

THE CASE OF THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER

by Brian Bopp



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The Case of the Mysterious Stranger

A humorous dinner theatre mystery

by Brian Bopp

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SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

The Case of the Mysterious Stranger 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.

- 6:30 p.m. — Guests arrive and are introduced.
Appetizers and punch
- 6:45 p.m. — Cast is introduced.
- 7:00 p.m. — Welcome by host/hostess.
Salad or soup
- 7:07 p.m. — Scene 1 (“Ms. Pippenpopple Points Out a Dress Code Infraction”)
- 7:20 p.m. — **Entrée**
 Scene 2 (“Amos Allman Saves the Day”)
- 7:25 p.m. — **Dessert and coffee**
 Scene 3 (“Sweetwater Sisters Dialog about Dessert”)
- 7:45 p.m. — Scene 4 (“Ronald Gluck Disappears”)
- 8:30 p.m. — Approximate departure time.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(In order of appearance)

GARÇON: (Gar-SOHN) The always cool, unflappable maître d' of the Café Flambé. He speaks with a French accent, even though he was born and raised in (insert your locality here). He should wear a tuxedo. He could have slightly graying hair and perhaps a small Clark Gable moustache.

MISSY and Sissy SWEETWATER: Twins (if possible) widely known for their effusive cheerfulness and syrupy sweetness. They may dress alike.

MS. PATRICE PIPPENPOPPLE: High-society heiress to the Pippenpopple Popcorn fortune. Self-proclaimed fashion trendsetter and busybody. She should be dressed to the hilt with an upswept hairdo, lots of gaudy jewelry, a fur, etc.

AMOS and EUNICE ALLMAN: Benevolent and wise, but oftentimes mischievous, benefactors of the town. They should be made up to look fairly old — not to the point of senility, but in good taste. They should look spiffy, with Amos in a suit and tie and Eunice in a nice dress.

THE COUNTRYMAN FAMILY: Husband STAN, wife JUDY, and their children, COREY — age 15 to 17, COURTNEY — 12, and CALEB — 7. (Could be played as Cara, also 7.) They should be dressed neatly but casually, like the all-American family that they are.

RONALD GLUCK: The mysterious stranger. No one knows his origins or quite what to think of him. He enters without a tie, and his clothing is out of style — not quite an obvious hobo. Could he be ... ?

SPARKY: The supreme ruler of “ze kitchen.” He speaks only French or an improvised version with lots of “ze” and “zwah” and throaty “ho ho” sounds. He should wear a chef hat and a white apron over white clothing.

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: They serve the meal in courses and attend to the guests' needs. For added fun, they may dress alike — e.g., white shirts, black pants, and black bow ties.

HOST/HOSTESS: Greets the guests and gives the welcome. May also assist the kitchen staff.

PASTOR: Prays before the meal and concludes the evening.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Setting:

A fashionable restaurant in the finer section of Yourtown, U.S.A., called the "Café Flambé." It is dinner time and the tables are set, the candles are lit, the lights are low, the delicious aroma of the entrée is wafting out from the kitchen, and romantic music is playing in the background (a string quartet, if possible). All is ready for the wealthy, prestigious residents of the city to arrive.

Dinner theatre happens in a variety of banquet halls, church basements, gymnasiums, and seldom on a regular stage. The directions provided are general and are intended for adaptation to your specific setting. Since the setting is intimate, small tables seating two to four persons are suggested. Tablecloths, centerpieces, candles, etc., should be consistent with the Café Flambé motif.

Microphones:

In a smallish banquet (fifty to seventy-five guests), this may not be necessary. With seventy-five or more guests, the ideal would be for each main character to wear a wireless lapel microphone which may be rented from an audio supply store.

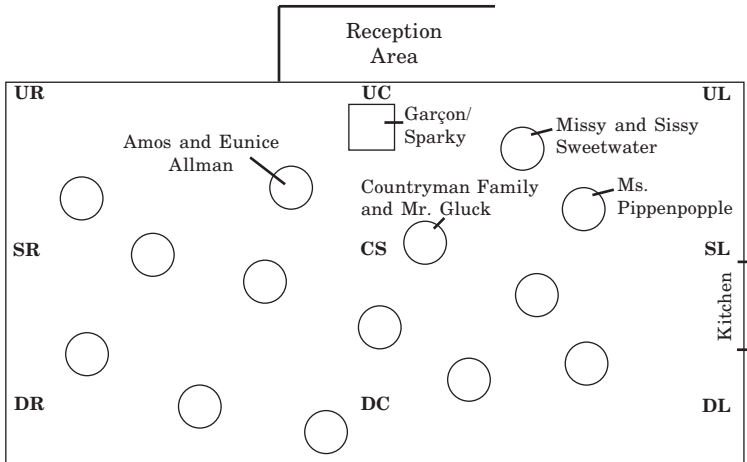
Lighting:

Subdued lighting in general will add to the romantic mood. Lighting should be full at Garçon's station Upstage Center. A follow spot, if available, could be utilized to follow the action during the scenes.

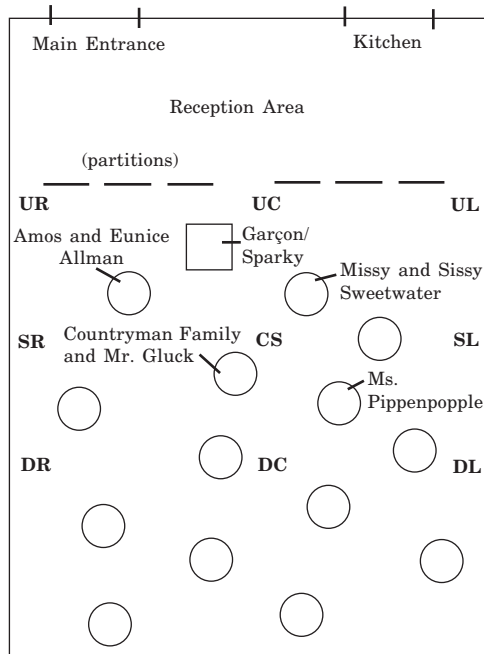
Props:

Small bell and clipboard for Garçon and gum for Courtney.

MYSTERIOUS STRANGER STAGING — PLAN A — FELLOWSHIP OR BANQUET HALL



PLAN B — GYMNASIUM



The Introductions

(In a similar fashion to the previous dinner theatre, each guest or couple is introduced as they arrive. They are shown to their seats by the longtime maître d', GARÇON, who introduces them to their wait staff. GARÇON first receives each guest by asking for their invitation card. He rings a small bell and announces to the group [Use P.A. system if necessary], "The Café Flambé is pleased to welcome _____." He then escorts them to their pre-assigned table. Interspersed with the attendees of the dinner theatre are the dramatized characters of the mystery. They are seated with the "regulars" and must maintain dramatic character throughout the night. GARÇON introduces them as he has the dinner guests, using the following dialogs.)

GARÇON: *(Entering with the SWEETWATER SISTERS)* The Café Flambé is pleased to welcome Missy and Sissy Sweetwater.

SISSY: Oh, Sissy, don't you just love it when Garçon says that?

MISSY: Yes, of course, Sissy dear, but he always gets our names wrong. *(Correcting him)* This is Sissy. I'm Missy.

SISSY: Sissy ...

MISSY: Missy.

SISSY: Sissy ...

MISSY: Missy.

SISSY: Sissy ...

MISSY: Missy.

GARÇON: Yes ... I ...

SISSY: Sissy ...

MISSY: Missy.

GARÇON: *(Mildly frustrated)* This way to your table, if you please ...

SISSY: I think he's got it, don't you, Missy?

MISSY: Yes, Sissy, and he's so cute, don't you think?

- 1 (*GARÇON leads them to a table for two, then returns to*
 2 *escort MS. PIPPENPOPPLE to her table.*)
- 3 **GARÇON:** Café Flambé is pleased to welcome Madame
 4 Patrice Pickenpeckle.
- 5 **MS. PIPPENPOPPLE:** That's Pippenpopple, young man ...
 6 **Pip-pen-pop-ple!** (*With each P, she sprays GARÇON in the*
 7 *face with spittle.*)
- 8 **GARÇON:** I beg your pardon, Madame. (*Tries again.*)
 9 Madame Patrice Pinkenpepper.
- 10 **MS. PIPPENPOPPLE:** (*Under her breath but into his ear, with*
 11 *spittle, of course*) **Pip-pen-pop-ple.**
- 12 **GARÇON:** (*Wiping the spit out of his ear, obviously flustered*)
 13 Patrice Pickle ... Poopen ... peppersprinkle.
- 14 **MS. PIPPENPOPPLE:** (*Seizing the microphone or assuming*
 15 *GARÇON's job, speaking with great eloquence*) **Madame**
 16 **Patrice Pippenpopple, heiress to the immense**
 17 **Pippenpopple Popcorn fortune.** (*Obviously happy with*
 18 *herself*) **Now, Garçon, my seat, please.**
- 19 **GARÇON:** Yes, Madame. (*He escorts her to her table, still*
 20 *wiping his ear, and returns to escort in EUNICE and AMOS*
 21 *ALLMAN.*) **Café Flambé is pleased to welcome Mr. and**
 22 **Mrs. Amos Allman.**
- 23 **EUNICE:** (*Matronly*) **Thank you so much, Garçon.** (*With a*
 24 *wink*) **You've done so well since you came over from ...**
 25 **France.**
- 26 **AMOS:** (*Playing along*) **Say, Garçon, do you have any French**
 27 **fries tonight? Maybe a little French toast?**
- 28 **EUNICE:** Now, Amos, don't tease. He's just doing his job.
 29 (*She flicks a crumb off GARÇON's shoulder and straightens*
 30 *his tie.*) **Keep up the good work, Johnny.**
- 31 **GARÇON:** Yes, Madame. This way ... (*He guides them to their*
 32 *table, then returns to greet the COUNTRYMAN FAMILY.*)
 33 **Café Flambé is pleased to welcome the Countryman**
 34 **family: Stan,** (*STAN smiles*) **Judy,** (*JUDY waves happily*)
 35 **Corey,** (*COREY rolls his eyes with a typical teen scowl*)

1 Courtney, (*COURTNEY smacks her chewing gum*) and
 2 Caleb (*CALEB looks hungry*) Countryman.
 3 CALEB: (*Tugging GARÇON's sleeve*) Hey, Mister, what's for
 4 dinner?
 5 GARÇON: (*Trying to ignore him*) One moment, please ... (*He*
 6 *departs to search for a table with enough seats.*)
 7 CALEB: Do you have chicken nuggets? How 'bout macaroni
 8 and cheese? *I love that!*
 9 JUDY: Now, Caleb, this is a fancy restaurant. (*Emphasis on*
 10 *"fancy."*) I'm sure the food will be wonderful.
 11 COREY: (*Scowls.*) Yeah, right.
 12 COURTNEY: Don't get your hopes up, squirt. Look —
 13 there's not a bottle of ketchup in sight!
 14 CALEB: (*Incomprehensible*) No ... ketchup? (*While they are*
 15 *talking, RONALD GLUCK enters quietly.*)
 16 GARÇON: (*Returns to the entrance and notices MR. GLUCK. To*
 17 *STAN*) I'm sorry, is there one more in your party?
 18 STAN: (*Taken off-guard*) Um ... no, Garçon. He's not with us.
 19 CALEB: Dad, I ...
 20 GARÇON: Sir, may I see your invitation?
 21 MR. GLUCK: (*Somewhat shy*) I ... have no invitation.
 22 GARÇON: No invitation? May I have your name, please?
 23 MR. GLUCK: Gluck. Ronald Gluck.
 24 CALEB: Mom, I need to tell you ...
 25 GARÇON: Yes, Mr. Gluck. One moment, please, while I
 26 check ze guest list. (*He pulls out a clipboard and scans it,*
 27 *nervously eyeing the stranger.*) I'm sorry, Mr ... Your name
 28 does not appear on our guest list this evening. Perhaps
 29 you are ... at ze wrong restaurant?
 30 MR. GLUCK: I don't think so ...
 31 CALEB: (*Unnoticed by GARÇON*) He's with us.
 32 GARÇON: There is a Café Wafflé just down the street ...
 33 (*Pronounce waffle like "wah-FLAY" — a play on the Waffle*
 34 *House restaurant chain, or insert name of other local*
 35 *restaurant.*)

29
30
31
32
33
34
35

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1 **HOST or HOSTESS:** (*Suggested comments*) It is my great
 2 pleasure to welcome you all to the Café Flambé tonight.
 3 I hope that Garçon has found you all a good table.
 4 Please let us know if you need anything at all to
 5 enhance your dining experience. Our delicious dinner
 6 will be served in courses by our efficient team of
 7 waiters and waitresses. As we enjoy our meal, we will
 8 get in on some of the strange happenings at the Café
 9 Flambé.

10 Now I will invite Pastor _____ (*Insert name*) to
 11 bless our meal. (*PASTOR prays.*) Thank you, Pastor.
 12 Have a most pleasant experience tonight as you dine at
 13 the Café Flambé. (*The meal begins as the waiters serve the*
 14 *salads or bowls of soup.*)

15

16 **Scene 1 — Ms. Pippenpopple Points Out**
 17 **a Dress Code Infraction**

18

19 (*Begin this scene shortly after all the guests have received*
 20 *their salads or bowls of soup.*)

21 **MS. PIPPENPOPPLE:** (*Noticeably disturbed by the presence of*
 22 *MR. GLUCK, she signals for GARÇON.*) Garçon, could I
 23 speak with you, please?

24 **GARÇON:** Is something wrong with your seating, Madame
 25 Pippen ... pippen?

26 **MS. PIPPENPOPPLE:** No, not exactly. But I must ask you
 27 a question: Have you lowered the standards of dress
 28 here at Café Flambé?

29 **GARÇON:** No, Madame, we maintain the highest of dress
 30 codes, as you know.

31 **MS. PIPPENPOPPLE:** Shirt, shoes, clean fingernails, and a
 32 *tie?*

33 **GARÇON:** But of course. It is only proper for proper
 34 propriety.

35 **MS. PIPPENPOPPLE:** Then I must register a complaint.

1 **GARÇON:** (*Self-conscious*) **A complaint? What is ze problem?**

2 **MS. PIPPENPOPPLE:** It's that ... man over there.

3 **GARÇON:** Where?

4 **MS. PIPPENPOPPLE:** Over there!

5 **GARÇON:** (*Moves to indicate an influential member of the*
6 *congregation — perhaps a pastor or board member, or*
7 *someone who is a good sport and can take a joke.*) **Zis man?!**

8 **MS. PIPPENPOPPLE:** Not that one — the strange-looking
9 one.

10 **GARÇON:** Aha! You must mean *zis* one! (*Another unsuspecting*
11 *church member*) If he's bothering you, I will throw him
12 out!

13 **MS. PIPPENPOPPLE:** No, no! He's stranger than that one.
14 He's sitting with that — that family ... over there! (*She*
15 *points to the COUNTRYMAN FAMILY's table.*)

16 **GARÇON:** Ah, yes, I see him now. What exactly is ze
17 problem, Madame Picklepicker?

18 **MS. PIPPENPOPPLE:** Any fool could see it, Garçon. He's
19 clearly an outcast ... and (*With great drama*) he's *not*
20 wearing a tie.

21 **GARÇON:** (*Shocked*) Madame, my deepest apologies. I will
22 address ze situation immediately.

23 **MS. PIPPENPOPPLE:** I should hope you do.

24 **GARÇON:** I will do just that ... right after we bring out (*With*
25 *great dramatic flair*) ze main course. (*As the meal*
26 *continues, the salad plates or soup bowls are cleared away*
27 *and the servers bring out the main course. After a sufficient*
28 *length of time, when all the dinner guests have their entrées,*
29 *begin Scene 2.*)

30

31 **Scene 2 — Amos Allman Saves the Day**

32

33 **JUDY:** May I pour you some water, sir?

34 **MR. GLUCK:** Yes, thank you, Mrs. Countryman.

35 **JUDY:** Mr. Gluck, I never would have guessed you to be so

1 knowledgeable about bowling pins! There are precious
 2 few who share an interest in our art, you know.

3 MR. GLUCK: How long have you been doing “used bowling
 4 pin art techniques,” Mrs. Countryman?

5 JUDY: Oh, please, call me Judy. Well, I learned it from my
 6 mother, who learned it from her mother ...

7 STAN: Judy, tell Mr. Gluck about your “magnum opus.”

8 COURTNEY: (*Embarrassed*) Dad, no ... not that ...

9 STAN: Oh, come on ...

10 JUDY: I wouldn’t want to brag ...

11 COREY: (*To CALEB*) “Magnum opus”? Isn’t that, like, a
 12 comic strip?

13 CALEB: Yeah! Mr. G., do you read the comics too?

14 MR. GLUCK: (*To CALEB*) Doesn’t everyone? Please, Judy,
 15 I’d like to hear about your work.

16 JUDY: Well, if you insist. (*With obvious self-pride*) I created an
 17 entire replica of Leonardo Da Vinci’s *The Last Supper*.

18 STAN: That’s thirteen bowling pins in one piece!

19 COREY: (*Mock enthusiasm*) Strike!

20 JUDY: (*Continuing*) Each disciple is lovingly recreated in the
 21 finest tradition of “pin-art.” Finely painted faces ... little
 22 fake beards ... the cutest little biblical robe for each
 23 one ...

24 STAN: Why, you can almost hear each one ask the question,
 25 “Lord, is it I?” (*COREY and CALEB mouth the words*
 26 “Lord, is it I?” as STAN speaks them. COURTNEY groans
 27 as she slowly sinks into her chair.)

28 MR. GLUCK: Sounds ... inspiring.

29 JUDY: I truly hope so. It’s on display ...

30 STAN: (*Excitedly*) Yeah, right next to the bowling trophies at
 31 the Lucky Strike Bowl-a-Rama! (*Or insert name of local*
 32 *bowling alley.*)

33 GARÇON: (*Approaches the table.*) Please excuse me, Mr. ...

34 MR. GLUCK: Gluck. Ronald Gluck.

35 CALEB: I call him “Mr. G.”

- 1 GARÇON: Yes, well, it has been pointed out that your attire
2 does not meet ze Café Flambé dress code.
- 3 JUDY: What?
- 4 STAN: Now, wait a minute ...
- 5 GARÇON: (*Extremely embarrassed*) Sir, you ... have no ... tie.
- 6 COURTNEY: (*With mock exasperation*) Oh, boy ... better call
7 nine-one-one ...
- 8 CALEB: Yeah, but ... he didn't know about the code. I just
9 invited him ...
- 10 GARÇON: Still, the standard is firm. I'm sorry, Mr ... Duck.
- 11 COREY: Mr. *Gluck*. His name is Mr. Gluck, and this is just
12 not fair!
- 13 COURTNEY: Who complained anyway? Was it those
14 Sweetwater Sisters? I've got a message for them too!
- 15 GARÇON: No, Miss. I am not at liberty to divulge that
16 information ...
- 17 MR. GLUCK: I don't want to cause a scene.
- 18 STAN: You're not the problem here, Mr. Gluck. It seems to
19 me that ...
- 20 AMOS: (*Arriving at the table from across the room*) Good
21 evening, Stan, Judy. Garçon, what seems to be the
22 trouble?
- 23 GARÇON: We have, as they say, ze lack of a tie. (*Indicating*
24 *MR. GLUCK*)
- 25 AMOS: Is that so?
- 26 JUDY: He would have worn one if he'd been properly
27 invited, wouldn't you, Mr. Gluck? You know, he's into
28 bowling pin art, like me!
- 29 GARÇON: I have no choice but to enforce ... ze code.
- 30 AMOS: Of course, Garçon. We wouldn't want you to break
31 the code.
- 32 COREY: (*Mocking*) That would cause all *sorts* of trouble!
- 33 COURTNEY: (*Playing along*) Next thing you know they'd
34 have *ketchup* on the table!
- 35 COREY: Shocking!

1 **MR. GLUCK:** *(Standing as if to leave)* Well, I guess it's time
 2 for me to say good night. It's been a wonderful evening.
 3 Caleb, thanks for befriending me! I'll look forward to
 4 seeing your artwork, Judy, and ...

5 **AMOS:** *(Interrupting, as he removes his own tie)* Mr. Gluck, I
 6 think I may have found a solution. *(He places the tie*
 7 *around MR. GLUCK's neck.)* You know, I've always
 8 thought this tie was a bit busy for my taste, but it looks
 9 good on you.

10 **MR. GLUCK:** *(Pleasantly surprised)* Why, thank you, Mr.
 11 Allman. That's quite selfless of you.

12 **AMOS:** Think nothing of it. *(To GARÇON)* I guess you'll have
 13 to throw *me* out now, right, Garçon?

14 **COURTNEY:** Yeah, like that's gonna happen ... He
 15 practically owns this town.

16 **GARÇON:** I ... uh ... don't know what to say ...

17 **STAN:** Maybe you should go ask the "complainer."

18 **AMOS:** I think I have a better idea. Why not just say, "It is
 19 now time for dessert"? *(AMOS returns to his table and sits*
 20 *beside EUNICE. MR. GLUCK sits down again.)*

21 **GARÇON:** *(Accepting the situation, he calls aloud)* Ladies and
 22 gentlemen, let there be dessert! *(Returns to his station.)*
 23 *(After the plates from the main course are cleared away,*
 24 *dessert and coffee are served. As people are attending to their*
 25 *dessert, MR. GLUCK somehow disappears. He could slide*
 26 *under the table or be removed under a dessert cart, but his*
 27 *departure is not discovered until the last scene.)*

28

29 **Scene 3 — Sweetwater Sisters Dialog about Dessert**

30

31 *(SPARKY enters when the dessert is served. If possible or*
 32 *acceptable, a flaming dessert should be served. He moves*
 33 *amongst the tables spouting incomprehensible phrases to the*
 34 *patrons, smiling, kissing his fingers, shouting "Viola!" (wah-*
 35 *LAH) or other random French phrases. He ends up near the*

- 1 *SWEETWATER table.)*
- 2 **MISSY:** I just love the desserts here, don't you, Sissy?
- 3 **SISSY:** Oh, they're simply the best! *(Confidentially, to her*
- 4 *neighbor)* It just so happens I know the chef. He's the
- 5 best one in all of _____. *(Insert name of local county*
- 6 *here.)*
- 7 **MISSY:** Now Sissy, don't brag ...
- 8 **SISSY:** Well, it's true! You know him too — Monsieur Le
- 9 **Sparky.** *(Realizing he is being spoken of, SPARKY bows*
- 10 *elegantly to the crowd.)*
- 11 **MISSY:** He *does* present the finest cuisine in town.
- 12 **SISSY:** Of course. It's what we've come to expect.
- 13 **MISSY:** We deserve it, don't we?
- 14 **SISSY:** You might say that ... after all, we set the standard
- 15 for sweetness around here.
- 16 **MISSY:** *(Nods in agreement.)* We are the Sweetwater sisters.
- 17 **SISSY:** Don't you just love the French chocolate mousse?
- 18 **MISSY:** *(Sighs.)* So sweet ...
- 19 **SISSY:** So light and fluffy ...
- 20 **MISSY:** Just like us!
- 21 **SISSY:** How fortunate for all of these ... others to get the
- 22 same menu we do.
- 23 **MISSY:** I'm not sure they'll appreciate it ...
- 24 **SISSY:** *(Half-jokingly)* Perhaps we should keep it all for
- 25 ourselves.
- 26 **MISSY:** Yes! *(She catches herself.)* But Sissy, it wouldn't be
- 27 right ...
- 28 **SISSY:** Too-too much for any two sisters to nibble!
- 29 **MISSY:** You are so right, Sissy.
- 30 **SISSY:** Sweet of you to say so, Missy. *(They continue enjoying*
- 31 *their dessert. SPARKY has overheard their conversation and*
- 32 *does a slow burn from mild shock to explosive outrage. At*
- 33 *this point, he erupts with a brief and colorful French tirade.)*
- 34 **GARÇON:** *(Hurries to the scene.)* Monsieur Le Sparky, what is
- 35 ze matter? *(SPARKY spouts off more French gibberish,*

1 *pointing to the SWEETWATER SISTERS, throwing his*
 2 *hands up, etc.)*

3 **MISSY and SISSY:** *(Together)* **Garçon, what's wrong?**

4 **GARÇON:** *(Attempting to calm SPARKY down)* **I'm not sure ...**
 5 **But I think ze chef is ... upset.**

6 **SISSY:** **Yes, but why? Was it something we said?** *(Somewhat*
 7 *calmer, SPARKY mimics the self-centered attitude he heard*
 8 *from the SWEETWATER SISTERS, then motions that his*
 9 *creations are meant to be shared with the whole world,*
 10 *babbling all the while. He then throws down his hat and*
 11 *stomps back to the kitchen. Pots and pans clank together in*
 12 *the background.)*

13 **MISSY:** *(Confused)* **Did you get that?**

14 **GARÇON:** **He seems to think you want all ze dessert for**
 15 **yourselves! Zis would be wrong! A great insult to his**
 16 **abilities. His creations are meant to be shared with ze**
 17 **world!**

18 **SISSY:** *(Repentant)* **I was wrong to even think it!**

19 **MISSY:** **Even for a moment.**

20 **SISSY:** **Please tell him we meant no harm.**

21 **MISSY:** **Oh Garçon, will Monsieur Le Sparky ever forgive**
 22 **us?**

23 **GARÇON:** **But of course. Our chef is, as we say, all Sparky**
 24 **and no Flambé. Please excuse me.** *(He exits to the kitchen.*
 25 *Servers clear away any empty dessert plates and refill*
 26 *coffee.)*

27

28 **Scene 4 (Finale) — Ronald Gluck Disappears**

29

30 **GARÇON:** *(Returning to MS. PIPPENPOPPLE's table)* **I beg**
 31 **your pardon, Madame Pimplepopper. I — we — have**
 32 **taken care of ze ... trouble.**

33 **MS. PIPPENPOPPLE:** *(Relieved)* **What a relief! One can**
 34 **never be too careful these days. Who knows what type**
 35 **of riff-raff might get in?**



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