

# MAN MURDER OF THE YEAR



Place: The Hotel Hoodoo, New Orleans

Time: The present

Colonel Cornelius Pridemore – The man of the hour. Self-made multi-billionaire, philanthropist (up to a point), philanderer (up to a point, and beyond). Notable for his larger than life personality, and mysteriously withered arm.

Catherine Pridemore – Cornelius’ long-suffering wife. Plays the dutiful wife very well, but is fully aware of Cornelius’ faults.

Lucy Belletresse – Cornelius’ assistant; the daughter he never had, and the apple of his eye, at least until he met...

Julia Floutgams – Cornelius’ current mistress; works as a waitress at the Hoodoo. Knows what she wants and isn’t afraid to get it.

Thaddeus Boondock – Cornelius’ lawyer, and Lucy’s fiancée. Up to his eyeballs in debt to the mob.

Eustace “Rooster” Mazzari – Mob enforcer from the Northeast. All around tough guy. Comes to collect a debt. Played by the same actor as Cornelius.

Reginald Pierce – Your host for the evening. Chairman of the greater New Orleans philanthropic society, which has seen better times. Looking forward to a fat check from Cornelius.

Chief Justin Budreaux – The local exemplar of law and order. Likes his gumbo. Sometimes has difficulty getting out of the squad car. Played by the same actor as Julia.

Murder of the Year

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## Act I

**Reginald:** Ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to welcome you to the Hoodoo Hotel to honor the New Orleans Philanthropic Society's 2010 Man of the Year, Colonel Cornelius Pridemore! Of course, you all know me, Reginald Pierce, director of the Society. Please, feel free to call me Reggie, if you've made a donation in the last year.

I'd like to offer a special welcome to (his/her) Honor, Mayor (Charles/Charlene) LaBeuf! We're all glad to see you here tonight, and I think I speak on behalf of us all, (sir/ma'am) when I say that you have our full support in this trying time. I don't care what the newspapers say, it should not be illegal to do that with your own dog!

We're so glad to have you all here as we celebrate the life and achievements of a great man, a great benefactor, a great friend. *(As he will be in these situations, Reginald is rather overcome.)*

We're a little bit behind schedule, since we don't ah, quite know where the Colonel is right now. *(awkward laugh.)* So let me take this opportunity to welcome some of our distinguished guests here on the dais. *(In this, or whatever order makes sense according to position on the dais. Catherine should come last.)*

Mr. Thaddeus Boondock, Colonel Pridemore's attorney and chief advisor. I'll bet you know where the bodies are buried, eh Thad?

**Thaddeus:** Uh, thank you Reg. I have absolutely no comment about any bodies. But I'm very happy to be here.

**Reginald:** Miss Lucy Belletresse, the Colonel's personal assistant. I can see why the Colonel wants to keep you close, Lucy!

**Lucy:** Many thanks, Reginald. I'm privileged to be here to help honor a man who has done so much for me and for the city.

**Reginald:** And last, but most certainly not least, a blessing to our Society, a dear, dear friend, a lady whose generosity is outweighed only by her heart *(again, he finds it hard to go on)...*

**Catherine:** There, there, Reggie. It'll be alright. Friends, I'm Catherine Pridewell, the Colonel's wife these many, many, many years. I must apologize for my husband's absence. I'm sure he must have a very good reason for keeping all of you fine people waiting. And when I find out what it is, I'll be sure to let him know...how much we missed having him here.

**Reginald:** Thank you Mrs. Pridemore. Folks, I'm going to ask you to bear with us while we wait for the guest of honor. Please, enjoy your appetizers, and enjoy your evening!

*(Lucy exits the dais to the bar, Thaddeus makes to follow. Reginald and Catherine remain. On his way out, Thaddeus thinks twice, comes back, so that he hears the tail end of the following.)*

**Reginald:** Mrs. Pridemore?

**Catherine:** Please, Reggie, call me Catherine! We've known each other long enough, heaven knows.

**Reginald:** Ah, yes, Catherine *(he giggles)*. Do you, in fact, know the whereabouts of the Colonel?

**Catherine:** *(grim)* I have long since given up trying to determine the Colonel's whereabouts. I do not know where he is.

**Reginald:** Well, I know he's a busy man...

**Catherine:** Yes, well – the real question is, who is he busy with?

**Reginald:** Pardon?

**Catherine:** Nothing, Reggie, nothing. You shouldn't be too concerned. Cornelius always shows up when he's least expected, larger than life.

**Reginald:** Well, you see, the reason I'm concerned is that I haven't got a straight answer from the Colonel about his donation for the year.

**Catherine:** Leave that to me, Reggie. You and the Society have no better friend than myself. You know that the Colonel can be somewhat...capricious, but I will advocate for you.

**Reginald:** Given all that, I'm also greatly concerned that he's mentioned changing his will. You don't think his bequest to the Society is in jeopardy, do you?

**Catherine:** Nonsense, Reggie. All talk and nonsense. Leave it to me, Reggie. Just leave it all to me.

**Thaddeus:** Excuse me, Mrs. Pridemore?

**Catherine:** Yes, excuse me, Reggie. I must attend to...my husband's affairs.

*(Reginald goes to check in at the bar/kitchen.)*

**Catherine:** Now, Thaddeus, where is my husband?

**Thaddeus:** How should I know?

**Catherine:** You know all of his dirty laundry, don't you? I tend to think of you as chief launderer.

**Thaddeus:** I do not know his whereabouts. What I do know is that his absence here tonight is a major embarrassment to the business and the family.

**Catherine:** You may concern yourself with the business. As for the family, this embarrassment is only one of many, and none of your concern.

**Thaddeus:** I need to speak to you about something else. The colonel has received another death threat.

**Catherine:** Well, that's nothing new is it? As Cornelius says, "you cannot be loved by everyone." Or is it "anyone?"

**Thaddeus:** This one's different. There's more to it.

*(Thaddeus hands Catherine a piece of paper)*

**Catherine:** What is this?

**Thaddeus:** A voodoo hex. I took it to a shop in the quarter. It's a curse, meant to result in poverty and death.

**Catherine:** Which would be worse for him, I wonder? Well, points for creativity, and a refreshing change of pace from the recent badly spelled requests for payment of non-existent debts. Still, don't show this to one to Cornelius.

**Thaddeus:** Why?

**Catherine:** Well, unless you want him to have a coronary. He's afraid of very little, but voodoo is different.

**Thaddeus:** Why is that?

**Catherine:** Did he never tell you what happened to his arm?

**Thaddeus:** No.

**Catherine:** So, you don't know everything? Well, it's a long story...

*(Lucy re-emerges from the kitchen)*

...one I have neither

the time or inclination to tell now.

**Lucy:** Mrs. Pridemore, I...

**Catherine:** (*Ignoring Lucy*) Thaddeus, my throat is dry, and I must see to it. Let me know if you find my husband (*exits to bar/kitchen.*)

**Lucy:** She doesn't like me.

**Thaddeus:** No.

**Lucy:** Why?

**Thaddeus:** I don't know why. It's unusual...in my experience, you bring out the best in people.

*(He goes to her. They are close.)*

**Lucy:** I'm glad you're here tonight. Between Mrs. Pridemore and that insufferable Mr. Pierce, it's good to have someone to talk to. Not that I can tell anyone else what I really want to say!

**Thaddeus:** Lucy, come now, we agreed. The time isn't right.

**Lucy:** I still don't understand why we can't...

**Thaddeus:** Shhh...

**Lucy:** All right. You'd better not make me wait too long, I told you what my mama taught me.

**Thaddeus:** Yes. (*He is thoughtful.*)

**Lucy:** What is it?

**Thaddeus:** Nothing. Well, the Colonel received another...letter.

**Lucy:** Oh, no, not tonight!

**Thaddeus:** Yes, I'm afraid so.

**Lucy:** Is it serious?

**Thaddeus:** I don't know...

**Lucy:** He inspires strong feelings, doesn't he?

**Thaddeus:** You could say that, yes.

*(Reginald re-enters.)*

**Reginald:** Pardon me, Mr. Boondock, Miss Belletresse. Have you seen the Colonel?

**Lucy:** Sir, if the Colonel were here, I think you would know!

**Cornelius:** I should say so!

*(Cornelius enters, larger than life, as promised. He takes his time making his way to center stage, shaking hands, flirting, whatever makes sense at the time. His left arm is withered and useless. His apparel is conspicuous by the lack of a tie. He embraces Lucy, greets Reginald warmly, Thaddeus more perfunctorily. Thaddeus exits to find Catherine.)*

*(Julia enters, looking somewhat ruffled. It is obvious that she knows him, and knows him well. She produces his bowtie.)*

**Julia:** Oh, Colonel, I found this in...the hallway. You must have misplaced it.

**Cornelius:** Ah, thank you.

*(She helps him put the bowtie on, showing off to the assembled. Catherine and Reginald re-enter.)*

**Catherine:** Cornelius, so glad to finally see you. I see you've found a new friend.

**Julia:** Oh no, ma'am, I've known the Colonel quite a long time.

**Catherine:** Well congratulations, Miss...

**Julia:** Floutgams, Julia Floutgams.

**Catherine:** Charming. Well, Miss Floutgams, you are practically unique in my experience. My husband has a hard time keeping...friends. He's always been fond of his assistant, but you know what they say – new blood.

*(Julia notices this, and is visibly bothered by it.)*

**Reginald:** Uh, yes. Colonel, we're behind schedule. Shall we begin?

**Cornelius:** By all means. (To Julia) My dear, I require a libation.

**Julia:** Of course. What shall it be?

**Cornelius:** Oh, surprise me. You know what I like.

**Catherine:** I'm sure.

*(The testimonials begin, starting with Reginald.)*

**Reginald:** Ladies and gentlemen, it is my singular honor to begin tonight's salute to a great man. Colonel, you have been a friend to the Society for so many years. No one has done more for us, and we rely on you and your generosity, more than ever in these trying times. We are indebted to you, deeply deeply indebted to you. If I may be so bold, without you and your largesse, we would be lost, bereft, without hope or succor. Abandoned, bankrupt, destitute...

**Catherine:** No need to lay it on quite so thick, dear.

**Reginald:** When the time comes, I hope that you will always remember us, and that through us, your memory will live forever. I can only hope that...

*(He is so overcome with emotion that he cannot speak, but tries to hug Cornelius, an offer which is flatly rejected. Lucy goes to the dais)*

**Lucy:** Colonel Pridemore, I can only say thank you. Thank you for all of your kindness to me these past three years. I haven't had much in the way of family, and you have been, well...just know that no one could take your place in my life. I flatter myself to think that I'm special in your life too, that no one could take my place.

**Catherine:** Oh, please, where are the violins?

**Cornelius:** Catherine, behave!

**Lucy:** I guess I just wanted to say, I'm honored to be your assistant, honored to know you sir. Many congratulations!

*(Applause from all. Catherine applauds loudly and slowly. Thaddeus approaches the dais with a sheaf of papers, which he will read from.)*

**Cornelius:** Catherine...

**Catherine:** Oh, is it my turn?

**Cornelius:** Not yet.

**Thaddeus:** Mr. Pridemore, as your legal advisor, and chief strategist for Pridemore Incorporated, it is my pleasure to tell you that you have well earned your place at

this table. Over the past five years, return on numerous investments has continued to increase, while expenses have...

*(At this point, Julia interrupts, pushing Thaddeus out of the way.)*

**Julia:** Hi! I don't know everyone here, but I'm a...friend of the Colonel's, and I wanted to pass on my own congratulations tonight. This is something special, just for you, Colonel. Hit it, Laird!

*(“I put a spell on you” begins to play, and Julia plays it for all it's worth. This is a private/public moment for her and Cornelius, and she's not shy about it.)*

*I put a spell on you  
Because you're mine.  
You better stop  
The things that you're doin'.  
I said "Watch out!  
I ain't lyin', yeah!  
I ain't gonna take none of your  
Foolin' around;  
I ain't gonna take none of your  
Puttin' me down;  
I put a spell on you  
Because you're mine.  
All right!*

*(Somewhere in all this, Reginald manages to figure out that this is not acceptable, and ushers Julia off the dais, cutting the music off. Catherine walks to the dais, glass in hand.)*

**Cornelius:** *(to Julia, as she's leaving)* Don't forget that drink, my dear.

**Catherine:** Well, wasn't that something? Congratulations, Cornelius. After twenty-seven years of marriage, you do still have the power to surprise me. I truly did not know just what you were capable of...and in front of all these people! Our friends, our community...I can only imagine how...entertained everyone feels. I cannot express to all of you, how I feel right now. You know, all of you, that a good wife stands by her man, and supports him in all he does. For instance...oh, just now, Cornelius, didn't you ask for a drink?

**Cornelius:** Why yes, I...

**Catherine:** Allow me, dear. *(She throws her drink in his face, storms back to her seat. Julia returns with Cornelius' drink.)*

**Cornelius:** *(gets drink from Julia)* Thank you my dear, your song was lovely. You could use some more breath support, though. Come see me after all this, and I'll give

you some tips on deep breathing. (*Cornelius and Julia laugh long and inappropriately*). Members of the Society, distinguished guests, Mayor LaWoof...(*laughs*)...pardon me, Mayor LaBeuf – you sly dog, (*gestures to table*) family, (*winks to Julia*), friends...

(*Takes a sip of his drink*) Interesting. Next time, something else, dear. It has a bitter aftertaste. (*Resuming speech*) It is customary at such times for a man to thank all of those who have made it possible for him to achieve such heights. Customary to give credit to all of the little people in his life, on whose backs he has stepped to get where he is.

There are so many backs, so many people who have made my success possible, that I cannot remember them all, so I will confine myself to these gathered friends.

Thaddeus, you have been my lawyer now for five years. I rely on your discretion and good sense, as well as the fact that you can fake my signature; saves me a lot of time signing tedious documents. Speaking of which, that was the most boring speech I've ever heard.

Reginald, you are a pillar of this community, and a good man. At least, rumor has it that you're a man. You might want to put a line item in the Society budget for backbone next year. That is, if there is a budget for next year! I'm just having fun with you, Reggie – donations to your society have meant millions in tax breaks for me. Sorry to tell you that the tax laws have changed, so...well, I'm sure you can scrape up a few more bucks somewhere, eh, Reggie?

(*He laughs, then is suddenly woozy.*)

Pardon me, I feel a bit lightheaded. Where was I? Ah yes, Catherine, I've had many drinks thrown in my face by many women, but you are the best. Of course, you've had a lot of practice. Still, I bow to you, my dear, you have raised it to a high art.

Lucy...(*he is suddenly serious*). You have been a light in the darkness for me, and I thank you for everything – for being my assistant, my right hand...my friend. You do not know...I can never do enough for you, never make up for...

(*he sees something on the podium, produces it. It is the hex.*)

...what? Where did this come from? Which of you did this?

(*His withered arm begins twitching. After much thrashing and gyration, he falls to the ground, dead. Thaddeus runs to him.*)

**Thaddeus:** Dead. He's dead.

**Lucy:** No! What was it, a heart attack?

**Catherine:** I highly doubt it. My husband wasn't the kind of man to die of natural causes.

**Julia:** What did he die of then?

**Thaddeus:** Isn't it obvious? Colonel Cornelius Pridemore was...murdered!

**Reginald:** Ladies and gentlemen, friends of the Philanthropic Society, I'm sorry for the sudden change of plans, but I'm afraid our testimonial dinner has been transformed into a wake. And I'm afraid, a crime scene. I must ask that no one leave the premises.

*(During the following speech, Thaddeus investigates Cornelius' glass, smelling it, which gives him pause. He turns to comfort Lucy; while he does so, Julia takes the glass and returns to the kitchen with it.)*

**Reginald:** Now, no offense to New Orleans' finest, but to avoid any (further) scandal to the Society or the Pridemore family, I would greatly prefer to present the police with a solved case, rather than subject all of you fine people to the rigors of a full interrogation. I know (his/her) Honor the Mayor would prefer not to have any more publicity.

**Catherine:** The good news is that there are no animals present...

**Reginald:** Yes! Thank you! And so, to keep the glare of unwanted attention from the society and all of it's...friends, I ask you to help us investigate this heinous deed, and bring the murderer to justice. As part of your programs for the evening, you will find (how convenient!) sleuthing sheets, that give you a place to write down the fruits of those investigations.

After we respectfully dispose of the Colonel's mortal remains, I would ask all of our honored guests on the podium to mingle with our friends at the other tables; as those closest to the Colonel, they may have particular insight into how he died, or who may have wished him dead. Let me stress this – they may have information crucial to your investigations – information you cannot glean in any other way than by interrogating these fine people yourselves.

So, while you enjoy your salads, please take time to see justice done.

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*The actors, as best they can, remove Cornelius' body, and bring him "backstage." After a few minutes, they filter back out as the salads are being served. They mingle with the audience, dropping clues and answering questions in character. In general, all questions about relationships are fair game, but facts and red herrings should be released only when indicated.*

*All the actors except Reginald and Julia mention that Lucy could smell almonds in Cornelius' drink. Julia is defensive about the drink, only saying that it was "something special." Reginald knows nothing about the drink.*

**Catherine:**

- Cornelius' withered arm was the result of a voodoo curse, at least he thought so.
- She resents Lucy because she's close to Cornelius. She suspects they were more than friends.

**Julia:**

- She and Cornelius knew each other a long time, and were "very close, closer than anyone knows."
- She is not from the New Orleans area.
- If asked how long she's been working, she says "here, or my other job?" If quizzed more about the other job, she is defensive and unrevealing.

**Thaddeus:**

- He knows Reginald socially, and has noticed that he seems very jittery of late.
- Catherine may not show it, but she was very jealous of any woman who showed an interest in Cornelius.
- If approached about his connection with Lucy, he is evasive, saying only "the time isn't right."
- If pressed about the drink, he mentions that it smelled slightly of almonds.

**Lucy:**

- She and Thaddeus are engaged, but he didn't want anyone to know about it. (*This shouldn't be volunteered, but will be acknowledged by Lucy if someone figures it out.*)
- She is from the bayou area originally, and learned a few things about voodoo. "how to put a charm on someone, or even a hex, if needed."
- She recognizes the voodoo hex Cornelius received – "poverty and death."

**Reginald:**

- He is sorry Cornelius is gone, but grateful and relieved that the fate of the Society is now in Catherine's capable hands.
- This isn't the first time that he's seen Cornelius with Julia at the Hotel.