

# A MURDER OF SCARECROWS

**A Comedy Thriller**

By Pat Cook

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**STORY OF THE PLAY**

Gerald and Cristine Dandridge always give a Halloween party for their friends. This year, however, they're having the party at their country house. It's a nice little fixer-upper with all the conveniences and one haunted scarecrow. At least, that's the story that came with the house.

The night of the party everyone's having a good time until someone notices the scarecrow has vanished. And when it finally DOES turn up, it's carrying an axe. Yes sir, this time it's personal!

A comedy thriller that needs only one set.

**SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY**

**ACT I:** Halloween night at the Dandridges' country house.

**ACT II:** About 15 minutes later.

## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(5 M, 5 W)*

**GERALD DANDRIDGE:** A finicky man in his thirties who is hosting his annual Halloween party.

**CRISTINE DANDRIDGE:** Gerald's long suffering wife, an intelligent 35-year-old.

**ANTHONY MURRAY:** A university professor in his late forties who has a wry sense of humor.

**LYDIA MURRAY:** Anthony's wife, about his age, also very clever but also down to earth.

**JIMMY STARNES:** In his mid-thirties, he often lets his imagination get the best of him.

**SHIRLEY FROHMAN:** Something of a take-charge type, in her early thirties.

**CLARICE JARRET:** In her late twenties, she is innocent in the ways of Halloween.

**JACK CLANCY:** About Gerald's age, he is also his most competitive friend and something of a wise guy.

**OFFICER MacELROY:** A no nonsense police woman in her early thirties.

**THE SCARECROW:** A phantom scarecrow.

**Time:** The present, Halloween night.

**Place:** The Dandridges' country house.

## **COSTUMES**

During the action of the play, several people show up dressed as scarecrows (with masks). While Gerald's costume is unique, both Jack's and the Scarecrow's outfits match almost perfectly. This is very important, especially when the confusion begins. Also, since nobody else's costume is described in the text, these may be chosen by the production company. However, whatever costume is chosen should be very practical and allow the characters easy and, at times, sudden movement.

### **SETTING**

The setting for this pre-arranged game of horrors is a rather old-fashioned country house belonging to the Dandridges. Now used only as a vacation home, it has been decorated for one night in honor of Halloween, a holiday cherished by Gerald and tolerated by his wife, Cristine. There are two doors leading in and out of the living room. The first, or front door, is located SR, flanked by two windows and leads outside. The second door, which leads to the den, is located on the SL wall. There is also an arch, located USR, which leads to a dining room and off SL to the kitchen. A staircase is located on the UPS wall which leads to the bedrooms.

The furniture is overstuffed and comfortable. A large couch resides DSL near the fireplace. There is a matching chair next to it. Behind the couch rests a sofa table which holds a telephone. Near the SR wall is a long table, on which various odd "game" pieces are placed. In the alcove is a small dinette which holds the refreshments. The rest of the room is rounded out with other chairs, some belonging, some set up just for the party, along with plants, lamps, etc.

### **PROPS**

On game table - several game pads and pencils; zipper with a tag; piece of lace and a small poison bottle; weiner in a mug; small toy house with "Women's Army Corp" on it; several tiny tombstones; toy dog with a dog tag.

On dinette table - mugs, punch bowl, assorted party food, camera.

General offstage - full-size scarecrow, axe.

Gerald - watch and from offstage a large picture of a flock of crows.

Jack - small cellular telephone.

MacElroy - starter pistol, badge and credentials; notepad and pen.

Cristine - several candles and matches from kitchen, white bedspread from den.

## ACT I

*(AT RISE: As the play opens, all LIGHTS are out in the living room, with no sign of movement. There is a KNOCK at the front door. After a brief pause, there is another KNOCK. Then, the door opens about halfway, slowly, CREAKING loudly on its hinges. CLARICE looks in. She is illuminated by the porch light.)*

CLARICE: Hello? Is there anybody...? I can't believe I'm doing this. Hello? *(SHE opens the door wider. The LIGHT now falls on a SCARECROW sitting in a chair.)* Oh, hello. I'm Clarice, Jack's date. *(No response.)* Excuse me! *(SHE moves closer and sees the SCARECROW for what it is.)* Oh, great. It's another dummy. I can't believe this. If Jack set me up, I'll ... Hello? *(SHE looks UPS into the alcove. Unseen by her, the SCARECROW tilts to the other side of the chair. She turns back.)* I know he's doing this, I ... Hold it. Wasn't that thing leaning on its other side? *(SHE moves closer to the SCARECROW.)* Hello? *(SHE pushes on it but gets no reaction.)* What's going on here? First, the car breaks down and now ... *(Now, a bit cocky, SHE introduces herself.)* Hello, I'm Clarice Jarret, Jack's date. He'll be here as soon as he can. Pleased to meet you. *(SHE reaches down and takes the SCARECROW'S right hand off its lap and shakes it briskly. The arm comes off in her hand, dangling from her grasp. She looks at it.)* Oh, I'm so sorry! I bet that must hurt. Can you direct me to the bus station? I was asked out here to ... *(Slowly, the SCARECROW begins to move and rises.)* What the ... what're you ... ? *(The SCARECROW moves menacingly toward HER.)* Oh, no! Stay away from me! You hear me! *(The SCARECROW raises its other arm.)* No! Don't! You ... you stay away from me!

*(The SCARECROW yells in blood-curdling tones.)*

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GERALD: *(As the SCARECROW.)* Trick or treat!

*(Suddenly the LIGHTS come up and EVERYBODY [except Jack] jumps out, also yelling Trick or Treat and laughing. CLARICE jumps out of fear.)*

CLARICE: What? Who?

GERALD: Having fun? *(HE takes off his mask.)*

*(CRISTINE moves to CLARICE.)*

CRISTINE: Sorry about this. Are you all right?

CLARICE: I ... I think so.

CRISTINE: It's my husband's stupid idea. I'm Cristine.

GERALD: At least, she didn't say stupid husband's idea. I'm stupid Gerald. Where's Jack?

CLARICE: The car overheated about half a mile back. He's waiting for his auto club to send someone. But as soon as he gets here, I'm going to kill him.

GERALD: *(To CRISTINE.)* I like her! May I have my arm back?

CLARICE: *(Hands HIS arm back.)* Oh. Here. And I'm Clarice Jarret ... I think.

ANTHONY: Pay him no mind, he's the product of an unbroken home.

GERALD: Hey, you'd make fun of an unarmed man? Oyez, oyez, may I present Dr. Anthony Murray and his lovely, albeit sharp-tongued spouse, Lydia.

ANTHONY: My pleasure.

LYDIA: I do NOT have a sharp tongue and go brush your teeth. *(SHE shakes CLARICE'S hand.)* Hello.

CLARICE: Hi. Doctor?

ANTHONY: I chair the drama department at the university.

GERALD: Yeah, so don't let him give you a physical.

LYDIA: *(Mildly.)* Are you doing that again, dear?

ANTHONY: Only if it's something terminal.

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LYDIA: Well, if I catch you doing it again, it'll be terminal.  
(*Back to CLARICE.*) He's kidding. I'm kidding. We're kidding.

GERALD: Well, now that we've gone through all the pronouns, where'd you say Jack was?

CLARICE: The car overheated. (*GERALD and the MURRAYS exchange knowing glances.*) What? Wha'd I say?

(*CRISTINE moves CLARICE to JIMMY.*)

CRISTINE: This is Jimmy Starnes and Shirley Frohman.

CLARICE: (*Still concerned.*) Wha'd I say? Why'd they look at each other?

CRISTINE: Shirley is Jimmy's ... well, they're dating, so she's whatever the current politically correct phrase is.

SHIRLEY: Surrogate mother.

JIMMY: You sure you're not the sharp-tongued one?

SHIRLEY: Didn't Jack warn you about this gang?

CLARICE: He said something ... it was going to be a different kind of a Halloween party.

SHIRLEY: And that's all?

JIMMY: Jack was always the master of the understatement. He still calls himself romantically shy.

SHIRLEY: Yeah, and he's been married four times.

CLARICE: (*Aghast.*) How many?!

CRISTINE: Let's get you some refreshments, how about that? (*SHE ushers CLARICE to the alcove.*)

(*ANTHONY is helping GERALD pull his real arm through the arm hole left by the phony one.*)

GERALD: Come on, folks, game one has begun, so get to it.

(*JIMMY, SHIRLEY and LYDIA move to the SR table and look at the game pieces.*)

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