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Party games for 8 to 100 guests

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presents...

“Caught In A Spanish Web”

Play version
for 10 to 16 guests

by Stephanie Chambers

First edition

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“Merri Mysteries” was formerly known as “Tailor Made Mysteries”.

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The Suspects

In the morning, they found the owner and director of The Grand Hacienda Hotel in Spain, Arthur Seaton, dead in his office. He had been stabbed to death. The four and three quarter star, luxury international establishment had only been in operation for less than a year, but, as you will soon learn, a lot has been going on behind the scenes. The staff at the hotel are:

Fiona (*co-owner of the hotel*) I met Arthur when I was at college. We became good friends. After we finished, Arthur asked me if I'd like to go into a business venture with him. He thought we could pool our resources to build a new hotel in Spain and then run it together. His family was very wealthy and so was mine. It was a bit of a gamble, but we both wanted to create something special and we both loved Spain. After a bit of persuading, our parents agreed to fund the project – 50% each. Arthur didn't fancy me romantically thankfully. We were just business partners. He certainly wasn't my kind of man. Unfortunately Arthur has always insisted on working our staff far too hard. **Dress suggestions:** Conservative business clothes such as a suit. Carry a notepad (paper or electronic) or a briefcase.

Sebastian (*concierge*) When I was in my twenties, I was lucky enough to be able to spend some time working in the USA because my mother had moved to California after she married an American man. I learnt how to speak English fluently and I learnt a lot about the hospitality industry. I obtained work in one of the finest hotels in LA and I was able to move up the ranks quite quickly. Unfortunately I didn't get on too well with my new stepfather who seemed to treat my mother as some kind of slave. Finally my mother decided that enough was enough and that even a poor existence was better than one where you lost all respect for yourself. So we moved back to Spain, back to our old way of life. I must admit I was sorry to kiss all that money goodbye, but I was happy to be back in Spain. So you can imagine my excitement when I heard that a luxury hotel was being built in my city by an American couple. And it has been great, apart from the very long hours Arthur expected me to work. **Dress suggestions:** Dark suit with a white shirt. Perhaps add a drooping moustache and a sash tie.

Pascal (*French chef*) I loved cooking and my mother soon handed the apron over to me. She said I could sense what a taste would be even before I had put the ingredients together. I won a scholarship to the most prestigious culinary academy in Paris. I cooked a soufflé. They said it didn't just melt in their mouths; it melted their hearts as well. Then I worked in one of the leading hotels in Paris. I became the head chef of the hotel. French cuisine is without doubt the best in the world, but even caviar and truffles every day can lose their appeal. You need variety and new challenges. When I heard of this job in Spain, I knew it would allow me the opportunity to experiment not only with the colors and textures of Spain but also with a different cuisine. **Dress suggestions:** Chef's check trousers and chef's cap or a French beret.

Jose (*Spanish waiter*) When I was younger, I dreamed of being a singer. I love singing ballads – the ones that make women weep. But I realized that although I was a good singer, I was no Caruso. So I became a waiter to make a living. Almost three years ago, I married Louisa, the most beautiful woman on God's earth! She shines like the sun in my eyes. A year ago, she gave birth to our precious little Annetta. I worked at one of the restaurants in the city, but I found it hard to make enough money to support my wife and child. Louisa had to mind other women's children as well as her own, just so that we could afford to pay the rent. I was very happy when I obtained a job at the new hotel, because it paid more and I was allowed to sing Spanish love songs to the guests. **Dress suggestions:** Black trousers and white shirt. Perhaps add a drooping moustache and a sash tie. Carry a guitar or violin.

Francis (*Spanish gardener*) My father was one of the leading botanists in Spain and he taught me to love plants. Unfortunately, I inherited my mother's emotional side rather than my father's intellect, so I didn't make it to university. After I left school, I became a gardener. I always knew I would because plants are the only things that bring out the best in me. There are few wealthy people in our city who can afford to have a private gardener, so I was employed in doing minor gardening jobs by various people. When I heard about the new hotel, I was very excited by the idea of creating a big beautiful garden from nothing. I was afraid that they would give the job to someone who had been to horticulture school rather than me, but fortunately they didn't. **Dress suggestions:** Drape yourself in cuttings from various plants as if you have just emerged from the bushes. Khaki clothes with maybe a spade in hand.

Antoinette (*Brazilian masseuse*) My mother was a healer and she passed on a lot of what she knew to me. I went to massage school in Brazil and obtained my certificate in remedial massage. I worked in a health clinic. I developed a good reputation. But I found that there were problems I didn't know how to deal with, so I went on an advanced training course in remedial massage in LA. While I was in LA, I heard about a hotel that some Americans were planning to build in Spain. I thought that because I know Portuguese, Spanish and English, that I would fit in quite well in Spain. I applied for the position and I demonstrated my skills on Arthur and he said he would be happy to employ me, especially if I did that to him once a week. It was agreed and I got the job. **Dress suggestions:** Well-oiled body, leotards or gym clothes and perhaps with a towel around your neck. Perhaps wear tiger balm or other fragrant oils.

Maria (*Flamenco dancer*) I grew up in a respectable family. We thanked God for what we had. I dreamed of becoming a nun, but later I realized that my family needed my financial support. My family was so poor that it looked as if they would have to adopt out my youngest sister if I didn't find work. Fortunately I was lucky enough to find work in one of the restaurants as a Flamenco dancer. But I am a bit shy and I found that the clients would generally tip the more bubbly dancers rather than me. So my wages were very low indeed. When I heard of the new hotel, I thought that it would be a better place for me to work – more tasteful and genteel. I was very pleased when I got the job at the hotel. Fiona seemed such a nice lady to work for. I didn't like it when Arthur used to squeeze me, but I thought that this was just the way American men were with women. **Dress suggestions:** Flamenco dress with castanets (if available) and dancing shoes. Wear a cross around your neck.

Tom (*Caribbean barman*) I wanted to be a famous cricketer, but don't all young Caribbean boys want to be cricketers! I loved to dance and I loved to party, so when someone suggested my being a barman, I thought it sounded perfect. My parents sent me to a top bar school in the US. I memorized all the cocktail recipes as quickly as I could. Then I came to Spain and worked in a few of the bars. I was popular with everybody and I mixed a mean drink. Then I saw the movie Cocktail and it changed my approach to my career. I knew then that I wanted to include more of my love of dancing in my job. I started moving, really moving man! And they started to pay me even more, so I knew I was doing the right thing. Then I heard about the new hotel and they heard of me. You see I had quite a reputation around town by then. **Dress suggestions:** Flowery Hawaiian-type shirt. Add some fake-tanning lotion to add to the Caribbean look.

Marilda (*Spanish barmaid*) My mother was the kind of woman who lived for her children. She had nothing in her life besides us. I am determined to not end up like her. I want a life filled with excitement, not nappies. I went to a bar school and spent my nights in the kinds of bars I wanted to work in. I have never had trouble attracting men. I love to go out with men and have fun, but I don't let them put their noose around my neck. I found a job at a classy bar at one of the hotels. I learnt a lot on that job about how to handle drunken men. I found that there are ways to twist men around your finger without them thinking the less of you. When I heard about this elegant new hotel I just knew it was the place for me. So I put on my red dress and my best perfume and fluttered my eyelashes at Arthur. Men are so easy. **Dress suggestions:** Colorful feminine clothes (as you are part of the bar dancing act). Lots of lipstick and perfume. Maybe enhance your breasts by adding socks.

Juliolla (*Spanish cleaner*) When I was younger, I dreamt of marrying a man and never having to work again. But when I grew up, I realized that nobody gets to just be at home these days. My husband works as a carpenter. His wage isn't enough for us both to live on. I was unable to have children, so there isn't much for me to do at home anyway. I have been working as a cleaner for most of my life. I used to clean large office buildings at night. I didn't really like this because it meant that I never got to spend time with my husband. When I heard about the hotel, I was determined to work there. Arthur, believe it or not, timed applicants on how long it took them to clean a double room. Of course I won hands down. At first there weren't many guests, so the work was easy. The other cleaner and I used to mess around and laugh a lot. She said I can make beds so quick, I ought to be in the Guinness Book of Records. **Dress suggestions:** Wear a uniform. Have cleaning rags still hanging out of the pockets. Carry a feather duster.

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Optional authorities

Estoban Barcel – I’m an inspector working with the Spanish Police Force. We may have a relaxed lifestyle here in Spain but we take crime very seriously. I have spent a good many years helping to put criminals behind bars, and the only thing I like better than chasing criminals, is dancing. **Dress suggestions:** Wear a casual shirt, casual trousers and carry a notebook and pen.

Carmen Paella – I’m a detective employed by the Spanish Police Force to get to the bottom of mysteries. I have uncovered more crimes than you’ve had fish dinners, and I’m a better investigator than any you might see on TV. **Dress suggestions:** Wear a casual shirt, a plain skirt and carry a notebook and pen.

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Optional witnesses

Louis Benito (*Spanish porter*) My family was poor so I didn’t go to school for very long. That is why I can’t speak much English. My first job was as a bouncer at a bar. It was a tough job. I hated dealing with drunks all the time. I was lucky to get my position with the hotel. I think they liked my smile. They didn’t seem to mind that my English was a bit poor. I bring the bags and the meals to the hotel rooms. Sometimes the clients asked me to buy postcards for them, so now I have set up a little sideline business selling postcards. They are very pretty postcards. **Dress suggestions:** Black trousers and a white shirt and a porter’s cap. Perhaps add a drooping moustache and a sash tie.

Isabella Martez (*Spanish room service maid*) Over the years, when I haven’t been having children, I have been working as a maid for various rich people. But it seems the richer they are, the less they pay. My husband hurt his back when he worked as a builder’s laborer and he hasn’t been able to work since. He has to spend most of his time lying down. We have 4 children to support, so I have to work. **Dress suggestions:** A maid’s outfit (eg frilly apron).

Rickie Dario (*pot scrubber*) Ever since I can remember I have wanted to be a rock ‘n roll star. Unfortunately, because my love of music took my entire attention I didn’t do very well at school. Because I was bad at school, the only job I have been able to find since leaving school is pot-scrubbing. I don’t mind as it is a job, which leaves my mind free to be thinking of lyrics and melodies for my new songs. I have been in a band for many years but we have never been given a lucky break. So we just keep practicing in the garage. **Dress suggestions:** Wear old, torn clothes. Maybe jeans. Carry an electric guitar.

Josie Gaea (*laundress*) I grew up in a small village in the country and my father was a goat herder. When I turned of age my parents sent me to the city to earn money. I send them back as much money as I can from my wages. I miss them very much. Because no education I speak very little English. I was very happy to get the laundress job at the hotel because I prefer it to cleaning. **Dress suggestions:** Wear old, torn clothes and carry a scrubbing brush. Maybe Spanish peasant-type clothes.

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Name Tags

Fiona
(suspect)

Sebastian
(suspect)

Jose
(suspect)

Pascal
(suspect)

Francis
(suspect)

Antoinette
(suspect)

Maria
(suspect)

Tom
(suspect)

Marilda
(suspect)

Juliolla
(suspect)

Louis Benito
(witness)

Isabella Martez
(witness)

Rickie Dario
(witness)

Josie Gaea
(witness)

Detective
Estoban Barcel

Detective
Carmen Paella

Merri Mysteries
presents...

“Caught In A Spanish Web”

by Stephanie Chambers

The Play

Caught In A Spanish Web - 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 24 “Anyone” clues and write their character’s name next to each one.*

- Anyone: Fiona and Arthur built the hotel about eleven months ago. Then they got the decorators in and they interviewed for staff. They recruited mainly local Spanish staff plus a few specialists like Pascal, Tom and Antoinette.
- Sebastian: I applied for the position of concierge, because I had reached that level in my last job in the US. I was very pleased when I was told I’d won the position.
- Anyone: Fiona was delighted when Pascal accepted the position. She knew she had scored one of the world’s most brilliant chefs.
- Jose: When I was interviewed for the job, I told Arthur that I also had a good singing voice. He thought he was getting some sort of a bargain – a singer and waiter in one.
- Anyone: For the first month things Arthur was busy getting the hotel up and running, so he didn’t worry about having his weekly massage with Antoinette. He just didn’t have the time.

Anyone: When the hotel first opened, Maria enjoyed working at the hotel much more than at a local restaurant. She found that people were kinder and more appreciative.

Francis: I applied for the position and was given the job. I think Arthur thought that by employing me rather than someone with horticulture qualifications, he could get a cheap gardener.

Anyone: Tom was taken on as the lead barman and it was his job to train the other barmen to move in sync with him.

Marilda: I really enjoy working with Tom and the others at the bar. We really get into some great moves and the crowd loves it. It isn't just a matter of mixing the drinks; it's a real performance.

Juliolla: Once the hotel got in full swing, the other cleaner and I didn't have much time for a giggle. Arthur made us clean by ourselves instead of as a team. Sometimes I was expected to clean up to a hundred rooms by myself in a morning.

Fiona: At business school Arthur and I were praised for our emphasis on efficiency, but when it came to actually managing a hotel, I found out that Arthur was keen on having his staff work long hours so that he could cut costs.

Pascal: It soon became apparent that to Arthur I was just the "cook" out the back whipping up some food. He couldn't understand why as a chef I commanded such a high salary. But Fiona pointed out to him that he couldn't employ some cheap chef and still expect to attract celebrities and dignitaries to the hotel.

Jose: Fiona said that I could sing a little softly as I waited on the tables. I was thrilled to be able to sing at work. I love singing!

Anyone: When they were preparing to open the hotel, Antoinette felt a bit guilty lazing around while everyone else was working so hard. So she read up on some new massage techniques and sometimes she helped Francis in the garden.

Maria: My base wages were higher and the tips were wonderful. I thanked God for my good fortunes.

Tom: It wasn't easy to get the other barmen to move in sync. Some guys have no rhythm. But the barmaids were fantastic. We had a lot of fun and eventually we developed quite a cool act behind the bar.

Sebastian: My new bosses were great. They were both so keen to make The Grand Hacienda Hotel the finest hotel in Spain. I knew it would mean long hours but that didn't worry me.

Marilda: My wage is pretty good for bar work and the tips are unbelievable. I think it's because of the show we put on. Our rehearsals really pay off in terms of the tips. And I often get more tips than the rest, mainly because I'm a woman who knows how to show off what she's got. And shake her bootie. And I wear lots of makeup and perfume. And the men just love it!

Anyone: Juliolla the cleaner told me that sometimes the guests make a terrible mess. For example, if a child was sick, they just left the vomit lying all over the bed and moved the child to the other bed in the room. When she came to clean the room in the morning, the stench was overpowering.

Anyone: Creating the garden was a large job, because the land they chose for the hotel had been a dairy farm in the past and was mainly just grass. There were only a few old palms where the farmhouse had been.

Fiona: For the first few months, it was OK to work long hours. We were keen to make a good job of it and so were the staff. But no one can be expected to work thirteen or fourteen hour days indefinitely.

Anyone: At first Pascal had plenty of time to experiment with new dishes, because it wasn't until after the first month that they started having large numbers of rooms being filled.

Anyone: Jose said that for the first six months, he loved his job and that his base salary was much higher and the tips – the tips were fantastic.

Antoinette: Francis and I became good friends. I love him very much. He is much gentler than most of the men I have come in contact with since working at the hotel.

Maria: I became friendly with Pascal. He seemed to take his calling so seriously. He loved creating new dishes for the hotel.

Sebastian: Fiona even asked my advice on the decor. She said she wanted ideas on how to make it have an even more Spanish flavor. I bought my mother in, and together we came up with some really good ideas.

Francis: Fiona helped me design the garden and she allowed me to purchase whatever plants were necessary. We both decided to try and create a lush, exotic tropical paradise.

Tom: Everything was going really well. I flirted with the female clients and they flirted back – which led to a lot of after hours activity if you know what I mean.

Marilda: Fiona is a great boss. She gives us all lots of praise. Arthur was the opposite. He was always telling us to work faster. He just didn't understand that the crowd came for the show as much as for the drinks we made.

Juliolla: Somehow I managed to keep up this incredible pace for the first six months but then my back began to start playing up. It just wasn't humanly possible to keep cleaning all those rooms on my own. I pleaded with Arthur to let me work together with the other cleaner. I knew we'd be more efficient that way and I wouldn't strain my back as much. But he just wouldn't listen.

Fiona: Two months ago, I told Arthur I just couldn't keep up with this sort of pace. I told him I was taking two weeks off to go back to the States to see my folks. Arthur reluctantly agreed, but not without giving me an "I'm more wonderful than you" type lecture about "letting the team down" and so on. I just ignored him and went.

Pascal: I tried some of the new Californian cuisine and I read up on the new "healthy" approach to cooking. I must admit it was a bit of an eye opener for me. I had to think twice about all the creamy sauces I was used to using. And when I read all the statistics about the effect of meat on the body, I decided to concentrate on white rather than red meat.

Jose: Because I was earning more, my wife Louisa was able to give up minding other people's children and just concentrate on our dear little Annetta. That made me much happier because it also meant I got more attention when I was home.

Antoinette: I had never worked at a hotel before. The attitude of the clients is very different. For them massage is for pleasure rather than for its healing effects. I'm mostly asked to do back massages. People don't get me to work on problem areas of their bodies. They just want to be soothed.

Anyone: The staff the hotel employed were excellent, each and every one of them, and for the first six months they worked as a very close team.

Maria: Yes. I have had to work long hours, we all have. It hasn't been easy. I thought that it would probably get better once the hotel was fully up and running, but it's got worse. Arthur has refused to take on more staff even though the hotel is often bursting at the seams.

Francis: We added various swimming pools, watercourses and fishponds to the garden. It really became a very beautiful garden and many of the guests still stop me and say how much they love it.

Tom: Marilda is a great barmaid and we really clicked as friends. We both have the same free and easy approach to life. We often work really long hours when there is some function on at the hotel. Sometimes Marilda and I fall asleep on each other's shoulder on the couch in the staff room at the end of the night.

Marilda: A few months ago this guy saw me doing my thing behind the bar and asked me to star in a TV commercial for a fruit juice ad would you believe?

Juliolla: Sometimes Fiona would come and help me by making the beds and so on while I cleaned the bathrooms and vacuumed. She was wonderful – especially as she had work of her own to do.

Fiona: When I came back from my break, I could tell things had changed. I could just feel it in the air. The staff members were giving me funny looks. I asked Maria what happened while I was away. She said, "While the cats away the mice will play". She said that Arthur had been flirting with all the female staff, but that they all found him as appealing as a cold Tortilla de Patatas – a Spanish potato omelet.

Anyone: Pascal still cooked red meat and he still cooked French dishes, but he started to put other alternatives on the menu.

Anyone: Recently Jose and his wife Louisa bought their first apartment. Before that they had been renting. They're so proud. Of course, it's only tiny, and the mortgage is very large, but at least it's all theirs.

Antoinette: Men are difficult to massage. It's very hard work and it really hurts my hands getting stuck into their knotty, gym-hardened, muscles. It's worse than digging Francis' flowerbeds.

Anyone: Maria told me that sometimes her legs are so tired from working that they keep her awake with their aching. She has been working until late at night since the hotel started. She only gets one day a week off. Fortunately this was Sunday, so she could go to Church.

Anyone: The hotel staff used to have weekly meetings in which they were encouraged to give their suggestions. Arthur and Fiona often changed things as a result of their suggestions.

Anyone: Creating the garden was a very large project and apart from a few contractors who were employed in the early stages, Francis had to spend long hours to get it all going properly.

Anyone: Tom told me that Arthur liked to drink, but he didn't like it when Tom told him he'd had enough. He'd get angry and remind Tom that he owned the bar. Sometimes he drank so much that Tom had to get some of the guys to carry him to bed.

Anyone: At first Arthur told Marilda that she shouldn't do the TV commercial because it might lower the class of the hotel to have its workers appearing on TV. But when he heard how much she would be paid he agreed as long as Marilda paid him forty percent of her earnings.

Anyone: Juliolla's husband had a heart attack, so she asked for a few days off to take care of him. Arthur refused, as usual, but Fiona overrode his decision and said she would cover for Juliolla.

Pascal: Being in Spain, I also did some research on local vegetables and spices and the way real Spanish food is prepared and cooked. I developed some very interesting nouveau Spanish dishes.

Anyone: I was told by the policeman who came to the hotel after the murder, that Arthur had been stabbed by what appears to be a common kitchen meat knife. It had been plunged deep in his heart. But I doubt if that was true, because I don't think that man had a heart.

Anyone: When Antoinette protested to Arthur that she didn't want to continue massaging male clients, he said that she had to, as it was part of the job.

Anyone: Francis had read about the benefits of composting, so he arranged for the kitchen staff to save their vegetable scraps and leftovers for his compost heap.

Anyone: Fortunately in Spain they aren't as strict about not serving drunks, but the main problem for Tom was that Arthur would get really obnoxious when he was drunk. He'd start telling really crude jokes about all sorts of parts of the anatomy and he didn't seem to care if there were women present or not. It was really embarrassing. And Tom couldn't shut him up once he got going.

Anyone: Marilda didn't get that much from the TV commercial. But she said it was lots of fun and another producer said he might use her for some real acting work in the future. She used the money to start taking part-time acting lessons.

Juliolla: When I got back from helping my husband, Fiona looked a total wreck. She had never done that sort of work before in her life and I think it nearly killed her. She said she now knew why I felt we needed another cleaner to help out.