

# CATERING TO MURDER

By Sam Craig

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PUBLISHED BY

**ELDRIDGE PUBLISHING COMPANY**

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### **STORY OF THE PLAY**

Joanna Garner , a caterer, has good reason for being over-protective of her 16-year-old daughter Holly - reasons she has told no one. As guests begin to arrive at an exclusive party which Joanna is catering with Holly's help, there's a phone call. A hideous, disguised voice tells Joanna she must do exactly as she's told or Holly will die. Joanna desperately tries to get Holly out of the mansion, but another call from the voice reveals her every move and gives her further instructions about adding cyanide into the food she is preparing.

Which one of the wealthy guests is the malevolent intruder? To complicate matters, Paul, a man Joanna is dating, arrives to confront her that she's hiding her past from him. When Holly disappears, Joanna realizes she must follow the murderous directions or lose her daughter. A casual remark and Joanna's quick thinking avert a nightmare - but also force the would-be killer into action.

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(5 m, 9 w)*

**JOANNA GARNER:** A widow and caterer, 40s.  
**HOLLY GARNER:** Joanna's 16 year-old daughter.  
**REUBEN RICE:** A Texas oil man, 40s.  
**BARBARA CHAFFEE:** Rice's secretary, 30s.  
**ELLIS RUTLEDGE:** The handyman, 50s.  
**LORI:** A friend of Holly's, also 16.  
**TODD:** Lori's boyfriend, 16 or 17.  
**GENEVA RICE:** Reuben's wife, 40s.  
**COLLEEN MCKELVEY:** An old friend of Geneva's, 40s.  
**PAUL:** A lawyer and friend of Joanna's, 40s.  
**AMBROSE LESTER:** A friend of Geneva's.  
**DORIS LESTER:** His wife.  
**NINA:** Geneva's younger sister.  
**JEANNETTE BOWLES:** A world-famous concert pianist,  
20s.

**SYNOPSIS OF SCENES**

**ACT I**

Scene 1: 1:35 p.m., a Saturday in autumn.  
Scene 2: 3:45 p.m.  
Scene 3: 4:45 p.m.  
Scene 4: 6:10 p.m.

**ACT II**

Scene 1: 7:30 p.m.  
Scene 2: 8:05 p.m.  
Scene 3: 8:20 p.m.  
Scene 4: 8:30 p.m.

**SOUND EFFECTS:** Telephones, Rachmanninoff playing in the distance, gun shot, loud crack of metal, police siren.

### **SETTING**

The play takes place at the weekend home of Reuben and Geneva Rice. DSR, with a wing entrance to the kitchen, is a small service room. It is completely visible to the audience and consists of a small center counter and several cabinets behind the counter. Actors can pass in front of and behind the counter. Various serving tools and pieces are clearly visible and will be needed throughout: glasses, bowls, napkins, etc. A swinging or folding door can separate the service room from the main room which dominates the rest of the stage. A wing entrance DSL leads to main door of the house and the bedrooms. French doors USL leads to a deck with trees and sky beyond. The room is comfortably furnished with several chairs, perhaps a couch, tables, lamps, and so on. At right sits a banquet or other long table to be used as the buffet when dinner is served. Overall, the room gives off a very elegant appearance.

### **PROPS**

**HOLLY:** Box, napkins, stack of plates, tray of glasses, tray of hors d'oeuvres

**JOANNA:** Bags of groceries; paper cups; cell phone; vase of flowers; apron; silverware; tablecloth; watch; freezer paper wrapped bundle marked "ham hocks" containing a rubber hand with ring on finger; drinks; glasses, ice bucket, snacks and bowls, small box wrapped in brown paper and string containing a vial of sugar.

**TODD:** Crackers, bandage (on his head injury), log.

**ELLIS:** Pump-style bug sprayer; box containing flashlights, collection bags and lists for scavenger hunt; shovel; small clock with wires attached to a ball of clay.

**LORI:** Bowls covered with plastic wrap.

**PAUL:** Small ring box, grotesque Halloween mask, gun.

**AMBROSE:** Black shroud, bag of items.

**RUBEN and BARBARA:** Cell phone, radio pack, mikes, etc.

**ACT I**  
**Scene 1**

*(AT RISE: 1:35 p.m., Saturday. The Rice weekend home. The stage is empty. A moment later, HOLLY bursts on SL, carrying a box. She charges into the living area. JOANNA quickly follows, carrying a couple of grocery bags.)*

JOANNA: *(Trying to be quiet.)* Holly! Holly, get back here!  
*(SHE sets bags on counter in service area.)* Mr. Rice?  
Mrs. Rice? *(SHE moves into living area.)* Holly, what do you think you're doing?

HOLLY: You ordered me to bring this stupid box into the house, so that's exactly what I did.

JOANNA: You stay in the kitchen!

HOLLY: Oh, that's right. I forgot. I'm the servant girl.

JOANNA: Holly, I don't want to start again ...

HOLLY: It's OK. I understand perfectly well that we're in this together. We have to stick to each other like glue. Wherever you go, I go, and if that means cleaning toilets at joints like this, you can use me as the brush!

JOANNA: Knock it off! You've never had to clean a toilet and you never will. We're catering a party. We've catered hundreds of parties. It's our job.

HOLLY: Why couldn't you be like everybody else's mother and go off to work by yourself? For most kids "Take Your Daughter to Work" is just one day, not every day!

JOANNA: If there were anything I could do ...

HOLLY: There is.

JOANNA: What?

HOLLY: Lori asked me if I want to go up to her cabin next weekend. It's really beautiful and they've got a lake right there and some horses to ride ...

JOANNA: Anything but that.

HOLLY: Mom! Lori's my best friend!

JOANNA: I'm sorry, Holly, but I don't think it'll be possible. It's a weekend ... I'm sure we have a job -

HOLLY: We don't have a job! I already checked.

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JOANNA: You can't be sure. Mrs. Fissoli said that she might be hosting a dinner -

HOLLY: She'd know by now.

JOANNA: You know Mrs. Fissoli. She always decides these things at the last minute.

HOLLY: You and Mrs. Tippson can take care of it, then. It'll just be a small dinner.

JOANNA: Mrs. Tippson might not be well enough.

HOLLY: She just had her adenoids taken out, for crying out loud! She'll be back screaming and yelling by Tuesday.

JOANNA: Holly, I don't want another word.

HOLLY: Mom, you can't just shut me out like this!

JOANNA: I said it's not possible for you to go and that's final.

HOLLY: I'm 16, Mom! I don't fall for that "because I said so" crap any more. Why not?

JOANNA: You know why not! You never know who might follow you there ...

HOLLY: Lori is my friend. She's a good kid. She doesn't do drugs. She doesn't steal or even cheat! She's got two parents. They'll be with us the whole time. Todd's going, too, so we'll never really be alone.

JOANNA: It's not your friends I worry about. It's everybody else.

HOLLY: We can't live like this forever, Mom!

JOANNA: Look, we've got to get to work. We can discuss this later.

HOLLY: You just don't want to discuss it at all, do you?

JOANNA: There isn't any point to discussing it.

HOLLY: I think there is!

JOANNA: Holly, this is hard enough on both of us without your making it worse!

HOLLY: Me? I haven't done anything, remember? I never did anything! You act like it's my fault Daddy -

JOANNA: Holly! Not another word!

HOLLY: I'm sick of not another word! I don't want to go on lying about everything! We're supposed to have a new life. That's what they said. But this isn't living! Every time I think of Jim ...

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JOANNA: Holly, please, thinking about your old boyfriend back home - you're only hurting yourself.

HOLLY: Jim's the first guy that's ever meant anything to me! He's the first guy I've ever really liked. I miss him.

JOANNA: But there'll be others, Holly.

HOLLY: It isn't fair! It's never been fair!

*(JOANNA pulls HOLLY close to both quiet and hug her.)*

JOANNA: Holly, don't! Please, don't.

HOLLY: When's it going to end?

JOANNA: I don't know.

HOLLY: Let me go with Lori ... let me have a life back, Mom.

JOANNA: I wish I could -

HOLLY: *(Jerks out of her MOTHER'S embrace.)* You know what I wish? I wish we'd never moved to Sylvan Lake! I wish we were -

JOANNA: Shut up, Holly! Not another word!

*(REUBEN enters DSL.)*

REUBEN: Thought I heard voices. You gotta be ...

JOANNA: Joanna Garner, Celebrated Catering Service, and this is my daughter Holly. She'll be helping with the party.

REUBEN: Howdy, Holly.

*(HOLLY smiles weakly, then exits SR.)*

JOANNA: I'm sorry ... Holly's had a bad morning.

REUBEN: And how old's Holly?

JOANNA: Sixteen.

REUBEN: Never had kids of our own, but I hear tell it's a big job raising them these days. Too much sparing the rod and spoiling the child, I think. We so much as looked cross-eyed at our mother and we got the belt.

JOANNA: That's not really an option these days.

REUBEN: Too bad. Anyhow, we've been over all the specifics, haven't we?

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