

Trial Period

CHARACTERS:

Christopher Rike--Mr. Wilkins (Clueless conman)

Heather Hume--Gertrude Lopp (No-nonsense female assistant)

Jules Harriet (One of three snobs)

Barry Harriet (Cautious sibling)

Harry Harriet (Overwhelmed brother)

Fred Johnson (Goofy witness)

PLACES:

Christopher's house (Scene 1)

The Harriet's mansion (Scene 2&3)

SCENES:

Scene 1--The Beginning of the Case

Scene 2--Dead Witnesses & Freddy Johnson

Scene 3--Why They Did It, Thanks to Characters & End

**Production notes: This play is set in the early '90's, and the clothing should be as well.*

The Harriet family is obviously rich, and their clothes should display their wealth.

For Christopher: He's a conman, so his clothes should be relatively nice. A simple jacket and slacks would work fine.

For Heather: A blouse and nice jeans would work. Nothing brightly colored.

For Jules: A loose-fitting woman's suit (any color would do) and black slacks, and (quite obviously) lots of jewels: Pearl necklaces, bracelets, etc.

For Harry: A suit would be best. Slicked-back hair and nice clothes would best convey his snobby attitude.

For Barry: Barry's clothes should be some kind of collared, button-down shirt and khaki pants. His shoes should be nicely polished.

For Fred: He should have no clothing that is too complicated or elegant. A non-fancy shirt and jeans would do.

The sets will most likely not prove to be difficult. Simple backgrounds of a kitchen or living room would be fine. In scene one--Christopher's house--make sure to have a table and a coffee pot. The Harriet family's house should have a table and chairs, a file cabinet, and a telephone.

In the scene where Christopher says, "Nothing to sneeze at" and Barry sneezes, make sure that none of the actors react to the pun. It will prove to be much funnier that way.

*Character notes: **The Harriet family** should have uppity accents to enhance their attitude. It doesn't necessarily have to be a British tone, though it needs to be very snobby. They should move and speak professionally and always have their nose high in the air.

Christopher's lines proved to be more amusing in an English tone. His movements should be flamboyant and comical. Funny movements will enhance his character and help him connect with audience.

Heather should have no accent. She should have a smart, get-things-done attitude, but without being a nuisance.

Fred should move and speak comically. A Southern accent will make his lines become more likeable. Broad smiles and overall extravagant facial expressions will help Fred connect with the audience much better.

ACT ONE--SCENE ONE

The lights come up on CHRISTOPHER, sitting down at a table and reading a newspaper.

Soon after, HEATHER enters stage right in pajamas and mussed hair, looking very tired.

CHRISTOPHER is fully dressed and very awake. He greets HEATHER with a kind but comic wave.

CHRISTOPHER: Ah, there you are. I was wondering when you were going to wake.

Seems like you took your time. *(Examines her, then sniffs the air.)* And didn't bother to brush.

HEATHER: Where's the coffee?

CHRISTOPHER: Why so demanding, Heather? It's still being heated up, but I'm afraid I won't give you any if you don't start being nicer.

HEATHER: I'm not two, Chris.

CHRISTOPHER: Then, prove it to me by showing me better behavior.

HEATHER:(*Sighs and rolls eyes. Beat.*) I had a dream that you conned the President.

CHRISTOPHER: Ha-ha!

HEATHER: Chris, come on! That's terrible! Who would want to con the President of the United States?

CHRISTOPHER: Well, that depends. How much money are we talking about?

HEATHER: (*Sighs*) You know that--for you--conning is as bad a habit as smoking, don't you?

CHRISTOPHER: Heather, don't be ridiculous! If you smoke, what do you get? A gravelly voice and a pair of black lungs. Conning? Money, and respect of other--

HEATHER: Other criminals?

CHRISTOPHER: Now, don't be silly. Criminal and.....conniver are completely different.

HEATHER: I'm done talking about it.

HEATHER stands and pours herself a mug of coffee. She sits back down and sips from the mug.

CHRISTOPHER: Ah! Listen to this.

He reads from the newspaper he holds.

CHRISTOPHER: *'The Harriet family, mostly known for being incredibly wealthy, has had an unfortunate passing on Tuesday. The eldest, Sir George Harriet, founder of Harriet Enterprises, was found in a room of their mansion with a knife handle protruding from his chest. Sir George's family members insist the death to be a murder, not a suicide.'* (*He stops*)

HEATHER: What are you getting at, Chris?

CHRISTOPHER: Just wait. *'The Harriets are now searching for someone to investigate the murder and interrogate several suspects. They are willing to pay a small fortune for the solving of the murder.'* (Smiles)

HEATHER: Are you seriously wanting to trick these people into thinking we're private investigators just to get their money?!

CHRISTOPHER: Now don't get your panties in a chaotic state! Hear me out.

HEATHER: I'm not going to hear you out! If I told you that there was a death in someone's family, and I was going to "investigate" just to get money, what would you say?

CHRISTOPHER: I'd say you're a genius.

The lights go down, and they exit stage left. There is a slight set change, and HARRY HARRIET, a snobby-looking man with slicked-back hair, enters stage right with the only female in the family, JULES HARRIET.

JULES: I know the murder has overwhelmed you, Harry. Why don't you just rest for a while. Get your bearings back.

There is a knock on the door.

JULES: Who is it?

HEATHER:(Reluctantly) Wilkins & Lopp Investigative Services.

JULES: I told you they'd come. Come in!

CHRISTOPHER and HEATHER enter. CHRISTOPHER'S talking and movements are quite flamboyant and comic. He steps in front of HEATHER.

CHRISTOPHER: Hello! I'm Richie Wilkins, private investigator. This is my.....assistant, Gertrude Lopp. Glad to be on the case. Yes, yes!

He shakes the Harriets' hands vigorously.

JULES:(*Smiles weakly*) Are you qualified?

CHRISTOPHER: Qualified? Am I qualified?! (*To HEATHER*) She asks if I'm qualified!

HEATHER: That's outrageous.

CHRISTOPHER: Ah, yes, quite. I am very qualified. I'll give you my card. (*Extracts a laminated card from his suit pocket.*)

JULES: Wow. Laminated.

CHRISTOPHER: Yes. Now, I think I've proven myself worthy--

HARRY: Just wait just one second! Mr. Wilkins, this is all fine and well, but I hardly think that a laminated card makes you qualified.

CHRISTOPHER: Well, who's this?

JULES: This is my brother, Harry Harriet. You must excuse him.

CHRISTOPHER: It's quite alright. Many persons don't quite grasp the importance, the significance, and overall elegance of lamination. Take a closer look at the card, my good man, and you may soon change your mind.

HARRY does just that. He raises an eyebrow, then hands the card back to

CHRISTOPHER.

HARRY: I guess you're right.

HEATHER: Shouldn't we be getting on with the case?

CHRISTOPHER: In due time, Ms. Lopp!

JULES: Excuse me for interrupting, but I believe she's right.

CHRISTOPHER: Very well. Give us some details. Details are essential to any case.

JULES: Well, I suppose I'll start from when I arrived at home--

CHRISTOPHER: From where did you depart, Ms. Harriet?

JULES: My workplace, Harriet Enterprises. My father, the CEO, was off of work that day.

CHRISTOPHER: Your father is the recently deceased?

JULES: Yes, as of Tuesday.

CHRISTOPHER: Huh.....I--

HEATHER: What he means to say is this: What position do you occupy at Harriet Enterprises?

JULES: I'm the Head Secretary on the third floor.

HEATHER: Okay. Did you ever have any quarrels or disagreements with your father? Anything that would make you resort to physical violence?

JULES: Wait a minute! It sounds like you're investigating me!

HEATHER: Just covering all the possibilities. Now, Ms. Harriet, if you'd be so kind, please answer the question.

JULES: Well.....yes. Although I'm sorry to say, I had frequent quarrels with my father.

HEATHER: Can you tell us what they were about?

JULES: They were about money. My father was incredibly wealthy, yet very stingy.

There were often loud shouts and quarrels in the house.

HEATHER: Was there any major physical violence associated with the quarrels?

JULES: Heavens, no! Of course, he slapped me once in a blue moon.....but besides that, there is nothing to speak of.

HEATHER: Thank you.

CHRISTOPHER: Isn't there another Harriet?

HARRY: Why, yes. His name is Barry.

CHRISTOPHER: Harry and Barry Harriet?

HARRY: Yes.

CHRISTOPHER: Catchy.

HEATHER: Why isn't he here?

JULES: He's returning from a business trip. *(Looks at clock)* He should be here any minute, though.

There is a knock on the door.

JULES: Who is it?

BARRY: Barry.

CHRISTOPHER: Wow, that was convenient!

JULES: Come in!

BARRY enters. He waves at his two siblings, but looks at CHRISTOPHER and

HEATHER cautiously.

BARRY: Who are they?

JULES: They're private investigators.

BARRY: What are they doing?

JULES: Investigating.

CHRISTOPHER: Privately.

BARRY: I've already told you, we don't need any investigators!

HARRY: Jules and I have already decided. We need a private investigator.

BARRY: Well, fine. But I won't like them.

CHRISTOPHER: Oh, nonsense! Who could resist someone of such incredible charm and grace like myself?

HEATHER:(*Clears throat*)

CHRISTOPHER: Ah, yes. I don't mean to forget my lovely assistant, Ms. Gertrude Lopp.(*CHRISTOPHER smiles*)

HEATHER: I mean, shouldn't we get back to the case?

CHRISTOPHER: Of course, dear. Only a fool would divert off course from such a demanding case.

HEATHER: I agree. Now, did either of you--Harry and Barry--notice your sister, Jules, at work on Tuesday?

HARRY:(*Hesitates*) Of course I did! She was sitting happily at her desk doing her work, like any other day.

BARRY: Yes, I saw her, too.

HEATHER: You're sure?

BARRY: Yes.

CHRISTOPHER: Where are your other four witnesses?

JULES: They were to arrive today at three. I sent a letter to each of them.

CHRISTOPHER: And they were all present at the time of the murder?

JULES: Yes. Hence the name "witness".

CHRISTOPHER: Of course. My question was just a precautionary procedure, madam, nothing to sneeze at.

BARRY sneezes.

HEATHER: Well, while we're waiting for the witnesses, can you describe the night of the murder?

HARRY, BARRY, and JULES: Yes.

HEATHER: One at a time, please. Barry, since you seem most reluctant, why don't you start. Did you have any quarrels with your father?

BARRY: Well.....yes. You might even say they were of a regular occurrence.

HEATHER: Can you share the reason of the quarrels?

BARRY: Now, you've got no right to ask me that!

JULES: Just answer the question, Barry.

BARRY: Money.

HEATHER: Thank you. Now, can you describe the night of the murder?

BARRY: Well, our father, Sir George, threw a ball at the house that night.

CHRISTOPHER: What does that have to do with anything?

BARRY: A ball as in "party".

CHRISTOPHER: Of course.

HEATHER: Can you explain the purpose of the party?

BARRY: Yes. It was Tuesday, November second. It was the thirtieth anniversary of Harriet Enterprises. He invited everyone that made the company possible.

HEATHER: That must have been a good many people.

BARRY: Not as much as you'd assume. There were only eight people, including us and our father.

HEATHER: And the other four are the--

BARRY: The other witnesses. Yes.

HEATHER: Continue.

BARRY: Well, I got home before anyone else, besides my father.

CHRISTOPHER: That's very interesting. That could have given you ample opportunity to murder your father.

BARRY: Yes, it could have. But, your accusation has only one flaw.

CHRISTOPHER: What's that?

BARRY: Sir George was murdered after the party.

CHRISTOPHER: Hmm.....interesting. Very interesting, indeed. Ms. Lopp, why don't you take over?

HEATHER: Continue, Mr. Harriet.

BARRY: Well, as I was saying, I assisted my father in decorating the home and I helped prepare food. It was around six-thirty when Harry and Jules arrived.

HEATHER: Let's fast-forward to when the witnesses arrived, shall we?

BARRY: Well, the four people arrived, and they mingled with my father and each other.....

HEATHER: Did you notice anything out of the ordinary?

BARRY: Well, one of the visitors, Palooka Johnson--

HEATHER: Palooka?

BARRY: It's his nickname.

HEATHER: Continue.

BARRY: Fred Johnson--Palooka--was out of sight for quite a while.

HEATHER: Is it possible that he just slipped into the bathroom?

BARRY: Well, I suppose.....

HEATHER: Thank you. Now, we've got two hours until the witnesses arrive.

HARRY: Excuse me. I don't mean to be rude, Mr. Wilkins, though it seems to me like your "assistant" is doing more work than yourself!

CHRISTOPHER: It's her trial period. I'm seeing if she's worth keeping. And, so far, she seems to be pulling her weight quite well.*(Laughs)*

ACT ONE--SCENE TWO

The lights come up on the same five characters as before: HARRY, BARRY, JULES, HEATHER, and CHRISTOPHER. JULES stands and excuses herself.

JULES: I'll return in a moment. I am going to retrieve the postal items.

CHRISTOPHER: Does anyone else understand what she says?

She leaves and returns in under ten seconds. She piles four letters on the table. She opens the first one.

JULES: This is from one of the witnesses. *'Due to unfortunate circumstances, the witness you requested is not available for questioning. Signed, Wendy Kloitz.'* Do you know what this means?

HEATHER: It means your witness is dead.

JULES: Right. And--*(opens the other two envelopes)*--the same is true for George East and Brian Davis. And--*(opens another envelope)*--my electric bill is \$550.

CHRISTOPHER: Is there a letter for Fred Johnson?

JULES: Not that I see.

HEATHER: Why would they be dead?

HARRY: Maybe the killer didn't want them to release any revealing information.

CHRISTOPHER: Yeah, and maybe he didn't want anybody to tell anything that might lead us to the murderer!

HEATHER: Mr. Wilkins?

CHRISTOPHER: Yes?

HEATHER: Leave the talking to me.

CHRISTOPHER: Well, yes. Naturally. It is your trial period, after all.

BARRY: Well, if all of the other witnesses are dead except Fred.....that must mean Fred is the--

There is a knock at the door.

JULES: Who is it?

FRED: Freddy.

JULES:(*Hesitantly*) Come in!

FRED enters. He is a "hillbilly" of sorts. His movements are comical, as is his voice and choice of words.

FRED: Am I early?

JULES: No.

FRED: Well, where is everybody, now?

JULES: I'm afraid they're dead.

FRED: Dead?(*His eyes widen*) Gee! Well, I'm not so sure I want to be here, now.....

HEATHER: You're Fred Johnson?

FRED: Yes, ma'am, I am. I'm proud of it! And might I say, you're the prettiest woman on this side of the Mississippi River!

HEATHER: Thank you--

FRED: You're mighty welcome! Now, who are you?

HEATHER: I'm Gertrude Lopp, and I--

FRED: Wow, what a name! You don't hear that one every day! *(Pauses)* Sorry to interrupt.

HEATHER: That's quite alright. But now we--

FRED: Why am I here, anyway?

HEATHER: If you'd let me finish, I'd--

FRED: I'm interrupting again, ain't I? Please forgive me, madam. I'm terribly sorry! Continue, if you please.

HEATHER: Thank you. Anyway, I--

FRED: Wait. Are you sure they're *dead*? Not just missing?

JULES: We're quite sure.

HEATHER: Now, if I could ask you a few questions--

FRED: Well, what really stumps me is this: Why would they be dead? Not just gagged and locked in a closet?

CHRISTOPHER: Is it just me, or is he getting monotonous?

FRED: Oh, I am sorry! Continue with your questions.

HEATHER: Thank you. Do you work at Harriet Enterprises?

FRED: I'm proud to say I do!

HEATHER: And, what position do you occupy at the company?

FRED: Occupy?

JULES: He's the Master of Sanitization and Sterilization.

FRED: She means “janitor”.

HEATHER: Right. And did you notice any of the Harriets at work the day of the murder?

FRED: Nope.

HEATHER: They were gone on Tuesday, November second?

FRED: Yes, I believe so.

HEATHER: Are you sure that your recollection is accurate?

FRED: Miss, you’re pretty, but I don’t understand a word that’s a-comin’ out of your mouth!

HEATHER: Are you sure that they were not there?

FRED: I’ve already answered that! No, they were not at work that day!

HEATHER: Thank you. Now, were you friends with Sir George Harriet?

FRED: I should say so! We’d been chums since May 27th, 1976! I remember the day, because he got his first wedgy from the school bully. I tell you, it was a *hoot*!

HEATHER: Please don’t digress, Mr. Johnson--

FRED: Call me Freddy. Or Palooka. Whichever sinks your submarine!

HEATHER: Very well. Freddy, stay on track. We’re talking about the murder of Sir George Harriet.

FRED: Right.

HEATHER: Did you ever quarrel with Sir George?

FRED: Georgie? Never! We’d always been the best of buds!

HEATHER: Are you sure?

FRED: Of course! I’d never had an argument with him in my life!

HEATHER: Thank you. I believe that’s all we need from you, Freddy.

FRED: Yeah? Well, thanks. It's been a pleasure. I wouldn't even mind if you gave me your telephone number, so I can ring you in emergencies?

HEATHER: You know what? Why don't I give you Mr. Wilkins' number?

FRED: Oh.....uh.....that's alright. I doubt I'll have any emergencies.

Beat.

HARRY: So, aren't you going to handcuff him?

HEATHER: No. He's innocent.

HARRY: What?!

HEATHER: He has a perfectly plausible testimony.

CHRISTOPHER: Yeah. He does. I agree with my assistant.

BARRY: This is exactly why I told you not to hire private investigators!

HEATHER: Is that the only reason you advised against it?

BARRY: What are you talking about?

HEATHER: You've seemed awfully edgy since the minute you found us in your house.

CHRISTOPHER: *(Chuckles)* Barry's wary!

BARRY: You're not suggesting that I did it?

HEATHER: I'm saying it's possible. Now, there is only one person here I haven't interrogated yet. Harry, could I ask you a few things?

HARRY: Hold on for just a moment. We'd like to have a private talk with Freddy Johnson.

HEATHER: Don't take too long.

HARRY, BARRY, JULES, and FRED exit. Immediately after they leave, HEATHER sits at the table with CHRISTOPHER.

CHRISTOPHER: You're doing quite well. If I didn't know better, I'd say that you're actually enjoying this.

HEATHER: I've always wondered how someone as clueless as you could end as a conman. But, I have to say, it is very exciting. And this case is very interesting.

CHRISTOPHER: I agree. Who could have done it? We don't have any clues!

HEATHER: That's it! Pass me the phone.

CHRISTOPHER slides a telephone across the table to HEATHER. She dials a number and waits for the line to connect.

HEATHER:(*Quietly*) Emergency services? I need the police to come to 113 South Fenway Drive immediately. I'd like to report a murder.

HARRY, BARRY, and JULES come into the room. BARRY is holding a pistol, and is pointing it at HEATHER and CHRISTOPHER.

BARRY: Put the phone down.

ACT ONE--SCENE THREE

The lights come up on HARRY, BARRY, and JULES standing over HEATHER and CHRISTOPHER, tied together, back to back. The three Harriets sneer, watching HEATHER and CHRISTOPHER struggle with the rope. FRED is also there, tied and gagged.

HEATHER: Why did you kill your father?

HARRY: Isn't it obvious? That ungenerous benefactor was fit and healthy even in his old age. His health seemed to be improving, not declining. Even so, he wrote a living will,

just in case. And, instead of waiting another 10 years for him to keel over, we decided to speed up the process.

CHRISTOPHER: Ah, I see. Clever.

HEATHER: You're mad!

HARRY: Are we? I prefer the term "intelligent".

JULES: It was the perfect crime. No-one would've guessed!

BARRY: And now we inherit the estate, and you're trapped here! Good riddance!

They exit. Suddenly, sirens are heard. There is chatter. HEATHER smiles as she starts to untie the two of them.

HEATHER: I guess it turned out okay.

CHRISTOPHER: Yeah, I guess it did. We're unscathed and the three Harriet siblings will be behind bars for first-degree murder.

HEATHER: You do know that we don't get any money, don't you?

CHRISTOPHER: Yeah.....

HEATHER: Chris?

CHRISTOPHER: Hmm?

HEATHER: I think this is the best con you've ever pulled.

The lights go down. HEATHER leaves. CHRISTOPHER walks to center stage as the lights come up. He addresses the audience. The following is the curtain call.

CHRISTOPHER: Well, am I glad to see that justice was served! I'm also glad that Heather and I left before the police found out we were fakes. Well, before I go, I'd like to give thanks to some of my friends.

FRED enters stage right. He smiles and waves to the audience.

CHRISTOPHER: Freddy was brave. Although he was the most incredibly annoying person I've ever met, he said the right things, and gave the right information, so give him some--

FRED: Well, now! Thank you, Mr. Christopher! Now, I tell you, this is the best "thank you" I've gotten in 37 years. I remember the day because that was when I saved a kitten from the top of a California Redwood! I tell you, that was tough! I mean, the cat was mewling and moving, and I almost fell to my death!

CHRISTOPHER: Bow and leave, Freddy.

FRED obeys. He exits stage left.

CHRISTOPHER: And, even though they committed a murder and are now behind bars, the Harriets were very clever. Hiring a private investigator to investigate a murder they committed was pure genius!

The Harriets enter, handcuffed. They scowl at CHRISTOPHER. CHRISTOPHER smiles and waves at the siblings.

BARRY: We'll get you for this! Somehow, I'll get you!

They start to exit.

CHRISTOPHER: Have fun! Bye!

They leave stage left.

CHRISTOPHER: And, finally, my assistant and friend, Heather Hume. She did quite a good job investigating the Harriet murder.

HEATHER enters stage right.

HEATHER: Why, thank you, Christopher!

CHRISTOPHER: You're welcome. Of course, I spearheaded the investigation. I gave most of the pointers in the interrogation, but I let her go on her own for quite a while. It was her trial period, you know.

HEATHER: *(Sighs and rolls eyes)*

HEATHER exits stage left.

CHRISTOPHER: No! Heather, come back! I didn't mean to upset you!

HEATHER does not return. CHRISTOPHER shrugs.

CHRISTOPHER: Oh, well. Anyway, I'm Christopher, the brains behind the operation. I'm trying to decide if I should become a private investigator.

He eyes a newspaper on the table. He raises an eyebrow.

CHRISTOPHER: Hey! Listen to this! *'Hans Nicola, famed tennis pro, has gone missing. His family is willing to pay a small fortune to anyone who uncovers the mystery.'* *(He smiles)* Hey, Heather! Come here! I want to show you something!

He exits stage left.

THE END