

CRIMESCENE CRIMESCENE CRIMESCENE CRIMESCENE CRIMESCENE CRIMESCENE CRIME



www.merrimysteries.com

Party games for 8 to 100 guests

CRIMESCENE CRIMESCENE CRIMESCENE CRIMESCENE CRIMESCENE CRIMESCENE CRIME

presents . . .

“Murder On The Prairie”

Play version
for 11 to 16 guests

by Stephanie Chambers

First edition

Copyright © Merri Mysteries Inc. 2011

For further details on **Merri Mysteries** or to order another mystery dinner party kit, see www.merrimysteries.com.

See the host’s guide for further details on the copyright requirements for this kit.

The Suspects

Yesterday in Mitchido Richard Woods – a wealthy landowner – was shot down in cold blood whilst he was riding to town. He leaves behind his wife Katherine and daughter Annabel. There is a gathering of his family and the townsfolk to discuss what should be done. The people at the meeting look uneasy. They are not sure who will be arrested as the murderer and they are afraid that the gunslingers that are present might take the law into their own hands if they don't like the verdict. The people present at the meeting are:

Katherine Woods (*widow of the murdered man*) My parents moved to the country. I was annoyed, because I preferred the city where I could go to the opera. The people in Mitchido bored me. They were so uncultured. Joe was the only one who seemed to read. We used to discuss Shakespeare together when we talked after Church on Sundays. When I turned 17, the men came courting me. I liked Joe the best, but my parents said his parents were poor and that he would not be able to provide very well for me. Richard also came a courting. He seemed rougher than a rodeo rider's chaps, but my parents insisted that I marry him. I hated him, but there was no way to escape him. He decided that I was never to leave the ranch for any reason and so I have been kept here like a bear in a trap. He wouldn't even allow ladies to visit me in case they might mention their husbands. His jealousy knew no bounds. I wasn't even allowed to go to Church.

Dress suggestions: Conservative period wear (eg long skirt with half apron, bonnet, gloves & boots).

Annabel Woods (*daughter of the murdered man*) When I was little, I remember hearing Mummy crying. The next morning she looked sad. I guessed Mummy and Daddy had argued because they weren't talking to each other at all. When I asked Daddy why he'd been mean to Mummy, he said that it was because Mummy didn't love him. When I was growing up Daddy and I spent quite a lot of time together. I was his helping hand. He taught me how to ride and shoot and he called me his little tomboy. Spring Leaf and I also spent time together when I was young. She taught me all sorts of Indian secrets. One time, Spring Leaf and I exchanged blood and swore to be blood sisters for the rest of our lives. I told Daddy and he was very angry with me and with Spring Leaf. When I turned 12, Daddy tried to get me to give up wearing pants. He said it was time I acted like a little lady. I refused but he insisted. After that, I avoided spending time with Daddy. I wore a skirt but I continued to act as if I didn't. *Dress suggestions:* Wear pretty period wear (eg long skirts with long half aprons, bonnets, gloves and boots).

Clyde Williams (*Sheriff*) Richard and I went to school together. He was one of the school bullies and used to beat me up all the time when I was younger. Later, when I had grown up to be taller than him and learned how to box, he stopped beating me up. But the resentment was still there. My father was the town Sheriff and he was grooming me to take over from him. Richard's father was doing the same. He was a landowner. Richard's father and my father were great friends, so we had to be civil to one another. It wasn't till I was about to take over from my Dad, that I realized why he had been great friends with Richard's Dad. It was because Richard's Dad always gave him a supplement to his Sheriff's wages. I protested to my Dad that it was unethical, but he said it was the tradition and that if I wasn't courteous enough to accept Richard's Dad's generosity, then he wouldn't recommend me to become Sheriff when he retired. *Dress suggestions:* Make a cardboard star as a badge.

Joe Calsis (*barber*) When I was at school, Richard teased me and said I was the son of the red and white pole – meaning I was the barber's son. Richard always picked on my weakest points. He knew I was proud of my perfect hair, so he got some other boys to hold me down and then he cut large chunks out of my haircut. I had to wear a hat. My father refused to say anything about it to Richard's father, because he was hoping I would win a scholarship and Richard's father was the main contributor to the school scholarships. Although I had been groomed to be a barber from an early age, I still dreamed of another type of life. My books were my escape. My mother said it was a shame I couldn't be a librarian. I knew I would never be allowed to marry Katherine, but it didn't stop me from loving her. *Dress suggestions:* A barber's apron, carry a small striped barber's pole and/or some scissors.

Frank Reyes (*landowner*) When I was growing up, Richard was in the same year as me. He was always attacking the younger boys – beating into them. When I married Nancy, I was the happiest man alive. We had a big celebration. I even invited Katherine and Richard. They had been married about a year by then and Katherine was pregnant with Annabel. My wife and I made sure Katherine was comfortable. Richard was off dancing with the ladies and couldn't seem to care less about his pregnant wife. A year after our marriage, Nancy died giving birth to our son. He died too. I was devastated. I could never think of re-marrying – my memories of Nancy are so strong, I could never forget her. Annabel loved to ride. She looked like a princess on her pony and she took to visiting me even though she knew her Dad and I were feuding because he dammed up a river, rendering a fifth of my property useless. *Dress suggestions:* Wear check pants, flannel shirt, bow tie or tie and braces, as you are a farmer you may like to add some straw poking out of your shirt.

Eddie Thomas (*African farm worker*) My parents worked for a family who were very cruel and made them work 7 days a week. They were Richard's parents. When I was 4, my father died. He was only 45. When I was 5, my mother died of a sickness. They put me in the orphanage in town till I was 9 and old enough to work. In the orphanage, I became friends with Luke. We were great buddies and they were fun times in my life. The Nuns in the orphanage were strict but kind. Ever since the orphanage, I have been a devoted Christian. And God has been kind to me. He sent me to work for Mr Frank and he is a good boss. He lets me have Sundays off so I can go to Church. Being black, I only get to stand at the back of the Church, but I'm just happy to be there. Mr Frank lets me ride in the back of the sulky, so I don't even have to walk to Church. I'm very lucky to work for him. *Dress suggestions:* Curly black wig, check pants, plain shirt, bow tie and braces.

Luke Hansen (*farm hand*) My parents were wealthy, but they were killed by Indians when they were coming by wagon to settle the land. I grew up as an orphan in Mitchido. And Eddie was my friend. The Nuns gave me an education. After I finished school, I found work with Mr Woods as a farm hand. I worked hard for him and I enjoyed the work with the cattle. Mr Woods taught me how to ride like a bronco buster and to shoot like a bounty hunter. I felt sorry for Mrs Woods because she was never allowed to leave the ranch or even to speak with us farm workers. Last year Mr Woods sacked me because I had romantic intentions towards his daughter Annabel. Now I work for Frank and he treats me like a son. *Dress suggestions:* Plaid pants rolled up, plain shirt, bow tie/tie & braces. Hay poking out.

Red-Eye Mitchell (*gunslinger*) My parents were killed when I was little by Crow Indians, but I was lucky because one of the Indians liked my red hair and took me back with him. They called me "Red As The Sun". My hair's not as red now though. The Indians taught me how to ride bare-back and hands free. I learnt how to shoot a gun going full gallop. But when I became a man, they said I had to leave because I wasn't one of them. Then I worked as a stockman for a while, but word got around about how good I was with a gun. Being brought up Indian, I haven't been held back by all these Christian ethics. If a man is bad, I have no hesitation in killing him. People pay me to kill for them. The money is good and I can hide well because of my Indian training, so the law never catches up with me. Frank Reyes has brought me to town because he wants someone on his side to help with a showdown. *Dress suggestions:* Bring a toy gun, water pistol or cardboard cutout of a gun (no real guns, please).

© copyright Merri Mysteries Inc. 2011

Page 3 of 4

Lulu Peachy (*Can-Can girl*) I dreamed of being an opera singer, but my mother was too poor to send me to singing lessons. My father abandoned us when I was little. That's why I have never really trusted men much. I went to work in a factory. Then someone offered me a job as a Can-Can girl. I thought it sounded more fun so I did it. After I had been with the show about a month, they said that they had been offered a permanent spot in Mitchido in the country. Being young, I thought that sounded exciting. The sponsors of the show get a front row seat. Richard was my sponsor and I was his filly – as he liked to call me – for over a year. He felt that gave him the right to tell me what I should perform and how I should live my life. Someday I would prefer to be a singer in a larger town. *Dress suggestions:* A Can-Can girl outfit with lots of petticoats (starched stiff).

Spring Leaf (*Native American girl*) When I grew up – the boy in the next tepee – "Red As The Sun" – was my friend. When the boy became a man, he was told to leave. I was very sad. My parents said it had to be because he was not the same as us. Then the whites decided they wanted our land and they came and killed us. Their leader was General Woods and he killed my parents. He would have killed me too, but he decided to take me back as his maid. I was only 10 and very distressed, because my parents and friends had been killed. I did not talk for over 2 years. I was made to do chores. After I turned 12, I became the maid of General Woods' son Richard. His wife Katherine was nice to me, but Mr Woods treated me very badly. *Dress suggestions:* A Native American squaw outfit including suede shirt & skirt & feathers.

Margaret Read (*shop-owner's wife*) I went to school with Richard and Katherine, but I wasn't friends with them. I was very good with numbers at school, but because I was a woman, I couldn't become an accountant. My husband and I met at school and a few years after we left school, he stuttered out a proposal of marriage. I knew he wasn't much of a man, but I loved him anyway. We found we couldn't have children so there wasn't much for me to do except to help my husband manage the store. My husband is a bit timid and if anyone starts to question the price of the goods, he just panics – a bit like a horse when it stands on a rattler. They rear and buck and lose the plot completely. But if I'm around, if there's any trouble about money, I just pull out my gun. That stops most people quibbling over a few oats. *Dress suggestions:* Conservative period wear (eg long skirts with long half aprons, bonnets, gloves and boots).

© copyright Merri Mysteries Inc. 2011

Page 4 of 4

Optional Witnesses

.....
Nicholas Read (*shop-owner*) I also went to school with Richard and Katherine. But they ignored me just like they ignored Margaret. I wasn't particularly good at school, but I got through it. I inherited the store from my parents. They died young of tuberculosis. I met Margaret at school and when it was time, I proposed to her. I knew Margaret was a bit on the bossy side, but I knew she'd be a good wife. I'm not that timid. I just don't like people criticizing the way I run my business. Margaret and I do enjoy our card games. We also hear a lot of talk because of the shop, but I wouldn't call us gossips, just friendly people. *Dress suggestions:* Conservative period wear (eg check pants, plain shirt, bow tie or tie and braces).
.....

.....
Miss Norma Picket (*school teacher*) I went to school with Richard and Katherine, but I wasn't really friends with either of them. I was friends with Margaret. We were best friends. We did everything together. I still visit Margaret and her husband quite often. We like to play a hand of bridge or two. They keep me informed on all the town's gossip. My father was a farmer. I loved looking out over our fields with all the wheat waving its heads of grain. There is nothing more beautiful than a prairie, now is there? Although I'm very strict with my students, I do care about their welfare. Annabel and Luke were my students. *Dress suggestions:* Wear conservative period wear (eg long skirts with long half aprons, bonnets, gloves and boots). Carry a ruler or a cane.
.....

.....
Fifi Amouray (*Can-Can girl*) I was hopeless at school because all I could think of were the boys. My dad was a ill and my mother died early. So I had to work as soon as I could just to survive. I had always loved music and dancing and singing, so I decided to work in a saloon. I thought it would be much more fun than being a maid. I am a dancer at the same bar as Lulu and we are close friends. I can kick my legs higher than any other gal in the chorus. *Dress suggestions:* A Can-Can girl outfit including lots of petticoats (starched stiff).
.....

.....
Dr Conroy Splint (*medical doctor*) Richard Woods was a few years ahead of me at school, so I didn't get to know him much. Frank took over the running of the family farm, but I preferred to learn how to help people, so I studied medicine. As a doctor I've seen what some men do to their women and I know how Richard Woods had been treating Mrs Woods. I have never married as my work keeps me too busy, but I have a few friends such as Norma Picket. She's a fine woman. *Dress suggestions:* Wear conservative period wear (eg check pants, plain shirt, bow tie or tie and braces). Carry a black bag possibly with a stethoscope and/or thermometer inside.
.....

.....
Running Stream (*Native American squaw*) Like Spring Leaf, my parents were killed. We came from the same tribe. I came to work for Dr Splint as his cook. He is a good kind man. I am lucky. Spring Leaf and I are friends. We meet up briefly each week when we go to town to pick up the supplies. *Dress suggestions:* Wear a Native American squaw outfit including suede shirt and skirt and feathers.
.....

Name Tags

Suspects

Katherine
Woods
(suspect)

Annabel
Woods
(suspect)

Sheriff Clyde
Williams
(suspect)

Joe
Calsis
(suspect)

Frank
Reyes
(suspect)

Eddie
Thomas
(suspect)

Luke
Hansen
(suspect)

Red-Eye
Mitchell
(suspect)

Lulu
Peachy
(suspect)

Spring
Leaf
(suspect)

Margaret
Read
(suspect)

Witnesses

Nicholas
Read

Miss Norma
Picket

Fifi
Amouray

Dr Conroy
Splint

Running
Stream

Merri Mysteries
presents...

**“Murder On The
Prairie”**

by Stephanie Chambers

The Play

Murder On The Prairie - Act One

Note: *Although this is in play format, you do not have to take to a stage and act it out. You can just sit around a dining table and read out your lines or sit in a circle on sofas etc.*

Note: *If it says the line may be said by “Anyone”, we recommend that one of the optional characters take a turn to say the line. If there are no optional witnesses or not many of them, then everyone should take a turn saying one of these lines. Try and make sure everyone gets a similar number of lines to say. You may like to work out beforehand who will say each of these “Anyone” clues and write their character’s name next to each one.*

Katherine Woods: Whenever we had guests, I offered to play piano for them. But one day, Richard told me that he didn’t want me to do that anymore. He said I was becoming like an actress or performer and that people would think less of me because of it. I protested, but he insisted.

Annabel Woods: When I was young, I used to ride over to our neighbor Frank’s. He would give me a large glass of lemonade and I’d ride back. I never told Daddy about it because I knew he hated Frank.

Clyde Williams: Richard’s Dad died and then I had to accept money from Richard. Richard reduced the amount of money. And he threatened that if I didn’t do what he wanted, he would reduce it even further.

Joe Calsis: Before Katherine married Richard, she confided that she did love me and would always continue to love me, but that she was being forced to marry Richard.

Frank Reyes: I thought I had better tell Annabel what her father was up to when he went ahead and dammed his river, even after I protested that it would render a fifth of my property useless. She was only young and she burst into tears. I think she saw me as the loving kind of Dad she never had.

Annabel Woods: Yes, when Frank told me Daddy was damming the river, so that a fifth of Frank’s land would be useless. It upset me and I cried. I didn’t want to lose Frank as he was my friend. He comforted me and told me that we would always be friends no matter what my father did.

Luke Hansen: One time, I heard Mr Woods say that damming the river was just his first step – he was planning to ruin his neighbor Frank totally some day.

Eddie Thomas: I was sorry when Luke went to work for Mr Richard, ‘cause I knew he was a bad man.

Luke Hansen: Even after I was working for Mr Woods, I still saw my friend Eddie at Church on Sundays. He is still my best friend.

Red-Eye Mitchell: Sometimes I spend my money watching lady dancers like you Lulu. No one would ever want to marry a killer, so I don’t have any choice.

Lulu Peachy: Mitchido is the most boring place in the world. It has none of the excitement of the city.

Fifi Amouray (if present, otherwise, anyone can say it):
Lulu doesn’t like Mitchido. But I have always lived here. To me it’s home.

Spring Leaf: When I was still young, I was told to watch over Annabel and she and I became good friends. Annabel insisted we become blood sisters and stupidly told her father. When Mr Woods found out that Annabel and I were blood sisters, he was angry with Annabel but he was twice as angry with me.

Margaret Read: Because I don't panic and because I'm good with the books, I stay out the front and serve the customers.

Nicholas Read (if present, otherwise skip it):
I prefer to stay out the back of the store and I do the ordering and receiving and stocking of the shelves.

Miss Norma Picket (if present, otherwise, anyone can say it):
When Annabel was fourteen; she came to school looking so upset.

Dr Conroy Splint (if present, otherwise anyone can say it):
When Katherine Woods gave birth to Annabel, she seemed very happy. Richard Woods was annoyed, because he wanted a boy and a heir and all that. He treated Annabel like a boy, taught her to ride and to shoot. Over the years Katherine confided in me that she didn't think he really loved Annabel, probably because she was a part of her and he certainly didn't love her.

Running Stream (if present, otherwise anyone can say it):
Dr Conroy lives in town not far from Clyde and his wife. I sometimes pop in and have a chat with Clyde's wife. We're friends.

Katherine Woods: As time went by, Richard even stopped me from practicing the piano. He said he hated the sound of it. From then on, I could only practice when he was on a trip away. I made the servants swear not to tell him what I had been up to.

Clyde Williams: I had to agree to do whatever Richard wanted me to do because we really needed the money.

Joe Calsis: When Katherine was pregnant with Annabel, I gave her as much support as I could, because I knew Richard probably wasn't giving her any. It felt like I was the expectant father more than Richard was.

Frank Reyes: Annabel still visits me whenever she can – whenever her Dad won't find out. I've become very attached to her.

Eddie Thomas: Mr Frank taught me how to ride like a rodeo champ and how to use a gun. He said I wasn't to tell anyone he'd taught me how to shoot, 'cause blacks aren't supposed to do this. He did it so I could help him shoot ducks for dinner.

Red-Eye Mitchell: Recently I killed four men who had tried to ambush me. White men are pretty stupid. They forget I've been trained by the Indians to use my ears, not just my eyes. In total, so far I have killed thirty men, but I have never killed a lady or a child.

Spring Leaf: Mr Woods made me do more and more physical tasks. He made me carry more than any mule would ever carry.

Margaret Read: Farming is seasonal, so most of our customers are given credit accounts. Most farmers pay up when they get money for the crops or their cattle.

Nichola Read (if present, otherwise, skip it):
I don't like to see people starve, so I must admit
I am probably more generous with credit than I
should be.

Fifi Amouray (if present, otherwise, anyone can say it):
Lulu has higher aspirations and wants to make a
life for herself. But I'm not ambitious like you
are, am I Lulu?

Dr Conroy Splint (if present, otherwise, anyone can say it):
Richard wanted more children, but for some
reason God didn't answer his prayers. That
made Richard even angrier towards Katherine.

Running Stream (if present, otherwise, anyone can say it):
Clyde's wife confided in me that Richard had
come to see Clyde or "The Old Draught-Horse"
as he called him, but his visits were never
welcomed as Richard was always trying to tell
Clyde how to do his job.

Katherine Woods: At the end of our first year, I found myself
pregnant with Annabel. I was happy about it.
But Richard became even more jealous and he
made me go to my room whenever we had
visitors.

Annabel Woods: Another time, Daddy followed me and saw me
visiting Frank. On my way back, he stopped me
and beat my poor horse with a whip. He made
me swear never to visit Frank again. That's
when I started to hate Daddy. I kept going to
visit Frank, but only when Daddy was away on
one of his business trips.

Clyde Williams: My first run in with Woods came when I found
out that he was telling one of the dancers in
town – Lulu Peachy – that she wasn't to sing
any songs. I told him it was just not appropriate.
He told me to shut up or he would cut my
supplement even more.

Joe Calsis: Katherine stopped coming to town and I didn't
get to see her any more. I asked Annabel what
had happened to Katherine, thinking perhaps she
was ill. She told me her father had told her
mother was never to leave the ranch again.

Frank Reyes: I have written it into my will that Annabel is to
receive half of my property when I die. She
knows that. Her father didn't, of course. And I
made it that she will only get the money after
her father is dead, because I didn't want him to
take it off her.

Eddie Thomas: Last year, Mr Frank gave me my very own gun
to keep. But he made me promise to keep it a
secret. I never used it to shoot a man, of course,
only ducks and geese.

Luke Hansen: Once I asked Mr Woods why he hated Frank so
much and he said that he had a private reason.
But it was also because he wanted to be able to
buy him out at a cheap price and become the
wealthiest landowner in the county.

Red-Eye Mitchell: I was in a nearby state when I heard on the
grapevine that someone in Mitchido wanted to
hire a gunslinger.

Lulu Peachy: Richard started to become a regular. After a few
weeks, he demanded that he be my sponsor and
that he have a front row seat. He said I would
get lots of gifts in return.

Spring Leaf: I often heard Mr Woods yelling at Mrs Woods. He was a bad man and we all hated him.

Margaret Read: Sometimes when people are reluctant to pay or if they are trying to steal from us, I bring out the shotgun and fire a few shots in the air. Then they generally pay.

Nicholas Read (if present, otherwise, skip it):
I really wish you wouldn't do that Margaret. We're getting all these holes in the ceiling and it's starting to make the roof leak.

Fifi Amouray (if present, otherwise, anyone can say it):
When I saw the emotional state Mr Woods was leaving poor Lulu in, I felt so angry. But I knew if I caused any trouble about it, the boss would have both Lulu and I sacked.

Dr Conroy Splint (if present, otherwise, anyone can say it):
One time, Richard accidentally pushed Katherine off the porch and broke her arm. Katherine said he never even said sorry. No wonder Katherine came to hate him.

Running Stream (if present, otherwise, anyone can say it):
On one of his visits, Richard said he would cut their supplement if Clyde didn't help sentence Eddie.

Katherine Woods: When Clyde Williams came to the farm on the morning of the murder, I told him that Richard had gone to town and that he'd probably missed him because he had taken the route via the canyon and over the river.

Annabel Woods: When I was fourteen, Daddy found out that I'd kissed a boy at school. He told me I couldn't ride my horse Black Beauty for a whole month. I cried and cried until my tear tank was dry.

Frank Reyes: I heard about Richard giving Annabel a hard time because she kissed a boy at school. I told her school-teacher Miss Picket, that Annabel had a heart condition. I lied that my brother Dr Conroy Splint had diagnosed it.

Miss Norma Picket (if present, otherwise, anyone can say it):
I told Mr Woods that my friend the doctor had said that Annabel had a delicate heart. Really it had been Frank who had told me about this. You hadn't told me that it was a lie, Frank, but it doesn't matter. I would have done anything to stop that man being so nasty to his womenfolk.

Dr Conroy Splint (if present, otherwise, skip it):
I didn't mind you lying that I diagnosed a heart condition for Annabel. I really wanted to get Richard to stop treating Annabel so meanly.

Miss Norma Picket (if present, otherwise, anyone can say it):
When I realized Annabel's father had caused her to be so upset, I took him aside and told him not to treat Annabel so badly.

Annabel Woods (if Miss Picket is present, otherwise skip it):
You are so kind to me, aren't you Miss Picket?

Miss Norma Picket (if present, otherwise, skip it):
You evoke such feelings in me, dear. Unfortunately you told me later that your father had told you that he would treat your mother very badly if you ever did anything wrong again.

Frank Reyes: Yes I was really pleased when Annabel told me her father had agreed not to beat her anymore, but she burst into tears because her father said he would beat her mother instead.

- Joe Calsis: Annabel was a lovely little girl and whenever she passed the shop, I would go out and give her a candy. She always gave me a super big smile in return.
- Eddie Thomas: Luke told me when I saw him at Church, that he liked Miss Annabel. I told him to forget her, because Mr Richard would probably never let her marry someone so poor.
- Luke Hansen: Once Mr Woods let out the reason he hated Frank so much. He said that when he was at school, Frank humiliated him in front of the whole class by proving him a cheat.
- Red-Eye Mitchell: When I got to town, I found out that Frank wanted me to be around just in case they came to arrest one of his black workers.
- Lulu Peachy: Everything was Peachy – excuse the pun – for the next six months. He would come back to my room after the show and he would give me money or perfume or other gifts. But after that he turned nasty.