

(Printed with an unregistered version of Fade In)

Death Wears a Costume:

A Literary Detective Club Mystery

Written by

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(NOTE: All roles are and may be played by any ethnicity)

ALEXIS "LEXIE" BROWN: 13. Female. Dressed as Nancy Drew.

MIKE PRESCOTT: 13. Male. Dressed as Sherlock Holmes.

NATHAN KRIMBY: 14. Male. Dressed as C. Auguste Dupin.

HARRY ROOKER: 13. Male. Dressed as Hercule Poirot.

MAGGIE MAGNUS: 13. Female. Dressed as a Hardy Boy.

MILLIE MAGNUS: 13. Female. Dressed as a Hardy Boy.

VIRGINIA LOCKHART: 14. Female. Dressed as Miss Marple.

KENT WATSON: 14. Male. Dressed as John Watson.

PALMER HIGGINS: 13. Male. Dressed as Inspector Jacques Clouseau.

PIZZA GIRL: 14. Female. Pizza Girl (aka Katherine "Kat" Elliot).

SETTING:

Lexie's House.

TIME:

Halloween.

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Death Wears a Costume, Daniel Prillaman, 1.

Lights rise on Conan Christie Junior High's popular "Literary Detective Club" (which is to say, Conan Christie Junior High's distinctly unpopular "Literary Detective Club") at their first annual Halloween party.

Celebrating the holiday with great enthusiasm, all the students are dressed as famous fictional detectives and characters from the literary canon.

Playing "Clue" at a table/couch setup CS are THE MAGI (aka twins MAGGIE and MILLIE MAGNUS, dressed as the Hardy Boys) and HARRY ROOKER (dressed as Hercule Poirot).

Talking at a punch bowl DSL are ALEXIS "LEXIE" BROWN (dressed as Nancy Drew), MIKE PRESCOTT (dressed as Sherlock Holmes), and NATHAN KRIMBY (dressed as C. Auguste Dupin).

Or...so he's saying:

NATHAN

C. Auguste Dupin.

MIKE

Yeah, but who you are supposed to be, Nathan?

LEXIE laughs and goes about pouring drinks for the three of them.

NATHAN

C. Auguste Dupin.

MIKE

Right.

NATHAN

Seriously? You can't be interested in detective fiction without knowing about Dupin.

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Death Wears a Costume, Daniel Prillaman, 2.

MIKE

Well, obviously not, because...I exist.

NATHAN

Mike, that's my point. You're literally dressed as Sherlock Holmes right now. He would not exist if not for Dupin.

MIKE

Get out.

NATHAN

Mike.

NATHAN turns to poll the room, into which VIRGINIA LOCKHART (dressed as Miss Marple) and KENT WATSON (appropriately dressed as John Watson) have just entered from the kitchen USSR, carrying a resupply of chips and snacks.

NATHAN

(Raising his hand)

Okay, we've all heard of Dupin, right?

EVERYONE stops, thinking.

KENT raises his hand.

But no one else does.

MIKE

Ha.

VIRGINIA and KENT join the others at the "Clue" table.

NATHAN

Guys, are you kidding me? He's, like, the prototype for every person here!

MIKE

Yeah, but have we heard of him?

NATHAN

Oh, my gosh.

LEXIE

(Handing them punch)

Calm down, boys.

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Death Wears a Costume, Daniel Prillaman, 3.

MIKE

I am perfectly calm right now.

NATHAN

Mike!

LEXIE

Nathan. We get it. It's a good idea. Even if Mike is incompetent.

MIKE

Hey.

LEXIE

Mike. Everyone but Kent. Dupin was Edgar Allen Poe. Starred in several of his stories and widely renowned as the first detective in literary fiction, essentially influencing the creation of the entire genre. Nathan's snobbery aside, he is pretty much the basis for everyone in this room. We should all know this.

HARRY

Oh, yeah. That sounds familiar, actually.

NATHAN gives up.

LEXIE

Anyone else want punch?

THE MAGI

I'll take some.

VIRGINIA

Me too!

LEXIE turns around to get some more punch.

NATHAN

I'm just saying, we're a Detective Club, we should know who the first detective was.

KENT

I never liked Poe. Too gruesome.

HARRY

He wrote the one about the bird guy, right?

MAGGIE

And the one about the guy who kills a dude by immuring him.

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Death Wears a Costume, Daniel Prillaman, 4.

MILLIE

Yeah. This one dude offends a guy, so the guy chains him up in this alcove in a tomb and lays bricks over the entrance. So he can never get out. No matter how much he screams.

KENT

Yeah, that's a good example.

THE MAGI

I love Poe.

VIRGINIA

Well, Nathan, it is a deep cut, but it's good. I agree with Lexie, we should really devote more of our time to studying the history of the genre.

NATHAN

He's not a deep cut. He's, like, the Hamlet of detectives.

LEXIE

(Bringing the punch
to the "Clue" table)

Well, I wouldn't go that far.

THE MAGI

Thanks.

LEXIE

But it's still better than Billy who kept on insisting he be allowed to dress up as the Orient Express.

VIRGINIA

Thanks, Lexie.

MIKE

Well, yeah, no, Billy's--Billy an idiot.

NATHAN

That we can agree on.

EVERYONE mumbles in agreement.

KENT

Whose turn is it again?

THE MAGI

Not mine.

VIRGINIA

Nor mine.

KENT

Harry?

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Death Wears a Costume, Daniel Prillaman, 5.

HARRY doesn't hear this, however, as he's messing with the game pieces, organizing them on the board as well as his own cards.

KENT, THE MAGI, AND VIRGINIA

Harry.

HARRY
(Stopping)

Huh?

VIRGINIA

It's your turn, love.

HARRY

Oh, sorry.

MAGGIE hands HARRY the die and he rolls.

HARRY

Eight.

HARRY moves his piece across the board.

LEXIE

Come to think of it, has anyone seen Billy tonight? He's not usually this late.

EVERYONE looks at each other.

HARRY maybe doesn't.

Nobody's seen Billy.

MIKE

Yeah, that is weird.

HARRY

Okay. Final guess.

THE MAGI

Oooooh.

HARRY

Miss Scarlet. In the kitchen. With the candlestick.

VIRGINIA

I haven't seen him.

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*HARRY reaches for the envelope
and opens it to check his
guess.*

NATHAN

Has he texted anyone? Maybe he's just running later than usual.

*Some of the group pull out
their phones to check.*

BILLY hasn't texted them.

MIKE

Nope.

LEXIE

Really weird.

HARRY reads the cards.

KENT

Well?

Beat.

HARRY puts the cards back.

Nope.

MAGGIE

Yes.

MILLIE

That was close.

VIRGINIA

Sorry, Harry.

HARRY

It's okay. I'll guess the right answer someday. Maybe.

HARRY gets up from his chair.

HARRY

Lexie, it okay if I use the bathroom?

LEXIE

Yeah, you know where it is.

*HARRY exits to use the
restroom through the kitchen.*

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MIKE

You think maybe one of us should give him a call?

LEXIE

Well, we--

*But the doorbell ringing cuts
LEXIE off.*

EVERYONE looks.

LEXIE

Speak of the devil?

*NATHAN crosses and opens the
main door USL.*

It's not BILLY.

*It's PALMER HIGGINS (dressed
as Inspector Jacques
Clouseau), carrying a tray of
cookies.*

PALMER

(With the accent in
full)

Bonjour, mon amie.

EVERYONE

(Not necessarily
enthusiastic)

Hi, Palmer.

PALMER

Don't look so excited to see me.

(Brief Pause, looking
around, breaking the
accent)

Oh, wow, is Billy late? That's weird.

LEXIE

Yeah, it is weird. Yet now there's even something weirder
going on.

PALMER

Oh, yeah?

LEXIE

Yeah. Because, unless I'm wrong, and...I'm not. It looks
like you're dressed as Inspector Clouseau.

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Death Wears a Costume, Daniel Prillaman, 8.

PALMER

(A gesture)

Bon.

LEXIE

Which is something I'm pretty sure maybe even all of us said not to do.

PALMER

Now, is that any way to talk to somebody who just brought cookies? Come on, guys, there are only so many choices to claim before we had to spread out a little.

NATHAN

Yes, but we're Conan Christie Junior High's "Literary Detective Club," not "Literary and one Film Franchise Detective Club."

MIKE

I still think that name could use some work, though.

PALMER

I agree, Mike. I think it's more about the spirit of it all.

(To NATHAN)

Besides, Nathan, who the heck are you supposed to be?

NATHAN

I'm Dupin!

LEXIE

Enough! Okay? Enough. We can put the club name back under discussion later. Virginia, can you call Billy, see what's up? Palmer, you're a disappointment, you can drop the cookies in the kitchen.

PALMER

Merci, Lexie.

LEXIE

Shut uuup.

VIRGINIA pulls out her phone to call BILLY as PALMER crosses to exit into the kitchen.

But HARRY emerges from it, briefly cutting him off.

HARRY

Lexie, I--oh, hey, Palmer. Wait, are you dressed as Clouseau? I thought we weren't allowed to--

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*HARRY stops talking as half
the rooms gives him "no"
signals.*

HARRY
--um, to, um--so, how you've been? Since school let out?
Earlier today?

PALMER
(Brief Pause)
Good. You?

HARRY
Dandy.

HARRY AND PALMER
Awesome.

*THEY part ways, PALMER exiting
into the kitchen, HARRY coming
the rest of the way into the
living room, confused.*

MAGGIE
You're a wordsmith, Harry.

MILLIE laughs.

HARRY
(Sitting back down)
Whose turn is it?

*THEY turn to VIRGINIA, still
waiting on the call.*

Nothing.

*LEXIE, MIKE, and NATHAN watch
VIRGINIA.*

Nothing.

She shuts the phone.

VIRGINIA
Voicemail.

Beat.

*A crash from off-stage in the
kitchen.*

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Death Wears a Costume, Daniel Prillaman, 10.

PALMER (O.S.)
I'm okay!

LEXIE
What did you break?

PALMER (O.S.)
Nothing!

NATHAN
I wouldn't believe that.

LEXIE
I don't.

LEXIE crosses towards the kitchen to investigate, but PALMER re-enters, cutting her off.

PALMER
Oh, hey, Lex.

LEXIE
What did you break?

PALMER
Nothing.

EVERYONE
Really?

PALMER
Okay, look, mostly nothing. I just tripped over the dead body decoration you set up in there.

LEXIE
What?

PALMER
Yeah. It looks great, by the way. Why didn't you set it up in here?

LEXIE
Wait, what--dead body decoration?

PALMER
The Halloween decoration. In there. Super cool.

LEXIE
Palmer, I don't have a dead body decoration.

Beat.

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Death Wears a Costume, Daniel Prillaman, 11.

HARRY

Wait, that wasn't, like, a prop?

Beat.

LEXIE pushes past PALMER and runs into the kitchen as EVERYONE watches.

LEXIE screams offstage.

EVERYONE now runs into the kitchen.

EVERYONE screams offstage.

EVERYONE filters back onstage, minorly ad-libbing in fright.

LEXIE

Oh my gosh! Oh my gosh oh my gosh oh my gosh oh my gosh!

MIKE

Wait, so that's--that's real?! That's--real?! That's real?! That's--that's real?!

NATHAN

I guess we found Billy.

Beat.

THE MAGI

Gnarly.

MIKE

Wait, but, so...this is real?

KENT

That sure didn't look fake to me.

MIKE

Ooooooooooooooh man. Oh gosh, oh man, oh gosh.

MILLIE

One of us must have killed him.

EVERYONE stops and looks at MILLIE.

Reacts to that idea.

VIRGINIA

We're gonna jump right to that?

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MAGGIE

Do you see any other possibility?

VIRGINIA

Um, how about one that doesn't include one of us murdering Billy?

MILLIE

Eh, he had it coming.

KENT

Seriously?

LEXIE

Hang on, stop. This is ridiculous. There is no way one of us is actually capable of murdering somebody.

PALMER

That's probably what Billy thought, too.

Beat.

PALMER

We might have to face the possibility that that's something we just want to believe. Because one of us...is actually...a cold...blooded...murdurerrrrr.

LEXIE

Palmer, now is not the time.

PALMER

Your parents home?

Beat.

LEXIE

They don't come back until 10.

PALMER

So who else could it be? Other than of one us?

LEXIE

Well, then start talking, Palmer. Because as the one who found the body, you're suspect number one.

Beat.

PALMER laughs uncomfortably.

PALMER

I don't know if, um--tripping over the body counts as finding it.

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THE MAGI

It does.

EVERYONE stares at PALMER.

PALMER

(Pointing)

Harry saw it, too! Means the body was there before I got here.

EVERYONE looks to HARRY.

HARRY

...Yea, I guess that's true.

PALMER

See? Couldn't have been me.

LEXIE

You know that doesn't mean anything, Palmer.

NATHAN

You could have come in through the back door or something and set it up while we were all in here.

LEXIE

Then come around to the front.

MIKE

Or have an accomplice.

PALMER

Occam's Razor, people.

(Referencing HARRY)

The simplest explanation of something is usually the right one.

LEXIE

But you said it yourself. This is cold...blooded...murdurrrr. So how often is the simplest explanation actually correct?

Beat.

MIKE

Hang on. When we were arguing...about Dupont.

NATHAN

Dupin.

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MIKE

Whatever.

(To VIRGINIA and KENT)

Virginia, Kent, you were coming out of the kitchen.

KENT

Yeah.

MIKE

Did you see Billy then?

*VIRGINIA and KENT share a
glance.*

Beat.

VIRGINIA

Yes. We did.

KENT

Although we don't really have anyway to prove it.

MAGGIE

You didn't think to mention it?

MILLIE

To any of us?

KENT

(Brief Pause)

We thought it was a decoration.

VIRGINIA

Clearly, we all did.

HARRY

So, realistically, it really could be any of us.

Beat.

NATHAN

Why put his body in the kitchen? In plain sight? How? How even get it in there without any of us seeing?

LEXIE

You think they killed him somewhere else?

NATHAN

It would make sense.

PALMER

Does it though? I mean, we're stretching the realm the possibility as it is.

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*LEXIE and NATHAN eye PALMER
strangely.*

*Some of the group also share a
few odd glances, as if unsure
what to say next.*

LEXIE
You have something you want to say, Palmer?

PALMER
(He doesn't)
...Just saying.

Beat.

LEXIE
(To the GROUP)
Last texts. Check your phones, who talked with him last?

*EVERYONE looks at their
phones.*

LEXIE
Anybody got anything?

VIRGINIA
I've got 2:30, during the Spanish Exam. He was trying to ask
me what number 7 was.

MIKE
La biblioteca.

KENT
I've got 12:00, seeing if we wanted to go get lunch during
break.

HARRY
(Excitedly)
I've got 5:00! I've got 5:00.

EVERYONE looks at HARRY.

LEXIE
What does it say?

HARRY
(Thinking more than
reading)
"Um...did you...want...to--go fishing? After--the party?

Strange looks from everyone.

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PALMER

What?

MILLIE

You're a wordsmith, Harry.

MAGGIE laughs as HARRY makes a face.

He's trying.

LEXIE

Hang on--

But before she can make it any further, the doorbell rings once more.

Beat.

EVERYONE looks at each other.

No one was expecting anybody.

LEXIE crosses to the door to open it.

She opens the door to reveal PIZZA GIRL, standing in the threshold with three pizzas.

PIZZA GIRL

Hi!

LEXIE shuts the door in PIZZA GIRL'S face.

Beat.

No one knows what to do.

PALMER

She had pizza, though.

VIRGINIA

How can you think of your stomach right now?

LEXIE

Everybody, shut up!

LEXIE tries to think.

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PIZZA GIRL (O.S.)
(From behind the door)

Hello?

*LEXIE looks at everyone,
putting a finger to her lips.*

Don't say anything.

PIZZA GIRL (O.S.)

I have pizza.

Beat.

PIZZA GIRL (O.S.)

'Cause you ordered pizza.

Beat.

PIZZA GIRL (O.S.)

Do you not want it?

Beat.

PIZZA GIRL (O.S.)

That'd be weird. 'Cause everyone loves pizza.

Beat.

PIZZA GIRL (O.S.)

You know, I have this theory that--everyone loves pizza so much, that if everyone on earth had pizza at the same time, we'd have world peace! At least for as long as everyone had the pizza.

EVERYONE flabbergasted by this point.

PIZZA GIRL (O.S.)

Are you really not gonna open the door?

Beat.

PIZZA GIRL (O.S.)

I would think you'd want to. Seeing as how you're all trapped in there with a murderurrrrrr...

Beat.

PIZZA GIRL (O.S.)

Oh, yeah. I know. I know everything. So why don't you let me in?

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Beat.

PIZZA GIRL (O.S.)

We can have some pizza and talk everything over.

LEXIE slowly opens the door.

PIZZA GIRL

Hi, Lexie.

LEXIE

Who are you?

PIZZA GIRL

I'm just the pizza girl.

NATHAN

What do you know?

PIZZA GIRL

I know that one of you is lying, Dupin.

MIKE

Hey, she got it.

PIZZA GIRL

May I come in?

Beat.

Suddenly, the lights cut out.

EVERYONE ad-libs in fright.

MIKE

Woah!

VIRGINIA

Ah!

THE MAGI

Of course.

PIZZA GIRL

AAAAAH!

NATHAN

WHY DO THE LIGHTS ALWAYS HAVE TO GO OUT?!

LEXIE

Hit the switch!

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PALMER

Where is it?

LEXIE

On the wall, right there!

PALMER

Oh, that's so helpful. Of course I see it now.

EVERYONE

PALMER!

Continued ad-libs in the dark.

After a moment, PALMER finds the light switch and turns the lights back on.

Everyone has moved.

And PIZZA GIRL lies dead on the floor, the pizza on the Clue table.

A scream.

Beat.

MIKE

They killed Pizza Girl.

EVERYONE screams.

Some in fright, some in exasperation.

Ad-libs into:

LEXIE

Argh! Kat! What are you doing?

PIZZA GIRL

I'm being deeeeeaaaad.

LEXIE

Why?!

PIZZA GIRL

(Sitting up, pulling a card out of her pocket)

It said so on my card? I did everything it said.

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LEXIE

But you're supposed to stretch it out over the whole night,
not 30 seconds!

NATHAN

Oh, my gosh.

PALMER

We hitting the pause button, then?

LEXIE

Nope, I'm calling it. We're done. We're just done. We tried.

*Ad-libbed reactions. Some
disappointment, some
satisfaction.*

VIRGINIA

It was a cool idea, Lexie. I'm just not the best at this
sort of game.

LEXIE

(Eyeing some certain
culprits)

Believe me, Virginia, you were not the worst.

PALMER

(Brief Pause)

Hey. I brought cookies!

LEXIE

Kat brought pizza. She ruined things, too.

PIZZA GIRL

(Proudly)

Yep!

NATHAN

It's okay, Lex. We'll just take it back to the drawing
board. There's always the Christmas party.

LEXIE

I just wanted it to not immediately fall flat on its face
and die.

THE MAGI

Did more than that.

KENT

I mean, I had fun for the ten minutes it lasted.

LEXIE

Thanks, Kent.

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PALMER

To be fair, I enjoyed myself, too. I just like being a dingus too much.

LEXIE

Thanks, Palmer.

MIKE

There is always the Christmas party.

Beat.

LEXIE

I suppose it would be less awkward if we made one of us play the victim instead of making up somebody out of thin air.

NATHAN

Can't go worse than this.

MAGGIE

I wouldn't say that.

MILLIE

I want to hear about Harry's fishing story.

*HARRY lowers his head,
embarrassed.*

KENT

So, hang on, wait...who drew the killer anyway?

EVERYONE looks around.

*After a moment, VIRGINIA
raises her hand.*

VIRGINIA

It was me. I killed him. Ha ha.

HARRY

(A burst of
inspiration)

Miss Scarlet in the kitchen with the candlestick!

EVERYONE looks at HARRY.

Beat.

HARRY

Never mind.

EVERYONE laughs.

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THE MAGI

You're a wordsmith, Harry.

HARRY

I think that's enough murder and Clue for the evening.

KENT

Whose turn was it anyway?

MIKE

Hang on!

(Brief Pause)

I like it.

LEXIE

Like what?

MIKE

Clue. Wordsmith. Cluesmith. We're Cluesmiths.

NATHAN

Like as a club name?

PALMER

That's sort of goofy. I like it.

VIRGINIA

Me too.

KENT

Yeah.

MAGGIE

Right on.

MILLIE

Mmm.

PIZZA GIRL

(With a mouthful of
pizza)

Mmm hmmphf!

LEXIE

Well, I guess it's settled then. Happy Halloween,
Cluesmiths. We've solved the case of the...

PALMER

Non-existent fishing enthusiast?

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LEXIE

Close enough.

(To the Clue table)

Whose turn is it?

*EVERYONE gathers with ad-libs
around the Clue table.*

Pizza.

END.