

Murder of the Year

By

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Music and Lyrics by Daven Tillinghast

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Cast of Characters

- 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.
- Thaddeus Boondock: Thaddeus Boondock - Cornelius' lawyer, and Lucy's fiancée. Up to his eyeballs in debt to the mob.
- Lucy Belletresse: Lucy Belletresse -Cornelius' assistant; the daughter he never had, and the apple of his eye.
- Catherine Pridemore: Cornelius' long-suffering wife. Plays the dutiful wife very well, but is fully aware of Cornelius' faults.
- Julia Floutgams: Cornelius' current mistress; works as a waitress at the Hoodoo. Knows what she wants and isn't afraid to get it.
- 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.

(MORE)

Cast of Characters (cont'd)

Eustace "Rooster" Mazzari: Mob enforcer from the Northeast. All around tough guy. Comes to collect a debt. Played by the same actor as 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.

REGINALD AND CATHERINE - 1

REGINALD

Mrs. Pridemore?

CATHERINE

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

REGINALD

Ah, yes, Catherine.

(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, with whom is he busy?

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.

CATHERINE AND THADDEUS

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...one I have neither the time or inclination to tell now.

LUCY AND THADDEUS - 1

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

(Thoughtful.)

Yes.

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.

JULIA, CORNELIUS, CATHERINE, REGINALD, LUCY, THADDEUS

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.

LUCY 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 replacement libation.

JULIA

Of course. What shall it be?

CORNELIUS

Oh, surprise me. You know what I like.

CATHERINE

I'm sure.

REGINALD comes to the dais.

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...

REGINALD 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 set of index cards, which he will proceed to 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!

You're out of Luck 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.

DAVEN - LYRICS HERE

Because it's not clear enough, JULIA plants a big kiss on CORNELIUS at the end of the song. REGINALD manages to figure out that this is not acceptable, and ushers JULIA off the dais. 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 - I'll be more than happy to give you some...private lessons.

(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 boring tedious documents. Speaking of which, And, I have to say 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?

REGINALD whimpers as CORNELIUS 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.

(Suddenly serious.)

Lucy...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.

REGINALD AND JULIA

REGINALD

Excuse me, Miss, uh, Floutgams?

JULIA

Yes?

REGINALD

It isn't really my place, but I thought you should know, some of the others have been whispering...things about you...about you and the Colonel.

JULIA

Well, I suppose they would. Not that they have the slightest idea what was going on between us.

REGINALD

Not my place, as I say...

(He turns to leave.)

I will say however, I think your conduct with the Colonel right in front of Mrs. Pridemore was disgraceful! To embarrass her publicly like that! Not that it's the first time - I know he never treated her the way she deserved. In the midst of this tragedy, we can at least be grateful for her.

JULIA

We? You mean your precious Society?

REGINALD

Yes, finally, with Mrs. Pridemore as the Colonel's heir, the Society's future is secure!

JULIA

I wouldn't count your chickens if I were you.

REGINALD

Mrs. Pridemore wouldn't abandon us in our hour of need, a woman of her refinement and grace.

JULIA

Why Mr. Pierce, anyone would think you were in love!

REGINALD

How dare you suggest...it is absurd, and a slander on the character of a great lady!

JULIA

Such passion! You hold her in high regard, don't you?

REGINALD

I do indeed.

JULIA

What wouldn't you do on her behalf, I wonder?

REGINALD

I would do anything for her...

(Catches himself.)

...within reason.

JULIA

Very interesting. Thank you Reggie, you may go.

REGINALD

Yes, ma'am.

(Makes to leave, then realizes what just happened.)

Such impertinence! And you will call me Mr. Pierce!

JULIA

The time is may well be coming when I can call you whatever I please. And if history is any judge, you will come when I call, heel to me, and be grateful for whatever morsels I throw your way.

REGINALD

I don't know where this is coming from, young lady, but I shall speak to the management of the hotel, and have you dismissed.

JULIA

Suit yourself...

(Reginald fumes off.)

I won't be needing the job much longer.

LUCY, CATHERINE AND JULIA

LUCY

Mrs. Pridemore?

CATHERINE

Please, I have no desire to speak to you.

LUCY

But why? What have I ever done to offend you?

CATHERINE

How can you be so bold, right to my face, while my husband's corpse is still warm?

LUCY

You were his wife...I was his friend. Everyone else, everyone in his life wanted something from him. You and I should be friends now.

CATHERINE

Friends? Friends! The way he looked at you, the gifts, the phone calls! The "business trips" together - that was "friendship?"

LUCY

It wasn't like that! I was his assistant! He treated me like...

CATHERINE

...yes?

LUCY

Like a father. He said I was like the daughter he never had.

CATHERINE

(Laughs.)

He never told me he was looking for one! No one would describe Cornelius as fatherly. And you, why did you need to borrow my husband - what was wrong with your own father?

LUCY

I never knew my father, or my mother. I was an orphan, brought up by a kind neighbor. Odilia Marie - I called her Mama - everyone did. I stayed with her until I was ten years old. That's when she lost her home - some awful man heartless viper foreclosed on it, intending to turn it into a hotel or something. I was sent away to an orphanage. I've never had anything like a family since then. Until I met the Colonel. He hired me as his assistant. He was kind to me, nothing more.

CATHERINE

(Moved.)

Well, I did not know that. Any of it. The woman who raised you - what did you say her name was, Mama...

LUCY

Odilia Marie.

CATHERINE

I know that name.

(Throws it off.)

Well, I beg your pardon, my dear. It seems I was mistaken about you. Now that I think about it, you're not really Cornelius' type.

LUCY

How do you mean?

CATHERINE

You lack a certain...trashy quality, that Cornelius found so compelling. He was always more interested in someone like...

Julia appears from behind the dais.

JULIA

Ooh, my ears are burning!

CATHERINE

Oh, for heaven's sake! You're not about to tell me you were his adopted niece, were you?

JULIA

No, nothing of the kind! My relationship with Cornelius was very straightforward.

CATHERINE

I cannot listen to any more of this.

JULIA

Ah, but this is our chance to have some girl talk.

CATHERINE

I do not wish to speak to you! And if you speak to me again, trust me - I will find a way to make you very, very sorry.

JULIA

Maybe later then?

CATHERINE turns, glares at her, exits. LUCY makes to follow.

JULIA

I have to admit, I like your style.

LUCY

I beg your pardon.

JULIA

The dress, the hair, the too-good-to-be-true bit! Nice work - I'm not from the South, so I don't think I could pull it off - I don't look good in pastels. Still, you're a class act, all around.

LUCY

I have no idea what you're talking about.

LUCY makes to leave.

JULIA

Come on, no need to be a sore loser! There's more than one way to a man's heart - the direct approach just tends to be more effective, if you get my drift.

LUCY

Direct approach?

JULIA

You gave me the idea, you know! There are definite advantages to being the Colonel's favorite, aren't there?

LUCY

What?

JULIA

(Crosses to her.)

Never break character, right? You are a pro.

(Laughs.)

Just ask your boyfriend. He'll fill you in. Well, I'd love to stay and chat, but I've got to finish cleaning up this mess, then give my notice! I'd up and quit without it, but you never know when you'll need a good reference!

THADDEUS, LUCY AND CATHERINE

THADDEUS

Lucy.

LUCY

Oh, Thaddeus, that woman, that Flouthams...you have no idea what kind of person she is.

THADDEUS

I have some idea. I've known about her and the Colonel for some time.

LUCY

You've known? And you didn't do anything about it?

THADDEUS

You know how the Colonel was - I didn't take it seriously, any more than with any of the others.

LUCY

She thinks she had her hooks in pretty deep.

THADDEUS

She's entitled to her opinion. Look, I need to tell you something, darling. Something that may come as a bit of a shock.

LUCY

I'm not sure I can take any more of those today, but...
(Laughs)
...go ahead!

THADDEUS

Lucy, the Colonel made a change to his will two months ago.

LUCY

What?

THADDEUS

He added another heir - it's you, Lucy. He insisted on leaving some money for this Pierce's ridiculous society, but the rest is split between you and Mrs. Pridemore, 50-50.

LUCY

I don't believe it.

CATHERINE

(Emerging.)

I do - it all makes sense to me now. It wasn't enough that you would steal my husband's affections, now you

(MORE)

CATHERINE (cont'd)

steal his money! What wouldn't you do, my dear, to get ahead? Get added to my husband's will, then kill him off?

LUCY

Mrs. Pridemore, I would never...

CATHERINE

And to think, I believed you - I believed your story about Mama Dolly Mary!

LUCY

Odilia Marie! And it's no story, it's true.

CATHERINE

Odilia Marie, Odilia Marie. I do know that name!

THADDEUS

Mrs. Pridemore, Lucy didn't do it - she couldn't have.

CATHERINE

As if you are to be trusted to judge her character. Did you really think that your engagement, your "secret" engagement was a secret? Cornelius figured it out, and told me! It wouldn't surprise me in the least if you two were in league to kill my husband, and take his money.

THADDEUS

Mrs. Pridemore, this is nothing but a distraction from the facts! I know that Lucy didn't kill the Colonel...because I know who did.

CATHERINE AND REGINALD - 2

CATHERINE

I don't understand, what was Cornelius doing, getting involved with the mob?

REGINALD

Well, the Colonel seems to have been...a complicated man.

CATHERINE

Between this, that Miss Flouthams, and the new will...I can't say that I'm really surprised.

REGINALD

If I may, Mrs. Pridemore...Catherine. He didn't deserve you.

CATHERINE

Perhaps not.

REGINALD

I don't know if any man could deserve you. You are such a wonderful, generous beautifully perfect woman! You deserve to have the sun pointed in your direction at all hours of the day. You deserve to have baskets of fruit laid at your feet. Please, let me get you some fruit!

CATHERINE

No, thank you, Reggie. What you say is both very sweet, and rather disturbing at the same time.

REGINALD

Forgive me, I didn't mean to...

CATHERINE

It's all right, Reggie. Why don't you go check up in the kitchen, and see how the police are doing.

ROOSTER AND JULIA

ROOSTER

You still haven't told me what you've been up to here.

JULIA

I've been doing what you asked! Work over the Colonel, get the money.

ROOSTER

Three months ago I send you out here, I get no report, now this is what you tell me?

JULIA

Rooster, I'm the best, that's why you sent me. The Colonel was a tough nut to crack, I had to get creative.

ROOSTER

Now what am I left with? Pridemore's dead, the widow don't know nothing, there's a lawyer here - I'm afraid this may not be a negotiated settlement.

JULIA

Since when has that been a problem for you?

ROOSTER

Look doll, I'm not adverse to getting my hands dirty, but there are an awful lot of witnesses here to take care of...

(starts counting heads in the audience)

...and Uncle Luigi's Mortuary is already backed up three weeks!

JULIA

It won't come to that.

She is suddenly woozy.

ROOSTER

What? You okay?

JULIA

Just a little woozy, it's nothing. Look, just wait until after Pridemore's affairs are settled. You'll get your money, with interest.

ROOSTER

All right, I'll wait, if only to see what you've come up with. Just a gentle reminder - no one crosses me and gets away with it. Plenty of big shots like Pridemore have learned that lesson too late.

THADDEUS AND LUCY - 2

LUCY opens the purse, finds the napkin, which she reads. A beat as she puts it all together.

LUCY

No, no, no!

She makes to leave, is stopped by THADDEUS.

THADDEUS

Where are you off to, darling?

LUCY

(Attempting to play cool.)

Nothing, I was just going to join the others.

THADDEUS

I'm afraid I can't let you do that - not before we have a little chat.

LUCY

What will you do? Kill me?

THADDEUS

I wouldn't harm you, my darling; you're far too valuable to me. Unless you left me with no alternative.

LUCY

Like the Colonel and Julia?

THADDEUS

(Angry.)

They spoiled everything! My plan was perfect - get the Colonel to put you into the will, marry you...

LUCY

How did you do it?

THADDEUS

(Proud.)

Ah...everybody thought it was the drink, and they were right...and wrong. It wasn't the drink Julia brought the Colonel, or the water Reginald gave Julia. It was the champagne!

LUCY

Champagne?

THADDEUS

Used to celebrate the new will - the one you have in your hand. The one the Colonel made me witness as his

(MORE)

THADDEUS (cont'd)

lawyer. The one leaving all of his money to Julia, his floozy of the moment!

LUCY

But how...

THADDEUS

A slow acting poison - almost too slow in Julia's case. But then the Colonel drank a lot more than she did, and I think the hex I planted on the podium may have helped speed things along.

LUCY

That was you?

THADDEUS

Yes, trying to cover all bases. If that fool Reginald didn't dig himself a deep enough hole, I wanted to be sure that Mrs. Pridemore was next in line. She told me that the Colonel was deathly afraid of voodoo. I thought the hex might not only speed him on his way, but would make her a more likely suspect, since she was the only one who knew about his fears.

LUCY

Besides you, you mean.

THADDEUS

Come now, who makes a better suspect - the angry, jilted wife, or the dutiful lawyer? I had nothing to gain.

LUCY

Nothing to gain, except marrying the Colonel's heir?

THADDEUS

Hmmm. His heir - I never understood his connection with you. I suppose it started out as remorse, or perhaps it was fear of another curse. In the end, though...

LUCY

In the end, in spite of everything he was, and everything he had done, he cared for me. He was my friend.

THADDEUS

Your friend - whatever that means. I can't complain though. He needed very little convincing to put you in his will. The hex almost ruined it all though - I didn't know about your history with that silly creole woman...

LUCY

(Fierce.)
Her name was Odilia Marie!

THADDEUS

(Moving toward her, threatening.)
Dearest, you are overly sentimental about people.
Really, they're just a means to an end.

LUCY

(Backing up, stalling for time.)
And me? What end was I the means to?

THADDEUS

Money, and lots of it! The Colonel didn't owe money to the mob - that was me. While there are great advantages to knowing how to write the bosses signature, I was a little indiscreet in using that to power to cover some gambling debt. It got to the point where I couldn't cover the losses enough without some outside cash, so I got it from the mob. They're discreet, up to a point...at least until it's time to collect. By then I knew, the Colonel would be dead, we'd be married...

LUCY

But for how long? How long do you plan on keeping me around?

THADDEUS

Details, details...a few months, a year - maybe longer. It all depends on you keeping your mouth shut. It won't be so bad, really. We'll be filthy rich - surely that's some consolation.

(He leans in for a kiss, she tries to slap him, which he intercepts.)
So you won't play along. Pity - we'll have to do this the hard way. Any last words?