

A Murder for Old Time's Sake
A Murder Mystery in Four (short) Acts

By

Andrew Gordon

Music by Bruce Whitney

Lyrics by Scot Whitney

© 2013, Andrew Gordon

All Rights Reserved

1704 5th Avenue
SE Olympia, WA 98501

360-480-7420
andgor11@gmail.com

Cast of Characters

<u>Lucy Twiston:</u>	Bestselling mystery author, back in her hometown for the first time in twenty years. Lucy has just written a new, best-selling mystery, about a high school reunion, full of failed, dysfunctional classmates.
<u>William (Billy) Barrings:</u>	Former student body president, now school Janitor. William hasn't let the lack of success in his life get him down. Part of what keeps him happy is that he is criminally insane
<u>Nancy Biggs:</u>	Biff's ex wife.
<u>David Minter :</u>	Multi-millionaire. Invented a revolutionary self-cleaning toilet.
<u>Horace McGuffin:</u>	Student body president/owner of Books n' Things. Went into business with Biff, only to see things go south.
<u>Brian (Biff) Biggs:</u>	Our universally loathed and despised murder victim-to-be. Once the big man on campus, Biff is still a loudmouthed bully. There's lots of reasons a lot of people might want him dead.

Scene

South Pattersfield, Minnesota

Time

1993 and the present

PROLOGUE

A podium on a bare stage in front of the curtain. This is the South Pattersfield Books 'n Things, in South Pattersfield Minnesota. HORACE MCGUFFIN enters.

HORACE

Thanks, friends! I'm Horace McGuffin. You may know me as the owner of Books 'n Things, but I'm also the chair of the South Pattersfield High alumni association, and proud member of the class of '93. Go Penguins! It's great to see so many people here. That hasn't happened in a long, long time. Please, buy a book, or two...or more. We could use the help.

Now, uh, South Pattersfield gets a little bit of a bad rap around here, what with the football team going one and nine last year - go, Penguins! - the recurring badger infestations, and that smell in the first floor bathrooms that just won't go away. But we actually have a lot to be proud of. Our football team has a reputation for cleanliness - no messy victory celebrations - go Penguins - and our student body knows far more about treating badger inflicted wounds than those jerks at North Pattersfield High. Leaving all that aside, we've got an honest to god celebrity! It's my pleasure to introduce my fellow classmate, Lucy Twiston!

(Reading from a card.)

Lucy, class of '93, is the author of eight bestselling murder mysteries, featuring super sleuth Amy Benson. Her bestsellers include "Death Came to the Courthouse," "Death came to the Boathouse," and "Death Came to the Outhouse." After twenty years away from home, she's come back for tonight's reunion, and as a special treat, she's agreed to give a reading from her newest book, the ironically titled "Death Came to the Reunion." Let's give a warm Books 'n Things welcome to Lucy Twiston!

LUCY TWISTON walks to the podium. She is clearly nervous, and doesn't really want to be here.

LUCY

Uh...thanks, Horace.

(Reading from her book)

"Amy walked over to Jim's body. His strong body was collapsed on the ground. Given his drinking, most people would think he was just passed out. With her expert eye, developed over years of experience on the force, it was plain to see that he was dead - the pallor of his skin, the bruise-purple of his lips.

"No longer would the captain of the football team spurn her affections. No longer would those mocking, lovely eyes show such scorn. No longer would Biff..."

(She's gotten a little lost here.)

...sorry, Jim - his name's Jim. "No longer would Jim Jett stand as the epitome off all she wanted, and could never have.

"There was no visible sign of foul play, but the sound of his choked breathing before he died, and his known peanut allergy pointed to a likely cause of death. Given how careful he had always been around his condition, it seemed plain that one of his classmates had found a way to administer the deadly allergen. No one, not even Amy, was above suspicion.

Thank you.

HORACE

Thank you, Amy...I mean Lucy. See you tonight at the reunion. Go Penguins!

ACT I

The gymnasium of South Pattersfield High School, in Pattersfield Minnesota. WILLIAM BARRINGS, dressed in his best, but somewhat threadbare clothes, is seen at curtain rise, standing on a ladder, hanging a banner upstage, which reads "WELCOME BACK CLASS OF 1992!!!" He's singing the Pattersfield Fight Song to himself.

WILLIAM

COME ON AND FIGHT FIGHT FIGHT, YOU MIGHTY PENGUINS

FIGHT FIGHT FIGHT RIGHT DOWN THE FIELD

COME ON AND START START START UP YOUR ENGINES

WE'LL GIVE 'EM HELL, AND NEVER...

During the song, LUCY TWISTON enters, crosses to WILLIAM.

LUCY

Excuse me?

WILLIAM

(Nearly falling off the ladder)

Holy crap!

LUCY

(Rushing to his assistance)

Oh, I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to...

WILLIAM

(Overlapping)

No, don't worry about it, I'm fine. I just...

Simultaneously, WILLIAM and LUCY recognize each other, each giving a scream of surprise and delight.

LUCY

Billy! Billy Barrings! How are you!

WILLIAM

I'm fine, just fine thank you! Better, now that you're here. Lucy! You didn't tell anyone you were coming to the reunion!

LUCY

Yes, well, it was all a bit last minute.

WILLIAM

I understand, you must be very busy.

LUCY

No, it's just...I wasn't sure that everybody would want to see me.

WILLIAM

I'm sure everyone will be thrilled!

LUCY

Even you?

WILLIAM

Really!

LUCY

Even after...

WILLIAM

What?

LUCY

You know...the night of the senior prom.

Lighting change - a mirror ball spins and is lit up, and we are back in 1993. As best they can with no costume change, LUCY and BILLY transform from their present day selves into their high school counterparts. LUCY might put on a pair of glasses, BILLY might change his posture.

MUSIC, from the greatest hits of the 90's

WILLIAM

(He's upset about something, trying hard not to show it.)

I understand now...I'm the one who's been a fool. I thought...

LUCY

Billy, what's wrong?

WILLIAM

So silly! Of course it's him. Why would I ever think otherwise?

LUCY

(Walking up to him.)

Billy...

WILLIAM

(Quiet and intense.)
Leave. Me. Alone.

Suddenly, the mirror ball turns off, the lights change, and we are back in the present.

WILLIAM

(Laughing it off.)
Oh, that! Just a big misunderstanding. Don't let it bother you, Lucy.

Just then, NANCY MILTON-BIGGS walks in, drink in hand. At first, she doesn't see LUCY.

NANCY

Billy!

WILLIAM

(Again, nearly falling off the ladder, recovers.)
Aaah!

NANCY

Oh, for god's sake.

WILLIAM

I'm fine, don't worry about me.

NANCY

Did I say I was worried about you?

WILLIAM

No, but...

NANCY

What I'm worried about is that you've been spending the last hour getting that damn banner up, and we're expecting people to arrive any minute. Horace says we have "special guests" this year, so we have to have everything ready.

WILLIAM

Nancy, there's no point in doing something if you don't do it as best you can. Slow and steady wins the race.

NANCY

Please, shut up. Get the banner up, and come find me. We need to get out some more folding tables. Have you seen my purse?

WILLIAM

Yeah, I think you left it lying around...

(Finding it.)

...here. Something in it smells funny, didn't you notice?

NANCY

You know better than to ask me that! What do you mean something...

(She sees LUCY. A pause.)

Lucy Twiston...the Lucy Twiston! One of our special guests, I assume.

(Sugar-sweet.)

Wonderful to see you! After twenty years, back in South Pattersfield. How did you find the time?

LUCY

Well, I wanted to...

NANCY

I mean, given your jet-set murder mystery author life, right? Book tours...

WILLIAM

Nancy...

NANCY

Meetings with agents, publishers...

LUCY

It's not...

NANCY

Movie people, heads of state...

LUCY

All right, then...

NANCY

And yet you still find the time to drop in on the "little people" you've betrayed. So nice of you to make the time!

NANCY leaves.

LUCY

Well, that went just peachy, didn't it?

WILLIAM

Don't take it to heart, Lucy. Nancy's a bit on edge. The last two years, since she and Biff split up...well...

LUCY

...yes?

WILLIAM

Let's just say there was a bit of drama.

LUCY

That just now felt like drama to me!

WILLIAM

(Laughing.)

Oh no. That was just a warm-up.

LUCY

So, uh...Biff will be here, do you think?

WILLIAM

(Seeing her reaction, his happy affect
breaking a little.)

Still, huh? Well, Horace is trying to keep the reunion
a secret from him...

(Laughing.)

...he moved it from the Elk's Hall back to the school,
so even if Biff does hear about it, he'll go to the
wrong place. But, you know Biff. He always finds a
way. Some folks think he won't make it; me, I say he's
coming.

(Half to himself, amused.)

In fact, I'm counting on it.

(He's finished with the banner.)

Come on, let me give you a tour around the old place.

*They exit. After a moment, DAVID MINTER enters,
well dressed in suit and tie, followed by HORACE
MCGUFFIN, much tattier.*

DAVID

It hasn't changed much, has it?

HORACE

Yes, it's the same, good old South Pattersfield High!

(Seeing the reaction from DAVID.)

Eh...that's what you meant, isn't it.

DAVID

Yes, that's what I meant.

(Looking around.)

Could use a coat of paint, or two...isn't that the same
banner they had up when we were in school?

HORACE

Yes, well...you know, the school budget's been pretty
tight lately.

DAVID

Hmmm. Maybe I can make another donation, help get the place spruced up a bit. Make it a little less embarrassing to have graduated from here.

HORACE

Well, the school is very grateful for all you've done already - donating those high-tech toilets of yours. You know, David, if you're looking for a place to put your money...

DAVID

Look, Horace. I think I've made myself perfectly clear during your numerous phone calls. Why don't you ask your old buddy Biff? Wasn't he always the one with the big ideas?

HORACE

God, please - don't say that name. He is so dead to me right now.

DAVID

Hmmm, sounds like you two had quite the falling out. I'd love to hear about it...

(HORACE starts to speak.)

...another time. Tonight, I'm here to enjoy myself, see old...friends, that sort of thing. Your business will have to wait.

HORACE

Yeah, sure - I get it. We got a lot of reminiscing to do!

(He turns to leave. Looking around.)

Happy memories, eh?

HORACE exits. DAVID takes a necklace out of his jacket pocket, looks at it. The mirror ball spins again, and we hear the offstage voice of BIFF BILLINGS.

BIFF (V.O.)

SWIRLIE, SWIRLIE, SWIRLIE!!!

NANCY (V.O.)

Biff, leave him alone!

Sound of a toilet flushing, and the lights return to normal. David puts away the necklace.

DAVID

Oh, yes. So very happy.

HORACE re-enters, NANCY, BILLY and LUCY in tow. Lighting change - generally brighter.

HORACE

All right! I think it's time to get started!

NANCY

David! I didn't know you'd be here!

DAVID

It was meant to be a surprise. It's...good to see you, Nancy.

NANCY is visibly flustered, turns away. She opens her purse, straightens her hair, puts on lipstick.

HORACE

Yes, well...wonderful to see such...happy reuniting! Friends, fellow Penguins! Well, it's my very great pleasure to welcome back home the South Pattersfield High class of 1993! First, I'd like to thank my fellow members of this year's reunion committee - Nancy Biggs...

NANCY

(To DAVID.)

Milton. I'm Nancy Milton now. Again.

HORACE

Yes, thank you, Nancy. Also, special thanks to Billy Barrings, our school custodian, also a 1993 alum!

Unseen by the cast onstage, BIFF enters in the back of the room. He is again (and typically) sloppy drunk, making conversation and flirting as he goes.

BILLY

Hi, everyone! Welcome...

HORACE

Thank you, Billy. You know, reunion after reunion, we see the same faces. The same old faces. Year after year. This year however, we some special guests - celebrities in our midst! First, you may remember him as an unassuming math and science nerd. Who knew that he would go on to invent the Minter Miracle Self-cleaning Toilet, which has created a revolution in bathroom cleanliness. He's a self-made man, entrepreneur, philanthropist and all around swell guy, David Minter!

DAVID

(Tight.)

Thank you.

HORACE

And you may remember her as the painfully shy wallflower who made such a fool of herself the night of the senior prom...

LUCY

Horace...

HORACE

...now she's a regular guest on Oprah, CNN and the Danny Bonaduce show, the bestselling author of eight murder mysteries - including one set at a high school reunion - so watch your step everyone - Lucy Twiston!

LUCY

(Like David, not very happy.)

Thanks.

HORACE

Now, I'd like to say just a little bit about one of our former classmates who's not here tonight. The last two years, we've had some...disruptions during the reunion. I'd like to assure everyone here, and Nancy in particular, that it won't be happening this year. That particular...troublemaker was not invited, and we moved the location of the reunion...

(Noticing some commotion in the house.)

...so that he wouldn't...oh, crap.

BIFF

(Crossing on up to the stage.)

Horace, old buddy! How's it hangin'?

HORACE

Biff, get the hell out of here! You're not...

BIFF

(Grabbing HORACE in a headlock.)

What's the matter, pal? You're not still pissed about that thing last year, are you? Let it go, man! What's fifty thousand dollars between friends?

(He drops HORACE to the ground. To

DAVID.)

Loverboy! Great to see you! You know, you may be rich, famous and all that, but to me, you'll still always be that little geek with his head in a toilet.

DAVID

You son of a bitch!

He makes a lunge at BIFF, BILLY holds him back.

BILLY

Not now, David!

BIFF

Yeah, listen to good old...

(To BILLY.)

...whatshisname if you know what's good for you.

(To LUCY.)

Lucy! You're Lucy! Never knew that before, I know it now. Lucy, Lucy, Lucy! Sing any good songs lately?

(LUCY turns away, embarrassed. To NANCY.)

Last, but oh god, definitely not least. Nance, you look great - divorce agrees with you. Come here, sweetheart.

NANCY

You get away from me!

BIFF

Nance, it's our tradition, isn't it? A kiss, for old time's sake.

NANCY

Why in hell would I ever kiss you again?

BIFF

I don't know, Nance. For twenty years, for the good times?

NANCY

There weren't too many of those.

BIFF

All right, for the times that weren't completely horrible then.

(NANCY turns away.)

Ah, how about for Loverboy's sake?

(Going to DAVID, arm around him.)

You're never too old for a swirlie!

NANCY

All right! One kiss. If I agree, will you get the hell out of here.

BIFF

Scout's honor, sweetheart. Cross my heart and hope to...

NANCY

Shut up. Let's get this over with.

BIFF

(Handing DAVID his drink.)
Here, loverboy - hold this for me, wouldya?

BIFF crosses to NANCY. DAVID turns away, not wanting to look. BIFF and NANCY kiss. He tries to make much more out of it than she does, and she breaks away.

NANCY

Now get out of here.

BIFF

Always leave me wanting more, don't you, Nance? We've still got it though. That kiss made my lips tingle. Right, now where's that punch? Reggie always makes the best punch.

NANCY

Biff, you promised!

BIFF

Promise, shmomise, blah blah blah! You can't have a reunion without me!

(He coughs. As he goes on with this speech, his throat begins to tighten.)

I'm Biff Biggs, captain of the football team, life of the party, and all around swell guy! I...

(More coughs. He can't find his breath.)

I...

(He collapses, dead.)

NANCY

God. At least he passed out sooner this year.

HORACE

Billy, let's get him out of here.

BILLY goes to get BIFF to his feet.

BILLY

(In classic Murder Mystery style.)

He's not breathing! I think he's dead!

The rest of the cast gives a classic Murder Mystery gasp.

NANCY

Dead? Oh my god!

AMY

Just like my book...

HORACE

All right, can we please just all keep it together? Now look, we've got to do everything can to figure this out.

DAVID

Ourselves? Why not call the police?

HORACE

Yeah, of course we'll call them, but they can't do much. Due to budget cuts, they eliminated the South Pattersfield police station. The nearest station is in...North Pattersfield. And I say that there's more brain power in this room than in all of North Pattersfield, am I right?

General agreement from those on stage.

HORACE

(To audience.)

I said, am I right?

(Some audience reaction?)

Yeah! Those North Pattersfield jerks won't know what hit them. We can use your help! We have to figure out who did this.

BILLY

Horace, we have to assume that one of us up here is the culprit. We had access to Biff before he died. And from what I can tell, we all had motive.

HORACE

Agreed. One of the five of us is the murderer.

(DAVID whispers into HORACE's ear. HORACE points into the audience)

Oh, yeah. It could also be that guy in the front there. Never did trust him.

LUCY

All of you are witnesses, and it's your job to take what you've seen, and help us find the murderer.

NANCY

I propose that we take some time to circulate around these tables. You people may have seen something we didn't, or may think of a question that we might not.

BILLY

On your table, you will find sleuthing sheets, where you may write down the fruits of your investigations.

HORACE

How did those get there?

NANCY

They were supposed to be menus. There was some confusion at the printers.

HORACE

Okay. And witnesses, I'd like to point out that all of these suspects may be hiding secrets, secrets you cannot learn except through interrogation. All right, gang, let's get this over with.

They drag the body off, as the curtain falls.