yelled, TESS screams, loud and long from Off-stage.

Pause while CAST looks around, confused. MUSICIAN studies her keyboard, trying to decipher the cause of the scream.)

MRS. KEAL: *(Melodramatically, drawing lots of attention, fanning herself)* Well, my stars, what in the world was that? *(MRS. KEAL exits to change her clothes.)*

PASTOR: *(With no conviction, little emotion)* Relax, everyone, that was just the keyboard. These new ones are so realistic ...

MUSICIAN: *(Standing, eyes wide with confusion)* But I ...

- 1 **REV:** (*Rushing to the keyboard*) Ladies and gentlemen, I am the
 2 **Reverend Peter Piper Porcupine**, previous pastor of the
 3 **Pleasant Valley Pious Church** in Pleasant Valley,
 4 **Pennsylvania**. We at the Pious Parish in Pennsylvania
 5 possess a digital keyboard with those exact capabilities,
 6 particularly the duplication of sounds for use in worship.
 7 I would love to teach a seminar to this congregation on
 8 how to use dramatic sounds during worship. (*Turning to*
 9 *someone in the crowd*) Have I given you my card?
- 10 **MUSICIAN:** But I didn't —
- 11 **PHIL:** (*To MUSICIAN*) There'll be cheers for you all 'round
 12 If you can duplicate that sound.
- 13 **MUSICIAN:** But I never ...
- 14 **M.T. SOCKET:** Yeah, lessee you do that again! (*Laughs.*)
- 15 **MUSICIAN:** But ... (*MUSICIAN looks at all the expectant faces,*
 16 *shrugs, and repeats the cheer, and TESS again screams on cue,*
 17 *this time running out of the kitchen, holding a large sign-up*
 18 *sheet in her hand.*)
- 19 **MRS. KEAL:** (*Rushing to TESS, upstaging her with her arm*
 20 *gestures, screaming herself to steal the attention*) Oh my
 21 heavens, there's been an accident, an explosion of some
 22 sort, maybe, or perhaps a rodent sighting in the
 23 nursery. (*Swoons, looks to see who is watching. Sobers when*
 24 *no one is concerned, gets out compact, checks hair. Steps back*
 25 *and away from TESS.*)
- 26 **TESS:** Worse! Look at this! (*Holds up the paper. MUSICIAN plays*
 27 *the suspenseful dah-dum.*)
- 28 **PASTOR:** (*To MUSICIAN*) Lorraine! Please!
- 29 **PHIL:** (*Dryly, slowly, with little emotion*) It's a crime, isn't it,
 30 how the majestic trees of this earth have been
 31 murdered for our own convenience. (*Getting excited*) If
 32 we ban together, now, today, and opt for more recycled
 33 paper ... (*MUSICIAN plays an environmental song, e.g., "For*
 34 *the Beauty of the Earth," or "I Think That I Shall Never See."*)
- 35 **PASTOR:** (*Rushing up to PHIL, urgently calming him down*) Now,

1 **everyone, we must not get excited. The good Lord says,**
 2 **well ...** (*Flipping madly through his Bible, then frantically*)
 3 **Just stay calm, everybody!**

4 **REV:** (*Stealing the stage with flamboyant arm gestures, upstaging*
 5 **PASTOR**) **I am a man who believes in saving the**
 6 **environment. Parishioners should pull together for**
 7 **such a cause.** (*Hands out his card to PHIL and others*
 8 *nearby.*) **Have I mentioned that I am currently without a**
 9 **church home in which to save the trees?**

10 **PHIL:** (*With disdain*) **How many trees went into these cards?**

11 **MRS. KEAL:** (*Trying to steal the show again*) **What is this tragedy**
 12 **that has befallen us humble folk? I think I'm going to**
 13 **faint!** (*Begins to swoon, but when no one notices, she moves next*
 14 *to M.T. SOCKET and says, louder,*) **I said, I think I shall**
 15 **swoon!** (*She faints backward, hoping M.T. SOCKET will catch*
 16 *her, but he steps away, not noticing. After falling, MRS. KEAL*
 17 *gets up, brushes herself off, and exits to change clothes, stomping*
 18 *furiously. MUSICIAN plays suspenseful notes.*)

19 **PASTOR: Lorraine!**

20 **M.T. SOCKET:** **Is there maybe a problem with the circuits**
 21 **in the kitchen? Or possibly an oven that won't ignite**
 22 **properly?** (*Hitches up his pants.*) **Let me check this**
 23 **out ...** (*Exits.*)

24 **TESS:** **Listen, this is an emergency! No, a *nightmare!***
 25 (*PASTOR moans, putting hand to head.*) **Where is Mrs.**
 26 **Smith? Is she here tonight?** (*Waits for response, then turns*
 27 *to PASTOR and thrusts the paper into his hands.*) **Did she or**
 28 **did she not sign up to bring green marshmallow salad**
 29 **for this evening's potluck?** (*M.T. SOCKET comes out of the*
 30 *kitchen, holding a plastic box container labeled "SMITH" in*
 31 *large black letters. The container holds ten to twelve servings of*
 32 *green marshmallow salad. M.T. SOCKET is eating out of it*
 33 *with a large spoon. TESS does not see him, but M.T. SOCKET*
 34 *should make sure that everyone else does. TESS doesn't give*
 35 **PASTOR a chance to reply, but instead snatches back the sign-**

1 *up sheet and begins ranting, shrilly.)* Yes, indeed, she did
 2 sign up to bring green marshmallow salad. But instead
 3 of marshmallow salad to feed one hundred and twenty
 4 people, she only brought enough to feed twelve! How
 5 can we host a potluck without green marshmallow
 6 salad? We always have green marshmallow salad! Ever
 7 since this church was started we have had green
 8 marshmallow salad at every potluck that has ever
 9 transpired. What do you intend to do about this, Pastor
 10 Keal? *(When M.T. SOCKET realizes what TESS is saying*
 11 *about not having enough salad, he freezes, spoon in the air, eyes*
 12 *wide. M.T. SOCKET slowly looks at the container with a*
 13 *horrified expression and slinks out by the middle of TESS's*
 14 *speech, so as to re-enter by her last line. PASTOR is picking at*
 15 *his cuticles and isn't paying much attention to TESS.)*

16 **M.T. SOCKET:** *(Returning without the salad, wiping his lips and*
 17 *mocking)* Yes, oh please, help us! Without marshmallow
 18 salad, I just might *die!* *(MUSICIAN plays something*
 19 *foreshadowing.)*

20 **TESS:** *(Smacking her fist in her hand)* You watch it, M.T., or you
 21 just might! Pastor Keal! What do you intend to do?

22 **PASTOR:** *(Starts as if he had been sleeping, then scrambles madly*
 23 *in his Bible.)* Well, I just believe Jesus himself put it best
 24 when he said ... That is, the apostle Paul once was
 25 quoted ... I mean ... *(Louder, frantically)* Don't panic,
 26 everybody! Just stay calm!

27 **TESS:** Just as I thought. You'll take care of the situation, all
 28 right, just like you take care of every situation. By
 29 shaking in your boots. *(She shakes and shimmies to prove*
 30 *her point. MUSICIAN plays "Blue Suede Shoes" or "These*
 31 *Boots Were Made for Walkin'.")*

32 **PASTOR and TESS:** *(Together)* Lorraine! Please!

33 **MRS. KEAL:** *(Emphatically)* Oh, no, you must be mistaken, Tess.
 34 That would positively *never* happen. Evan doesn't own
 35 any boots at all. *(Pause)* Well, excepting, of course, for his

1 special-order catalogue Arctic tundra boots, but he knows
2 better than to wear those before Thanksgiving! What a
3 fashion faux pas *that* would be! (*Cackling laughter at her*
4 *own joke and whacking TESS with her purse.*)

5 **TESS:** Hey, what have you got in that purse, iron weights?
6 you could hurt someone with that thing!

7 **MRS. KEAL:** Oh, I'm terribly sorry! I just keep the
8 necessities in here. Us girls can't leave home without
9 certain things. You know what I mean ... Compact,
10 latest edition of *Inside Hollywood* magazine, exfoliating
11 cream ... (*MRS. KEAL begins to remove some things from her*
12 *purse as she names them. A plane ticket flutters to the floor and*
13 *is picked up by M.T. SOCKET, who holds it up for inspection.*)

14 **MRS. KEAL:** (*Snatching the plane ticket and shoving it back in her*
15 *bag*) I'll take that!

16 **TESS:** (*In a stage whisper to M.T. SOCKET*) What was that?

17 **M.T. SOCKET:** (*In a stage whisper to TESS*) It looked like a
18 plane ticket! (*MRS. KEAL continues to root in her purse and*
19 *accidentally spills out a very heavy object, such as a lead pipe*
20 *or large wrench. She should quickly shove the heavy object back*
21 *while looking around nervously.*)

22 **MRS. KEAL:** (*Chuckling nervously*) A girl never can be too
23 careful these days. (*Meanwhile, PASTOR has been trying to*
24 *slink away.*)

25 **TESS:** (*Turning to PASTOR viciously*) Not so fast, Pastor Evan
26 Keal. What have you got to say about this situation?
27 (*MUSICIAN plays "The Chicken Song," the song usually*
28 *played at weddings to which people do silly hand motions.*)

29 **PASTOR:** I ... uh ... (*Runs fingers under collar.*) That is to
30 say ... (*Clears throat.*)

31 **MRS. KEAL:** (*With sarcasm and disgust*) Evan, dear. You should
32 have worn a light shade of blue if you'd planned on
33 stuttering and stammering this evening. Yes, a light
34 blue would perfectly complement you chattering teeth.
35 (*To audience*) A public speaker who can't speak in public,

- 1 **indeed.** (*Takes out compact, fluffs hair, stalks out.*)
- 2 **PASTOR: Pooder Pie ... Lovey ...** (*Tries to walk after her but*
3 *concedes, unwilling to expend the energy.*) **Wait up.** (*MRS.*
4 *KEAL exits and changes clothes. MUSICIAN varies selection.*)
- 5 **REV:** (*Raising his arms*) **Please, people, please, allow me to**
6 **pacify this predicament. I am prominent in my**
7 **community in Pennsylvania for being a peacemaker**
8 **and I pride myself in having the vision necessary to**
9 **procure compromise in situations such as this.** (*Turning*
10 *suddenly to someone*) **Did I spit on you? Please don't let**
11 **that interfere with your good opinion of me and my**
12 **ability to lead a congregation of needy souls like**
13 **yourself. Have you seen my card?**
- 14 **PHIL:** (*Dryly, to TESS*) **Perhaps in the interest of harmony**
15 **and simple dietary variation we could forgo the**
16 **marshmallow salad, just this once.**
- 17 **TESS:** **You're just a visitor. What do you know?** (*Stalks over to*
18 *M.T. SOCKET, whispering.*)
- 19 **PHIL:** (*To TESS's back*) **Visitor? I have been a member here**
20 **for three years.** (*Pause, then looking out over the audience,*
21 *staring intensely*)
22 **We dare invite folly and disaster**
23 **With one breath,**
24 **By saying, "Give me marshmallow salad,**
25 **Or give me my death."**
26 (*Allow for a pause. MUSICIAN stops playing and characters*
27 *look at each other, thinking PHIL is strange. MUSICIAN plays*
28 *suspenseful chords.*)
- 29 **M.T. SOCKET:** **Well, with that message of "doom and**
30 **foreboding ..."** (*Say these two words in Richard Nixon style, a*
31 *bit mocking, using fingers in the air for quotes.*) **let's begin this**
32 **shindig, marshmallow salad or no!** (*Silly laugh that dies out*)
- 33 **TESS:** **Unbelievable!** (*Throws up hands, stalks out.*)
- 34 **M.T. SOCKET:** (*Clearing throat in a bit of a gross way*) **Well, folks,**
35 **how 'bout some dinner?** (*Laughs.*) **Seriously, though.**

1 Ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased as punch to
 2 welcome you to our church, led by our esteemed Pastor
 3 Evan Keal. (*MUSICIAN plays "The Chicken Song."*)
 4 **PASTOR:** (*Startles, then waves and comes forward, stopping at the*
 5 *MUSICIAN.*) Uh, Lorraine, thanks, but you should play
 6 the selections that I have already chosen for you.
 7 (*Addressing crowd*) Now, uhhhh ... I, uhhhh ...
 8 **MRS. KEAL:** (*Rushing in from Off-stage*) And don't forget his
 9 lovely wife, (*Striking a Marilyn Monroe pose, maybe whacking*
 10 *PASTOR with her large purse*) Mrs. Molly Devaro Keal!
 11 **PASTOR:** Ah, yes, thank you, dear. Now, Lorraine, if you
 12 please. I'd like us all to join together in a chorus before
 13 we dine. Uh. Let's all sing together that little song "Blest
 14 Be the Tie That Binds."
 15 **MUSICIAN:** I'm tired of that tune!
 16 **PASTOR:** What was that, Lorraine?
 17 **MUSICIAN:** I said ... (*Darting her eyes, searching for something to*
 18 *say*) uh ... I said ... uh ... I said, "Does everyone have a
 19 spoon? (*Laughs nervously, holds up a spoon.*)
 20 **PASTOR:** Ah ... Yes ... I see. Well, anyway, how about an intro,
 21 Lorraine? (*MUSICIAN makes a face at PASTOR. She shuffles*
 22 *her music, then makes a big production of beginning to play. But*
 23 *instead of "Blest Be the Tie That Binds," she plays "The Battle*
 24 *Hymn of the Republic" with a determined, nasty look on her face.*
 25 *PASTOR attempts to sing the lyrics to "Blest Be the Tie That*
 26 *Binds," as does the rest of the cast, but MUSICIAN is fighting*
 27 *them with the music. Finally REV and SISTER POLLY join in*
 28 *with MUSICIAN, belting out the chorus of "The Battle Hymn of*
 29 *the Republic," camp meeting style. The rest of the cast, and*
 30 *hopefully the audience, will begin singing "The Battle Hymn of*
 31 *the Republic," and at the very end, PASTOR finally gives up and*
 32 *joins in. When the song is finished, PASTOR looks defeated and*
 33 *slinks away. MUSICIAN looks triumphant.*)
 34 **M.T. SOCKET:** (*Clearing his throat*) Yes, well. Thank you for
 35 that ... (*M.T. SOCKET has no idea what to say.*) uh ... yes.

(Scene 2 takes place toward the end of the salad course. The cast [except for TESS] should be milling around among the tables toward the front. Marshmallow salads should be set out on the tables by a grumbling TESS in ridiculously small bowls, providing each table of ten to twelve people enough salad for one or two people. TESS should sarcastically make comments such as, "You'll all have to share this now, so don't take too much" and "Enjoy your bite, 'cause that's all of this you're gonna get!" PASTOR is up front for several minutes, allowing enough time for people to notice him. He is holding the cash box and begins to count heads. After using a calculator and making notes on a sheet of paper, PASTOR counts heads again, then scratches his head.)

28 **PASTOR:** *(With the cash box and piece of paper, coming to M.T.*
29 *SOCKET)* Uh, M.T., I, uh, need to have a word with you ...
30 **it's about tonight's collection.**

33 PASTOR: But there seems to be a shortfall in the collection
34 box, and I don't mean to trouble you, but weren't you in
35 charge of collecting the money tonight?

1 **M.T. SOCKET:** If you don't mean to trouble me, Pastor, then
2 **don't.** (*PASTOR and M.T. SOCKET have a face-off, staring at*
3 *each other. There is a long pause. PASTOR looks down,*
4 *obviously intimidated.*)

5 **PASTOR:** Silly me. I've miscalculated again. Funny how it
6 seems to happen just about every time you collect the
7 money, Mr. Socket.

8 **M.T. SOCKET:** (*Pauses, then stresses each word.*) If you don't
9 **mean to trouble me, Pastor, then don't.** (*A pause while the*
10 *tension grows. MUSICIAN plays suspenseful chords.*)

11 **PASTOR:** (*Stuttering nervously*) My error, no worries ...
12 (*PASTOR slinks off, shaking his head.*)

13 **M.T. SOCKET:** (*Looks after the PASTOR for a moment, then changes*
14 *his mood abruptly, turning to audience with feigned*
15 *enthusiasm.*) As some of you might know, or maybe some
16 of you don't know. But actually most of you might have
17 absolutely no idea, but really, some of you ... well ...
18 anyway ... tonight's potluck is being held in honor of the
19 esteemed Reverend Peter Piper Porcupine, previous
20 pastor of Pleasant Valley Pious Church in Pleasant
21 Valley, Pennsylvania ... (*REV approaches and begins to*
22 *speak, but is cut off when M.T. SOCKET says loudly and slowly,*
23 *as if to a child*) who will give an address **later** (*Extra stress*
24 *on "later"*) **in the program.** (*REV sits down, passing out a*
25 *business card or two.*) Now, in the event of an emergency,
26 **the exits are located here and here.** (*Gestures like an airline*
27 *attendant.*) In the event of a fire, the extinguishers are
28 located here. In the event of a murder, wave your arms n
29 the air and scream like a banshee. (*Waves his arms to*
30 *demonstrate, then laughs at his own joke.*)

31 **PHIL:** (*Sneaks up, startles M.T. SOCKET by clearing his throat,*
32 *then speaks slowly and intensely, staring at the audience.*)
33 **On such a night**
34 **It isn't bright**
35 **Your silence would suffice.**

1
2 **You've caused a fright**
3 **By making light**
4 **Of someone dying ...** (*Holds up two fingers forebodingly*)
5 **twice.** (*M.T. SOCKET laughs, then lets it lapse into*
6 *uncomfortable silence. After a moment of silence, MUSICIAN*
7 *plays the suspenseful dah-dum.*)
8 **M.T. SOCKET: Lorraine! Thank you!** (*PHIL walks slowly away,*
9 *staring intensely. TESS bustles in, walking between the tables.*)
10 **Yes, well, and such a night it is! The National Weather**
11 **Service has announced a freak tornado warning in this**
12 **immediate area. They have advised that everyone stay**
13 **put for the next hour or so until the scare passes. But**
14 **the good news is, we have lots of good food ...**
15 **TESS:** (*Screaming from amidst the audience*) **But not enough**
16 **marshmallow salad!**
17 **M.T. SOCKET: And hopefully you've been seated next to**
18 **someone who will provide good company. With that,**
19 **here is Pastor Keal to offer a few words before we begin**
20 **our main course.** (*MUSICIAN plays "The Chicken Song."*)
21 **PASTOR: Lorraine!**
22 **MRS. KEAL:** (*Rushing to the front*) **And don't forget his lovely**
23 **wife, Mrs. Molly Devaro Keal!** (*She strikes a pose, smacking*
24 *PASTOR with her purse.*)
25 **PASTOR: Yes, well, thank you. I mean, let's prepare our**
26 **hearts for eating. Or, rather, um, let's maybe give thanks**
27 **for the words that speak of what we have received so**
28 **far but have not yet had the pleasure of receiving ...**
29 **well ...** (*MUSICIAN plays "The Chicken Song."*)
30 **MRS. KEAL:** (*Disgusted*) **Land sakes!** (*Stalks off and changes*
31 *clothes.*)
32 **REV:** (*Putting his arm around PASTOR and ushering him off*
33 *the stage*) **Please, allow me, Pastor. It is apparent that**
34 **you've been overwhelmed by the problems that have**
35 **presented, what with the omission of marshmallow**

1 **salad from the menu and all ... I'd be pleased as punch**
 2 **to help.** (*His tone changes as he addresses the people now,*
 3 *arms raised in the air, speaking like a greasy salesman.)*
 4 **People,** (*Dramatic pause*) **let us reflect on all the blessings**
 5 **bestowed upon us, especially the blessing of**
 6 **employment, of which I do not at this particular**
 7 **moment possess. Any ideas would be appreciated. Have**
 8 **you seen my card?** (*REV passes out a few business cards.*)

9 **PASTOR:** Um. Yes, well.

10 **REV:** (*Upstaging PASTOR again*) **And now seems as good a**
 11 **time as any to give my address.** (*Unfurls a stack of index*
 12 *cards, taped together to imply a long speech. A few loose cards*
 13 *are tucked in the stack and flutter to the floor. SISTER POLLY*
 14 *rushes to pick the cards up.*) **I just have a few words to say**
 15 **prior to our partaking of this delicious dinner.** (*Clears*
 16 *throat and poses as if to begin.*) **The bonds that bind us ...**
 17 **have bound us tightly.** (*Pause*) **Together, we have been**
 18 **bound ... by all those things that bring folks just like**
 19 **yourselves together. One and all, together as one ... one**
 20 **group, united, under God, indivis ...** (*Realizes he's reciting*
 21 *the Pledge of Allegiance, looks down at cards, and says in a*
 22 *lower tone*) **Oh, that's the wrong speech.** (*Pauses to look at*
 23 *notes, and then louder*) **... if there is anything I have**
 24 **learned by growing up from childhood to adulthood**
 25 **and back again ... is that united, we are bonded ... and**
 26 **divided, we ... are not bonded. Broken bonds can never**
 27 **be mended ... unless, of course, they once again bond ...**
 28 **by binding together that which once was not. And by**
 29 **binding us all together, we are bound by bonds that**
 30 **bind us. Amen, and thank you.** (*REV waves and passes out*
 31 *business cards, pompous and sure of himself. SISTER POLLY*
 32 *clutches his arm, waving and smiling.*)

33 **PASTOR:** (*Looks unbelieving, shaking his head.*) **Well, I uh ... I'm**
 34 **not sure I can follow this ... uh ... speech.**

35 **M.T. SOCKET:** **You mean that random group of words?** (*Laughs.*)

- 1 **PASTOR:** Uh, yes, right.
- 2 **REV:** *(Sincere)* Thank you, thank you so much for your kind
3 words. *(REV and SISTER POLLY wave and exit to the back.)*
- 4 **PASTOR:** Well, more than usual, I'm just not sure what to say!
- 5 **M.T. SOCKET:** Allow me, Pastor! All this talk about bonds
6 has made me hungrier than a hound for our meal!
7 'Course, it doesn't take much for me to get hungry!
8 *(Laughs his laugh.)* Oh, jeepers, I can recall a certain
9 cruise the wife and I took to Bermuda last winter. They
10 said it was all your can eat, but ...
- 11 **PASTOR:** *(Interrupting M.T. SOCKET thoughtfully, as if recalling something)* You took that cruise just after our Christmas
12 fundraiser here, didn't you?
- 13 **M.T. SOCKET:** *(Crossing his arms, speaking in angry, defensive tones)* I don't particularly catch your meanin', Pastor.
14 Perhaps you and I should settle this matter later.
- 15 **PASTOR:** *(Looking out at the audience, clearing his throat)* Of
16 course. Sure, please proceed, Mr. Socket.
- 17 **M.T. SOCKET:** *(Glares at PASTOR for a moment, then switches roles instantly, looking out at audience)* Well, how 'bout if we
18 just relinquish the pleasantries and get right to it! Let's
19 eat! The servers will be around to bring your meals, and
20 once you have been served, please begin eating. Enjoy
21 your meal!
- 22 **TESS:** *(Yelling from the other room)* But not your marshmallow
23 salad!
- 24 **PHIL:** *(Sneaks up to Center Stage and turns to face audience, raising arms if necessary to keep the quiet.)*
25 Listen, both with eyes and ears:
26 Folly lurks and folly rears. *(MUSICIAN plays low, foreboding chords as PHIL makes his way, step by step, through the audience and out the back. PHIL looks people in the eye as he walks by, staring unblinking and intensely, making the audience nervous.)*
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28
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Scene 3
(Conversations with Dinner)

(Scene 3 takes place during the serving and eating of the main course. It's OK if this goes on after people are finished. SERVERS should make every effort to clear away dishes and refill coffee during this time. The CAST circulates to each table, saying their prescribed lines.)

PASTOR: *(Gulping, running finger through collar, sighing, stuttering)* Good evening. Isn't this a wonderful party? Yes, I suppose it is. *(Looks at watch.)* Incidentally, are you too warm? Do me a favor and let M.T. Socket know when he comes by that he should turn down the heat. I'd tell him myself but, well, he's not too fond of me at all. I'm a bit electrically challenged, you see. I tend to erase hard drives and short-circuit circuits. Whoops, is that my wife? I think I'll just duck out the other way ... Don't tell her you saw me ... well, um ... see ya.

MRS. KEAL: *(Does not wait for any responses to your questions; does not look folks in the eye.)* Hi honey, Mrs. Molly Devaro Keal here. *(Striking a pose)* How is your dinner? I happen to know the woman personally who brought those very rolls to this potluck, and I wouldn't trust her cooking to save my life. No sir, the only thing she knows how to bake is misery, and that's all she gives her husband! But I know all about misery with a husband, yes ma'am. I shouldn't tell you this, but just between you and me and that glass of water, the spark has gone right out of my marriage, let me tell you this. I have tried, believe me! I never in my life envisioned myself stuck in this town hosting book studies and singing in the choir. Honey, you don't sing in the choir, do you? It's a good thing — your voice just isn't the type. Anyway, I always saw myself the star of a Broadway musical. Don't you think I'd be fabulous? I had a voice teacher who thought I belonged

1 in theatrics. Well, honey, someday my ship will come in.
 2 *(Pauses, looking crafty)* Yes indeed, I believe that my ship
 3 will be here very soon, even if I have to sail it myself. You
 4 didn't wear those colors together on purpose, did you? Of
 5 course not, honey, I understand. Let's do lunch. I'll give
 6 you some pointers on your hair. *(MRS. KEAL should exit*
 7 *after her last table and change clothes again.)*

8 **REV:** Reverend Peter Piper Porcupine, most recently from
 9 Pleasant Valley Pious Church in Pleasant Valley,
 10 Pennsylvania, and my wife, Sister Polly. Glad to know
 11 you! Have I presented you with my card? Positively
 12 peachy evening, wouldn't you say? Look, don't pass this
 13 on to Pastor Keal, but some people at that other table
 14 were expressing their dissatisfaction with Pastor Keal's
 15 positions on certain issues of faith. You have already
 16 been privy to what an excellent speaker I am, and I
 17 would be pleased to appoint myself to this congregation
 18 as your humble shepherd and PR man. I believe I have
 19 already mentioned that I am currently without
 20 employment. Seems I have left the Pleasant Valley
 21 Pious Church in somewhat of a financial pickle, if you
 22 know what I mean! *(Laughs.)* Oh, so sorry, did I spit on
 23 you? Anyway, *(Looking around, talking conspiratorially)* I
 24 am positive that a large percentage of your members
 25 are looking to improve church life by retaining a new
 26 pastor. *(He slips a copy of "prop letter" onto their table.)* I am
 27 in possession of this top-secret correspondence from
 28 one of your very own. And when the time comes to hire
 29 a new employee, I'm your man. Look, and don't mention
 30 any of this to Pastor Keal. I'd hate for anyone to get
 31 hurt. Their feelings, I mean. Pleasant evening to you!
 32 *(Before the couple leaves the table, SISTER POLLY should say*
 33 *one of the below lines, in response to which REV will chastise*
 34 *her with "Sister Polly!" and drag her away.)*

35 **SISTER POLLY:** *(Attempting to take food off others' plates, stuffing*

1 *it in her mouth or purse) Are you going to eat that? Are you*
 2 *finished with that? Mind if I snatch a bite?*

3 **M.T. SOCKET:** Evening, folks, the name's M.T. Socket. How's
 4 that grub? I'm just about to get in there and rustle up
 5 some for myself. How's the lighting in here? Nice, isn't
 6 it? I coordinated the dimmer switches on timers to
 7 slowly increase with the subtle changes of the rising and
 8 setting sun. No biggie. But you know the real marvel
 9 here is the use of a computerized sensory system to
 10 detect the combined body heat of the whole crowd in
 11 this room. The heat is divided automatically by the
 12 estimated crowd size calculated by the pressure of our
 13 collective weight on special built-in sensory pads in the
 14 flooring. Then the computer decides, based on the
 15 outside weather conditions, if people are hot or cold.
 16 The heat or air then kicks in or shuts down accordingly,
 17 keeping each person in the room enveloped in a mean
 18 air temperature of 71.65 degrees Fahrenheit. I know, it's
 19 simply astounding. Yeah, I designed all that myself. You
 20 know what Pastor Keal said? He said, "Why don't we just
 21 ask folks if they are cold or hot, and jack up the heat or
 22 air ourselves?" Some people just have no knack for
 23 mechanical things, you know? No knack at all. As
 24 helpless as a baby around computers. I asked him about
 25 his RAM, and he thought I wanted to sock him one. Felt
 26 like it, I sure did. Yup, I sure did. Felt like it on more'n
 27 one occasion, in fact. (*Snorts and laughs.*) Well, you folks
 28 enjoy your dinners. (*PHIL mills around, staring intensely*
 29 *and quoting from odd sources, such as textbooks or the TV*
 30 *Guide. TESS bustles around, sputtering about the*
 31 *marshmallow salad and complaining about PASTOR's*
 32 *leadership. TESS should try to clear plates from people who are*
 33 *clearly still eating dinner. MUSICIAN should play random*
 34 *selections incorrectly, as in Scene 1.)*

Scene 4

(Something Is Brewing)

(Once the CAST has made the rounds with their speeches and the director has given the signal, the CAST should mill toward the front. The lights flicker, go out momentarily, and come on muted, as if using a generator.)

MRS. KEAL: *(Running out, screaming)* **It's disaster, destruction, I know it! I think I'm going to faint!**

M.T. SOCKET: **Well, don't do it over here! You'll end up with green Jell-O all over your backside.**

TESS: **There's not nearly enough green marshmallow salad left on these tables to cover her ... well, listen, everybody. The power has gone out! Do you know what that means?** *(MRS. KEAL should begin digging in her purse.)*

PHIL: *(Dryly)* **The ice sculpture Mrs. Keal had made to look like herself is going to melt.** *(MRS. KEAL pauses her digging for a momentary pose.)*

M.T. SOCKET: **No, worse! This means my computer could be fried!**

MRS. KEAL: **No, no! This means my light-up compact won't work!**

PHIL: **Doesn't your compact use batteries?**

MRS. KEAL: *(Taking out her compact and opening it up, saying in a breathy voice)* **Oh, thank goodness.**

PHIL: *(Looking toward the audience, speaking intensely)*
**It's foolishness to blame the fool
For folly is her only rule.**

MRS. KEAL: *(To PHIL)* **Why, thank you.** *(Everyone else pauses to look at PHIL.)*

TESS: **Listen, everyone! No electricity means that the ovens aren't working! Dessert will be ruined!** *(SISTER POLLY lets out a scream and faints into REV's arms.)*

REV: *(Fanning SISTER POLLY)* **Now come on, honey, we can stop at the donut shop on our way home.**

1 **M.T. SOCKET:** Come on, Tess. (*M.T. SOCKET hitches up his*
2 *pants.*) Let's go check this out. I'm sure it's just a fuse.
3 (*He gets a large, heavy flashlight out of his work belt.*)

4 **PASTOR:** May I assist you? (*MUSICIAN plays "The Chicken Song."*)

5 **M.T. SOCKET:** (*His eyes widen and he sighs, scratches his head,*
6 *and says sarcastically.*) Uh, yeah, why don't you go to your
7 office and see if your desk is still in the same position as
8 when you last saw it?

9 **MRS. KEAL:** Better yet, Evan, go make a fresh pot of coffee.
10 There's nothing better than fresh coffee to calm
11 frazzled nerves, I always say. (*She pats her hair and gazes*
12 *into her compact.*)

13 **PASTOR:** Right. (*Exits. PASTOR will not return.*)

14 **TESS:** Molly, without any electricity, how's your husband
15 supposed to make ...

16 **M.T. SOCKET:** (*Interrupting*) Just leave it alone, Tess. Leave it
17 alone. (*TESS and M.T. SOCKET shake their heads and exit.*)

18 **MRS. KEAL:** (*To the crowd as she exits a bit behind M.T. SOCKET*
19 *and TESS*) You all just go on and keep eating. You don't
20 really have to see to chew, now do you? Go on.

21 **REV:** (*To his still swooning wife*) Polly, honey, let me scoot into
22 the kitchen and see if I can rustle up some cupcakes or
23 cookies or something. (*REV picks up a large, heavy tray and*
24 *exits, leaving SISTER POLLY to check her nails.*)

25 **PHIL:** My own personal philosophy
26 Is simply what will be will be.
27 And yet, I sense a certain fright
28 For what may still unfold tonight. (*PHIL exits. After a*
29 *pause, the lights should come back on, and M.T. SOCKET*
30 *should come out without his large flashlight.*)

31 **M.T. SOCKET:** Just a fuse, ladies and gentlemen, not to
32 worry. But that lightning has apparently fried our
33 phone system. We probably won't have that fixed
34 tonight, (*Laughs*) but no worries! We'll be having dessert
35 after all in just a few minutes!



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