

The Crazy Quilt Club

Synopsis

Veronica Blather is a sweet little old lady who spends most of her time knitting and solving murders, most of which occur whenever she shows up. Understandably, she has a problem finding a place to live.

When her niece, Dr. Lydecker, invites her to stay at a retirement home for old knitters, it seems ideal – until one of its members dies from drinking bad punch. Or was it poisoned? Who did it? Was it Matilda, the president of Crazy Quilt Club? Or Clara, who's a compulsive liar? And what about the wise-cracking Sarafina who doesn't trust anybody and carries a rifle just to be sure?

Clues drop as fast as corpses as Lieutenant McCoy shows up, just to muddle the waters even more. Add in a black widow spider, a drafty old cave, a gold nugget, and an ominous phone call and light begins to dawn on Veronica. That is, before the storm knocks out all of the lights.

Dialogue races along at breakneck speed and keeps the audience guessing till the last minute in this ferocious mystery comedy.

Characters

Matilda Thibedeaux	President of the Crazy Quilt Club, aged 50s – 70s.
Myrtle Ipswitch	A bit of a snoop, aged 50s – 70s.
Clara Quinten	A compulsive liar, aged 50s – 70s.
Sarafina Litton	Thinks crabbiness is a virtue, aged 50s – 70s.
Viola Underwood	Has a telltale allergy, aged 50s – 70s.
Lydia Thornedyke	Likes to die on Tuesdays, aged 50s – 70s.
Dr. Joyce Lydecker	A young doctor who looks after the cantankerous group; niece of Veronica. Aged in her late 20s to late 40s.
Veronica Blather	Has published several whodunits, thinks best when knitting (or crocheting); aged 50s – 70s.
*Lt. Jack McCoy	A police officer who's determined to solve this case. Aged 25+

****May be played by a woman, "Jackie," for an all-female cast.***

Audition Scene 1

Myrtle, Viola, Sarafina, Matilda, Clara, Lydia

CLARA: Can you talk to yourself?

MYRTLE: How do I know what I'm writing?

CLARA: Read it!

MYRTLE: *(Reads.)* "The point is..."

CLARA: Not now!

(LYDIA stumbles through the kitchen door, clutching her throat.)

LYDIA: I can't breathe! Somebody's...somebody's tried to poison me! Oh no! This is it! Somebody's finally done...finally done it! I...I... *(SHE gasps, staggers over to the sofa, and "passes out" on it.)*

(The rest of the LADIES go on as if nothing has happened.)

SARAFINA: Why do we want to keep that drafty old cave around, anyway?

VIOLA: Because it's quaint, it's part of the landscape.

MATILDA: Where's your sense of ecology?

CLARA: Yeah. That cave has been there forever.

VIOLA: That cave was there before you were born, but I bet it was close.

SARAFINA: *(Stands.)* You want to step outside?

MATILDA: *(Raps her gavel.)* Everybody settle down. And STOP STANDING! *(To SARAFINA.)* And you! Cut down on your bran!

SARAFINA: I just asked a question!

LYDIA: *(Still on the sofa.)* I'm going fast...

VIOLA: How can we stop them from destroying the cave?

MATILDA: Maybe we could dig up something historical?

SARAFINA: Why don't we just dig another cave and be done with it.

VIOLA: Boy, you have a snappy answer for everything, don't you?!

SARAFINA: I don't know about you but at MY age, I'm a little queasy about open holes in the ground.

VIOLA: You have no romance about you.

SARAFINA: For a cave? What, when you were young you used to date bats?

LYDIA: *(From the sofa.)* The light is dimming, I...can just barely hear now.

MATILDA: Let's try to remain orderly, shall we?

CLARA: *(To MYRTLE.)* Are you getting all this down?

MYRTLE: *(Still writing.)* "...from destroying that lovely old cave." What was after that?

CLARA: Why don't you get a cassette recorder?

MYRTLE: Electricity scares me.

SARAFINA: *(Changing the subject.)* Well, I'd like to know just WHO is this Veronica Blather and why she's coming here?

MATILDA: Dr. Lydecker already told you.

SARAFINA: She didn't.

VIOLA: She DID!

SARAFINA: I'd have remembered it. I got a mind like a steel...*(SHE blanks.)*...steel...

VIOLA: Wool.

MATILDA: She's Dr. Lydecker's aunt and she's thinking about moving in here.

LYDIA: *(From sofa.)* Is that the Grim Reaper standing at the end of the sofa?

SARAFINA: *(To LYDIA.)* Shut up, you old...

VIOLA: Leave her alone. You know Lydia always dies on Tuesdays.

SARAFINA: This is Wednesday.

MYRTLE: My watch must be slow.

VIOLA: It's Tuesday.

SARAFINA: Oh, how do YOU know?

VIOLA: 'Cause she's dying!

SARAFINA: *(Realizes it.)* It IS Tuesday, isn't it?

MATILDA: *(To HERSELF.)* Dang, where's a serial killer when you need one?

Audition Scene 2

McCoy, Joyce, Matilda, Lydia, Veronica

McCOY: So you say she just sat down, dozed off and that was that?

JOYCE: As far as I know.

MATILDA: Was she poisoned?

McCOY: Can't tell until we perform the autopsy. However, did anyone here have oh, say, just off the top of my head, a motive to kill her?

JOYCE: No. In fact, she was the best liked of the group.

McCOY: I see. Always said cheerful things about people, like that?

JOYCE: Well, no, not exactly.

LYDIA: She always said she couldn't stand us.

McCOY: HA! Hated the group.

JOYCE: No, she loved us.

McCOY: But she just said...

LYDIA: *(Almost sobbing.)* And you know, she said she hated me most of all.

McCOY: So, you had the best reason for disliking her.

LYDIA: That's why I loved her.

McCOY: Do what?

JOYCE: You see, Lieutenant, Clara was a compulsive liar. Everything she said was just the opposite of what she meant.

McCOY: God, I hope she didn't leave a will.

MATILDA: If she WAS poisoned, could it have been the punch? I mean, we ALL drank some of that.

McCOY: Well, it's being tested at the lab now. I hardly think so, though. From what you've all told me, it wasn't two minutes after you drank the punch before she died.

VERONICA: But if it WAS the punch?

McCOY: I beg your pardon?

VERONICA: (*Rises.*) Well, I was just thinking out loud, it being a part of my nature. (*SHE puts down her knitting.*) I used to have a teacher, Miss Dinstitch. Tall woman with buck teeth that you would not believe. We used to say she could bite an egg out of a milk bottle. I had her in the sixth grade. I remember because that was the year the junior high prom was held near the slaughterhouse and when the wind blew...

McCOY: (*Jumps in.*) Is there a point to any of this?

VERONICA: Oh. Yes, of course. Miss Dinstitch was an ardent disciple of the Socratic system of education. My, my, I can still see her in the front of class, always wearing that same brown polka-dot dress, rimless glasses and teeth like a beaver...

McCOY: Can we get past when you graduated? I got an investigation to conduct here.

VERONICA: Oh, sorry. Anyway, she taught us to always ask questions. And I was only suggesting that if it WAS the punch, we can safely assume two things. It must've been just that particular cup that was poisoned and, since it worked extremely fast, it must've been a very potent poison and used by someone who really knew what they were doing.

McCOY: (*Not sure.*) You know, I wish you were my aunt.

MATILDA: Well, that's so sweet.

McCOY: Not really. My aunt's in Spain right now.

VERONICA: (*Crosses to HIM.*) I hope you'll forgive this old woman's questions. I was cursed with an eye for detail. Little things, you know. Trivial in nature, singularly minute but sometimes if you add them up, well, you get my meaning.

McCOY: What sort of details?

VERONICA: Well, take you, for example. You've been a lieutenant on the local police force for the past four years, a bachelor who was born and raised around here, you've been trying to give up cigarettes, which you've smoked for years, and have even taken up smoking a pipe to help wean you away from this habit.

Audition Scene 3

Lydia, Sarafina, Myrtle

MYRTLE: But why would Viola want to murder Lydia?

SARAFINA: Why are you asking me? (*SHE and MYRTLE look hard at LYDIA.*)

LYDIA: (*After a pause.*) She always liked my red print dress.

SARAFINA: Oh, let's give her the chair!

MYRTLE: Lydia, now think, dear. DID Clara have your cup or not?

LYDIA: No. Yes. I...really can't remember now. Everything happened so fast!

MYRTLE: Maybe that's the whole point.

SARAFINA: Huh?

MYRTLE: Maybe whoever did it made sure it would happen fast, that they really DID use a fast-acting poison.

LYDIA: But who would know about those things?

SARAFINA: Two people I can think of. (*SHE crosses and stares at the SL door.*) And they're both in Dr. Lydecker's office right now.

MYRTLE: Them? I can't believe you! You question everything everybody says.

SARAFINA: I do not. What makes you say that?

LYDIA: Why do you suspect them?

SARAFINA: Think about this. Suppose, just suppose, Blanche Kendall is dead. What happens?

LYDIA: You know what happens. This property reverts to us. It's part of her bequest, isn't it?

SARAFINA: Ah HA! And suppose something happens to us?

MYRTLE: Well, I guess it would go to Dr. ... (*SHE points to the SL door.*) Oh, I don't believe it!

SARAFINA: And think about that batty aunt of hers. Veronica Blather. Don't you think it a bit against the odds that she's ALWAYS around when people get murdered? Once or twice, maybe, but how many books does she have? She goes shopping and the butcher ends up with a cleaver in his back. She places an order for cheese and the milkman gets run over by his own truck. She buys lettuce and the gardener dies of Cobb poisoning. And you want to know what we're going to do?

MYRTLE: Make sure she doesn't fix dinner?

SARAFINA: We keep our backs to the wall and our eyes peeled. I, for one, am going to find some way to protect myself. (*SHE crosses to the front door.*) I suggest you do the same. (*SHE exits.*)

LYDIA: What do you think she means by that? Protect herself?

MYRTLE: Knowing how Sarafina overdoes everything, she's probably going to buy a tank.

LYDIA: But what if she's wrong? What if the killer was only after Clara? Or me?

MYRTLE: Well, I've read a lot of mysteries myself and the thing to do now is to figure on the worst. Sarafina's figuring on a worst case scenario.

LYDIA: Sarafina IS a worst case scenario. What're YOU going to do?

MYRTLE: A little investigating of my own. (*SHE crosses to the kitchen.*) I'm going down to the cave. I want to know why Viola was so interested in that thing.

LYDIA: I don't think that might be such a good idea. The Lieutenant might be back...

MYRTLE: Well, you tell them where I am. (*SHE exits through the kitchen door.*)

LYDIA: (*To herself.*) I don't like the sound of this. (*Suddenly, SHE begins literally talking to herself.*) You don't? No, I don't! People running all over the place. Maybe that's a good idea? What?

LYDIA: (*Cont'd.*) People running all over? How do you figure that? Well, it was just a thought. Fine. Next time, let ME do the thinking.

Audition Scene 4

McCoy, Veronica, Joyce

JOYCE: Now that Lydia's gone, I want you to see this. *(SHE takes a cloth bag and undoes a twist-tie.)* I found this down at that old cave a couple of days ago. I don't think anyone else knows about it. *(SHE takes out a glittering stone from the bag.)* I thought you might need to see this. *(SHE holds up the stone.)* I think it's gold.

McCOY: Dowhat? *(HE takes the rock.)* There's no gold around here.

VERONICA: You're sure?

McCOY: Well, years ago there used to be a lot of mining going on around these parts. Hmm. This sure LOOKS like gold. It's probably just fool's gold.

VERONICA: Well, I could be entirely wrong but it doesn't look like chalcopryite.

McCOY: Dowhat?

VERONICA: Fool's gold.

McCOY: Oh yeah, I didn't understand what you said at first. Do you think the victim knew about this?

JOYCE: Could be. *(SHE takes the rock and places it back in the bag, turning the twist-tie clockwise.)*

VERONICA: And there's been a movement under foot to demolish that very cave.

(The TELEPHONE RINGS. JOYCE crosses to it.)

McCOY: So?

VERONICA: Well, think, Lieutenant. Now, as a scene of the crime, nothing in the area can be touched or altered in any way.

McCOY: But if that cave was already going to be demolished ...oh, I see. Somebody ELSE might've found this.

JOYCE: *(Into the phone.)* Hello? No, this is Dr. Lydecker. What? Can you speak up? I can barely hear you. What? *(SHE quietly hangs up the phone.)*

VERONICA: Who was that, dear?

JOYCE: I don't know. They were whispering, whoever they were.

VERONICA: Whispering?

McCOY: What'd they say?

JOYCE: Just that they would be here for someone.

VERONICA: Maybe you better tell us exactly what they said.

JOYCE: Well, they said, "Reed Mace will be there just for her."

McCOY: Reed Mace. Who's that?

JOYCE: I don't know. Nobody I've met around here.

VERONICA: *(Crosses to window.)* I've heard that name before. Reed Mace. Seems oddly out of place somehow... Hmm. Looks like a thunderstorm is brewing.

JOYCE: Be there just for her? What does that mean?

McCOY: For her? I guess it means he's coming for her. *(Inspiration.)* OR...to GET her, whoever she is.

JOYCE: *(Crosses to HIM.)* And why were they whispering?

McCOY: Could've had a cold. OR...they didn't want you to recognize their voice. It's somebody you'd recognize! *(Ominously.)* Somebody who's coming here. *(HE looks at the two ladies.)* The killer! Who's coming here...to get someone else.

Audition Scene 5

McCoy, Veronica, Joyce, Myrtle, Matilda, Sarafina, Viola

SARAFINA: Did I miss anything?

MYRTLE: My God, it's the Terminator!

JOYCE: Sarafina, what is all this?

SARAFINA: Advertising. This is my way of saying I shoot first and ask questions later.

MATILDA: Where'd you learn that?

SARAFINA: My old piano teacher.

LYDIA: Your piano teacher dressed like that?

SARAFINA: We lived in a rough neighborhood.

LYDIA: Those were her exact words? "Shoot first and ask questions later"?

SARAFINA: Yep. I was going to ask her why but I had to shoot her first.

McCOY: *(Aghast.)* Dowhat?!

MATILDA: It's a joke! *(Suddenly, to SARAFINA.)* Wasn't it?

JOYCE: Where's Viola?

(There is the SOUND of a loud sneeze offstage.)

SARAFINA: Here comes the human typhoon now. Oh, and get this. She says she hasn't left the house all afternoon.

LYDIA: But we know she must've. *(To MYRTLE.)* You went down to the cave. Did you find anything?

MYRTLE: Just that there were a lot of footprints around there lately.

(VIOLA comes down the stairs, one hand full of kleenex and the other under her nose.)

LYDIA: Were they different footprints or all the same?

MYRTLE: I couldn't tell.

VERONICA: *(Crosses to VIOLA.)* Viola, you haven't gone down to the cave today?

VIOLA: No. I don't understand it.

VERONICA: What is it about the cave that sets you off like this?

McCOY: Hey, can we drop the nature hike for a second? *(HE moves in front of the sofa.)* I'll tell you what's obvious to me that apparently even the great Veronica Blather has overlooked.

JOYCE: What's that, Lieutenant?

McCOY: Just this. That phone call could be a decoy. You said the person calling didn't want you to recognize her voice.

JOYCE: No, you said that.

McCOY: Well, figure this. At the time of the phone call, which I say is bogus, several ladies had conveniently left the house. Any one of them could have gone into a neighboring house and used a telephone. There's even a pay phone on the corner.

VERONICA: Well, it could also have been an accomplice.

McCOY: (*Scornfully.*) Oh, I don't think so. (*Not sure.*) Do you?

VERONICA: Well, two things should be considered, in my opinion.

McCOY: Forget I asked.

VERONICA: Viola never left the house AND... (*SHE crosses to the dining table and picks up the book.*) ...there's this.

McCOY: "Snow White"? Back to the elves again.

VERONICA: Maybe there's something in it, something we've overlooked.

(*SHE opens the book. At the same time, a loud thunderclap rumbles outside and the LIGHTS dim out. After a brief pause they come up again.*)

JOYCE: Oh, not again.

McCOY: Okay, everybody, I think we should proceed on our first instinct. I still think I agree with Miss Thornedyke.

LYDIA: Thank you. What?

McCOY: You said you always thought someone was trying to murder you. And that COULD'VE been your cup that Miss Quinten drank out of. I say we keep our eye on you, see who tries to get near you.

LYDIA: Hey, I'm for that.

McCOY: Now, I want everyone to just stay here, in this room.

JOYCE: What're you going to do?

McCOY: I'm going to search the rest of the house. I mean, if one of these ladies could make a phone call from someplace nearby, then so could this Mace character, if it isn't one of them.

McCOY: (*Cont'd.*) He could've then hidden himself somewhere here in the house before I got my men in place.

VERONICA: Excellent idea.

McCOY: Really? Oh, of COURSE, it's a good idea. I'm going to start upstairs. (*HE crosses to the stairs.*)

JOYCE: But what about the storm?

McCOY: (*Stops.*) What about it?

JOYCE: The lights.

MYRTLE: They are a bit fragile. I guess it's because of the old wiring.