

# THE CHAMELEON



**MURDER MYSTERY**

**By Debi Irene Wahl**



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**Customer Taster**

# The Chameleon Murder Mystery

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*(Illustration by Sonya Wahl)*

## *Characters*

Miss Melinda Schwinn – a prim and proper schoolmarm.

Sassy Cassie – a saloon girl, very flirtatious.

Frank Jones, aka Fancy – cowboy, protective friend of Cassie.

Inspector Wilhelm William – no-nonsense police inspector.

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# The Chameleon Murder Mystery

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## ***About The Murder Mystery Pack***

The Chameleon Murder Mystery is a scripted murder mystery set in the USA in the late 1890s, optionally with a steampunk theme. It has a cast of 4 (2M, 2F).

## ***Structure***

This murder mystery pack contains:

- The **Organiser's Overview** (*extract here*)
- The **Full Script** (*extract here*)
- **Accusation Sheets** (to be provided to the audience)

## ***Organiser's Overview Contents***

- Plot Overview
- Guide to Staging
- Character Briefs
- Performance Notes
- Set Description
- Costumes
- Props and Effects Guidance
- Props List
- Music

## ***Plot Overview***

The Chameleon is the master of disguise. This person uses a bold, front-door entry method of holding up local financial institutions. Unfortunately, the thief's last robbery ended in multiple deaths, including the Chameleon's. But an accomplice that law officials did not know existed has escaped the shootout and is hiding amongst the guests of a party. Are you smart enough to identify the Chameleon's assistant before another murder takes place?

The suspects are:

- Miss Melinda Schwinn – a prim and proper schoolmarm.
- Sassy Cassie – a saloon girl, very flirtatious.
- Frank Jones, aka Fancy – cowboy, protective friend of Cassie.
- Inspector Wilhelm William – no-nonsense police inspector.

## ***Guide to Staging***

This show is versatile. It can be performed on the stage, in a restaurant with guests seated at the tables, or in a private home with guests seated in the room. The (minimal) set will remain the same. The audience take the role of guests at a party and can be seated as a regular audience or around the “staged” area.

There are three scripted scenes. Between the second and third scenes, there is an interval during which the audience are asked to fill in Accusation Sheets.

At the end of the interval, the actors will go from table to table or per guest and collect only the Accusation Sheets that support them as the suspect. If a guest chooses two suspects, one of the suspects will collect them while collecting his/her sheets. All correct accusations are entered into a draw to win a prize.

There are three different endings. The murderer can be chosen ahead of time by the cast or be determined by the number of audience accusations each character receives, at the discretion of the director.

The script says one Accusation Sheet per person. However, if the audience is seated around tables, it can be changed to one sheet per table, encouraging the audience members to discuss theories before submitting an accusation.

There are no additional clue sheets handed to the audience. All the clues are verbally given during the dialog. You could provide audience members with a Clue Review Sheet, for them to keep notes during Scenes 1 and 2.

### ***Character Briefs***

Melinda Schwinn is well-spoken with an air of “schoolmarm” superiority. Her posture is rigid, and she never allows herself to relax. If she is revealed as the Chameleon, she will become larger than life in her delivery of how she masterminded the robbery and murder.

Cassie is over-the-top in her motions and emotions. She is self-centered and very flirtatious in her reactions to the Inspector. Her “and, uh” comments are being used to give her a moment to create improv. When she reveals her real persona, there is a complete change in posture and diction. Her reaction to Frank as the murderer, if that is the ending, is honest amazement for she is oblivious to anyone but herself.

Frank is boisterous and loud. When he is outed as a bodyguard to Cassie, he defers to her immediately, his demeanor becoming one of calm authority. However, if he is revealed as the murderer, he is instantly aggressive and threatening.

Wilhelm is very businesslike in his role as Inspector. He has a job to perform and is no-nonsense in his approach to the other characters. His movements are controlled and calm. If he is revealed as the murderer, his stage presence becomes vaudevillian.

### ***Performance Notes***

The incorrect grammar used by Frank and Cassie is deliberate. Cassie’s use of “and, uh,” is also deliberate.

The head teller’s name in the story is Leamon with a long A; however, Wilhelm deliberately mispronounces it as Lemon until the reveal.

Wilhelm must keep one hand in the pocket of his jacket at all times. It does not matter which hand, but the actor must feel comfortable doing simple tasks with only the other hand until he is questioned and reveals the toy chameleon. After that reveal, his hand goes back into the same pocket until the reveal of the murderer.

### ***Set Description***

A parlor in a party in the late 1890s. A large cushioned chair is center, stage front. There is a small bar, with a few bottles, glasses for drinks and a dish for lemon slices. Near the bar is a spittoon or large metal decorative can. Opposite the bar is a small round table, with a linen cover and a lamp.

If performing in a venue with more than one door to the staged area, use only one door for all entrances and exits.

## ***Costumes***

Melinda wears a prim long dress, and her hair is styled in the manner of the late 1890s. She is wearing white gloves that are soiled on the palms. She never removes the gloves. Her purse can be a regular medical bag, or a woman's purse designed to look like a medical bag. If she is the murderer, a small handgun is in her bag.

Cassie dresses as a saloon girl from the late 1890s Wild West region. She has long sleeves and wears white gloves. Cassie's makeup is bold. Her shoes in the first scene are high heels. Before her Scene 2 entrance, she will change into more sensible shoes. She carries an old fiddle case and an old-fashioned drawstring women's handbag, with coins inside to create the sound of coins jingling. The handbag will also hold several "gold" coins and a tube of red lipstick.

Frank is in a long-sleeved, plain white shirt and a long riding coat. He wears a bold-colored vest over Levi's jeans and an empty gun holster around his waist. He wears black leather riding gloves, a cowboy hat pulled low over a bandage on his head, and cowboy boots. If Frank is the murderer, he carries a small gun that is not visible to guests, but easy to access for the reveal.

Wilhelm wears an old-fashioned suit and bowler hat. He sports a handlebar mustache, round wire-rimmed glasses, a thin necktie, and dress shoes. He carries a toy chameleon in his pocket, where he keeps his hand until the reveal at the end of Scene 2. After that, he puts his hand back in the pocket. If he is the murderer, he also carries a small gun in that same pocket.

## ***Props and Effects Guidance***

In Scene 2, Wilhelm has an audience member strike a match (or era-appropriate lighter if available) as he holds up a strip of special flash paper, which should immediately spark. The flash paper should be torn as though it came from the larger sheet of paper used to make the footprint copy. Repeat with a second audience member.

For period-appropriate props, you may want to scour thrift stores. The mystery can also be produced with a steampunk theme, for which simple changes are made to costumes and accessories, e.g. specialty glasses, belts, hats, and vests.

Since this play might be performed intimately around an audience, the actors should add any additional props for their character they feel are necessary. Audiences may, for example, ask to see Melinda's stethoscope and Cassie's coins. For that reason, in the original production, we found an old stethoscope at a yard sale and retouched it. Melinda routinely carried it in her medical bag.

For Frank's chew pouch, in the original production, a pouch was sewn from heavy coat material and a drawstring of rope was used to open and close the pouch. The pouch should look big enough to hold a ½ cup of chewing tobacco.

# The Chameleon Murder Mystery

(Extract from the scripted dialogue)

## Scene 1

(Late 1890s. The parlor – a simple set with a round table, a small bar with a few bottles and glasses for drinks, and an old-fashioned cushion chair.)

(Enter Miss Melinda; she appears to have been crying.)

**Melinda:** (To audience.) Oh, beg your pardon. I did not realize anyone was in this room. I cannot find the powder room and I've lost my handkerchief. Can someone help me? (Encourages audience to hand her a tissue. If no one does, she continues as if they had.) I am Miss Melinda, and you are? (Reaches to shake a hand; her glove has a dark brown stain.) Oh, my goodness, my gloves are simply a disgrace. I do apologize. I am never this disheveled.

(Enter Cassie, with Frank close behind.)

**Cassie:** Fancy, you shouldn't have tried to do that; you could have gotten yourself killed. Why, I wouldn't put it past...

(Frank grabs and pinches her shoulder.)

**Cassie:** OUCH! That hurts!

**Frank:** Be quiet, will ya! (Places his arm around her. To audience.) Well, howdy, all. I'm Frank and this is my sweetie, Sassy Cassie.

**Cassie:** Fancy, stop calling me that! (Sits in the chair, removes a shoe, rubs her foot.)

**Frank:** Why, Sassy, don't be shy. We can all see you are the sassiest little gal in this room. Meaning no disrespect to all you other sassy gals. Land's sakes, it's like a funeral in here. What we need is a dancing tune. Sassy, why don't you pick us a little tune on that fancy guitar of yours?

**Cassie:** Why, I would be glad to, Fancy, but I'm not sure where my fiddling pick is. And, uh, I can't seem to find it. I think it fell out when we were outside, and you...

**Frank:** Now, Sassy, never mind what we were doing outside. Nobody in this room cares. And besides, you don't need any fancy pick to play us a tune. You can do that with your God-given *impendiges*.

**Melinda:** Dear fellow, I do believe you mean "appendages."

**Frank:** Well, hello, pretty lady. *Impendiges* is what I said and it's what I mean, but you can correct me at any time. Frank Jones at your service.

**Melinda:** Correct me if I am wrong, but I believe your *lady* friend has called you Fancy several times, sir. What is your correct name?

**Frank:** Frank is the name my mama gave me when I came storming into this world, but you can call me Fancy or anything else you please. I will answer to just about anything when it comes to a pretty gal. (Close to Melinda, sniffs audibly.) Especially a gal who smells as nice as you! You smell like lemon verbena.

(Cassie puts her shoe on and stamps her foot.)

**Cassie:** Fancy, if you are done sniffing Miss High Society, I believe I can sing a tune without my fiddling pick.

(Song 1.)

(Enter Wilhelm on the last line of the song.)

**Cassie:** (Off-key, loudly.) My Bonnie lies over the ocean,  
My Bonnie lies over the sea.  
My Bonnie lies over the ocean,  
Oh, bring back my Bonnie to me.  
Bring back, bring back,  
Oh, bring back my Bonnie to me... to me.  
Bring back, bring back,  
Oh, bring back my Bonnie to me.

**Frank:** Whoeee, Sassy, that's some singing range! Now I know how you won the local hog-calling contest. If you'll just shake that pretty little dancing leg of yours with me, we need to be on our way.

**Wilhelm:** Excuse me, sir, but I cannot permit you to leave.

**Frank:** Just who's gonna stop me? You? I'd like to see you try! And who are you anyway?

**Wilhelm:** I am Inspector Wilhelm William. There has been a hold-up at the *[local bank]* in town. I have narrowed the suspects to the guests in this room. That includes, my obnoxious friend, you. I will need names, please.

**Cassie:** Well, *I* have nothing to hide, so I will gladly go first. My name is Cassie.

**Wilhelm:** Just Cassie?

**Cassie:** That's right, just Cassie, it's the name I took when I started my singing career. And, uh, this here is my, ah... friend, Frank Jones. We are visiting this nice town and have been at this party for what seems like hours. Surely you don't think little ole me could have anything to do with a hold-up and shooting?

**Melinda:** One moment. I do not believe the good inspector mentioned anything about a shooting. Did you, sir?

**Wilhelm:** No, I most certainly did not. Thank you for your input, Miss...?

**Melinda:** Miss Melinda Schwinn, Inspector. I am new to the area and have taken a position at the local schoolhouse. I must return to finish grading test papers, but will be glad to make myself available to you tomorrow if you like. Now, if you will all excuse me.

**Frank:** Hold on there a minute, Miss High and Mighty. If I have to answer Willie's questions, you do too.

**Wilhelm:** It is Wilhelm, if you don't mind.

**Frank:** I don't take no mind of you at all.

**Cassie:** Fancy, you better *mind* your manners. Mr *Impersonator*, perhaps it would help if we knew exactly what happened.

**Wilhelm:** Inspector, Miss Cassie, and I will gladly circumnavigate the order of events for you.

**Frank:** (Moves very close to Melinda's face.) Circum... what? Ain't that what they do to baby boys when they're born?

**Melinda:** Oh my goodness, please allow me my personal space. (To Wilhelm.) Inspector, do hurry this along. (To Frank.) Would you like a sprig of mint or perhaps a slice of lemon to help cleanse your breath? It is simply *foul*.

**Frank:** Why thank you, that would be my chaw. But I don't use any chicken in it, I make it myself from air-cured tobacco leaves. Then I soak it in strong-brewed coffee with a heaping shake of mineral salt. It's got the longest, *lastinest* flavor you could ever ask for. I ain't never met anyone else who uses this chaw recipe. Wanna try a wad?

**Melinda:** This explains *so* much!

**Wilhelm:** Sir! If you could hold your prattle for a moment.

**Frank:** Oh, I never spit *inside*.

**Wilhelm:** My caffeine-addled fellow, please pay attention. Just two hours ago...

**Frank:** Like today?

**Wilhelm:** Yes, two hours ago would mean today. The head teller Manfred Leamon (**pronounced "Lemon"**) was tallying up his daily receipts at the local bank. Two persons entered the building. One was a notorious bank robber who has been dubbed the Chameleon by law enforcement. The Chameleon earned his or her title due to the ability this nefarious person has of a fast-paced robbery and get away with any number of exit strategies, and then an equally fast hit on the next bank. There is no defined pattern for the hold-up locations. The Chameleon has no single description ever rendered by any of the frightened employees, making this person the master of disguise. Hence the name. It wasn't until today that police officials realized there were two in this intriguing mystery. The accomplice of the Chameleon also seems to be a wonder at disguise and melting into the general population. This devious duo waits until the end of the day when the teller is tallying totals. They always enter brazenly through the front door. I know that a gun has been used in the past to force the employees to acquiesce. A heavy dose of laudanum is forced on the employees to render them unconscious at some point during the robberies.

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[Continued in the full Murder Mystery Pack.]