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*presents...*

# “Murder On The Prairie”

Standard version  
for 6 females  
and 6 males

*by Stephanie Chambers*

Second edition

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## The Suspects

In Mitchido yesterday 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 that afternoon 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 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 of 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 there 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).

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**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. 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. Nicholas and I met at school and a few years after, 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 Nicholas manage the store. Nicholas 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 & boots). © copyright Acture Pty Ltd 2004 P4 of 4

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## Witnesses

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**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 with Margaret and Nicholas 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.

## Name Tags

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### Suspects

Katherine  
Woods

Annabel  
Woods

Sheriff Clyde  
Williams

Joe  
Calsis

Frank  
Reyes

Eddie  
Thomas

Luke  
Hansen

Red-Eye  
Mitchell

Lulu  
Peachy

Spring  
Leaf

Margaret  
Read

**Witnesses**

**Miss Norma  
Picket  
(witness)**

*Merri Mysteries presents...*

**“Murder on the Prairie”**

*by Stephanie Chambers*

*These are the clues for:*

*Katherine  
Woods*

## Katherine Woods - Act One

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During this act, you must reveal the following points:

- 1 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.
- 2 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.
- 3 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.
- 4 Richard wanted more children, but for some reason God didn't answer his prayers. That made Richard even angrier towards me. He told me that I was never to leave the ranch not even to attend Church. One time, I ran away to visit some friends, but when Richard found out he was very angry. How I hated that man.
- 5 Luke was a sweet lad and I really enjoyed it when he worked for us. Richard wouldn't allow me to speak to him or to any of the farm workers, but Annabel used to tell me what he was like and sometimes Luke would tip his hat if he passed by. When Richard sacked him because he liked Annabel, I protested and said Annabel would be lucky to marry a man like Luke. Richard got angry. He said he would decide who Annabel would marry.

## Katherine Woods - Act Two

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During this act, you must reveal the following points:

- 1 My parents dropped in one time and they could see how unhappy I was. My father questioned Richard about it. Richard didn't tell them why I was unhappy, of course.
- 2 After a few years, I got used to never going out. Richard spent more time in town watching the dancers. I was relieved to have him out of my hair.
- 3 Sometimes Annabel would tell me if she saw Joe. He always used ask after me and to send his regards to me via Annabel.
- 4 The next day in town, Annabel met Joe in the park and she told him what had happened. He said that someday he would see to it that my husband got what he deserved for treating his family this way.
- 5 When Richard accused Eddie of killing his cattle, I knew he was wrong. I told him so, but wouldn't listen and he told me it was none of my business.

## Katherine Woods - Act Three

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During this act, you must reveal the following points:

- 1 On the night before the murder, Richard came home early from town where he had been watching the dancing and Annabel and I were still playing cards. He came in and told Annabel that she would have to marry Harold Edgert, the new young lawyer in town.
- 2 Annabel burst into tears when she was told she had to marry Harold, because she doesn't like him. He is so intellectual she doesn't understand half of what he says. And he's so ugly with warts on his face bigger than bullet holes.
- 3 I slept in the spare room where I usually do these days and in the morning we had breakfast in silence. Spring Leaf wasn't there because it was her day off, so I served the meal. Annabel wasn't there. She had gotten up early and gone for a ride.
- 4 At 8 am he got on his horse and said he was going to round up some cattle in the bottom paddock and then he would be heading to town to tell Harold the good news.
- 5 After Richard left a rattlesnake came up by the house and I got the gun out and shot it. I don't know where the gun is now. One of the farm hands must have taken it.

*Merri Mysteries presents...*

## **“Murder on the Prairie”**

*by Stephanie Chambers*

*These are the clues for:*

*Annabel  
Woods*



## Annabel Woods - Act One

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During this act, you must reveal the following points:

- 1 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.
- 2 One time Frank told me what Daddy was doing – he was damming the river, so that a fifth of Frank's land would be useless. It upset me and I cried when Frank told me. I didn't want to lose my friend. He comforted me and told me that we would always be friends no matter what my father did.
- 3 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.
- 4 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.
- 5 The school teacher, Miss Picket, took Daddy aside and told him not to treat me so badly. She told him that her friend the doctor had said that I had a delicate heart.

## Annabel Woods - Act Two

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During this act, you must reveal the following points:

- 1 When Luke came to work for us, I was only sixteen. He was very shy and never came up to the house. Gradually Luke and I became friends. I was always out riding in my spare time and he would see me and ride up for a chat. Our horses trotted along together like circus ponies.
- 2 Daddy thought Luke was a good worker, but as Luke and I became friends, he came to dislike him. I thought it was jealousy at first, but later I realized it was because he wanted to marry me off to someone he considered suitable.
- 3 Eventually Luke got up the gumption to ask Daddy if he could marry me. Daddy was furious and told Luke he was nothing but a farm hand and his daughter deserved better.
- 4 Daddy told Luke that he wanted him to leave our place and never to talk to me again. I cried and cried and pleaded with Daddy but he would not back down.
- 5 Luke had often told me about his friend Eddie and when Daddy picked on Eddie, I told him that Eddie wouldn't have killed his cattle as Eddie was a good man. That just seemed to make Daddy more determined to get Eddie in trouble.

## **Annabel Woods - Act Three**

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During this act, you must reveal the following points:

- 1 On the night before the murder, Daddy and I argued because he wanted me to marry Harold Edgert. He's so ugly I feel queasy just looking at him.
- 2 Daddy ignored my tears and told me, after Mummy had gone to sleep, that if I didn't behave myself and marry Harold, he would take out his anger on my mother for the rest of her days. I burst into tears again and pleaded with him not to be so cruel, but he just laughed.
- 3 Daddy told me that he would tell Harold that his offer of marriage had been accepted, and that he would bring him back to the house for a celebration lunch. He told me to dress up for it.
- 4 I didn't want to see Daddy in the morning so I got up early and went for a ride on my horse. I didn't come back until around noon.
- 5 I always carry a shotgun with me when I go riding – just for protection.

*Merri Mysteries presents...*

## **“Murder on the Prairie”**

*by Stephanie Chambers*

*These are the clues for:*

*Clyde  
Williams*

## Clyde Williams - Act One

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During this act, you must reveal the following points:

- 1 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.
- 2 I had to agree to do whatever Richard wanted me to do because we really needed the money.
- 3 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.
- 4 Richard had been shot about ten times – more than you'd shoot a rattler. Whoever killed him wanted to make sure he was dead. There hadn't been any signs of footsteps near the body.

## Clyde Williams - Act Two

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During this act, you must reveal the following points:

- 1 Everything went along relatively smoothly, until recently when Richard accused poor little Eddie of killing his cattle.
- 2 I told Richard that he was stupid to pick on Eddie just because he was black. That made Richard angry and he even tried to hit me. That guy thought he could do anything. I didn't do anything in return, just told him to get out or I'd lock him up for assaulting an officer of the law.
- 3 I told Richard I would give up my supplement rather than arrest Eddie for a crime he didn't do.
- 4 Richard said that I'd better reconsider about arresting Eddie or he would arrange with the authorities in Washington to make sure I lost my job. He said he had enough connections in high places to make it happen.
- 5 When I found Mr Woods, there was a note in his pocket saying that "*The river came down overnight, so it is possible to cross at the canyon*". The note was not signed.

## Clyde Williams - Act Three

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During this act, you must reveal the following points:

- 1 On the morning of the murder, I decided to ride out to Richard's place to try and reason the whole Eddie case out with him. Because of the supplement business, I went alone to see Woods rather than with a deputy as I usually did.
- 2 When I got near Woods' house, I saw a person at a distance riding along one of the ridges. I couldn't make out who it was.
- 3 When I got to Woods' house, I found out from one of the farm hands that he'd gone to town and that I'd probably missed him because he had taken the route via the canyon and over the river.
- 4 Woods was a little crazy to have tried to come to town over the river, because he should have known because of all the rain we've had lately, that the river would be very high and impossible to cross.
- 5 When I got to the river, I found Woods lying face down. His 200 pound body was still warm and he was sinking so fast he was making his own crater in the mud.