


Don't Tell  Me Who Done It

by Ross Carter

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

<i>Henry O'Neill</i>	An amiable young man
<i>June Dotson</i>	An amiable young woman
<i>Clifford House</i>	Late middle-aged innkeeper
<i>Carl Sparks</i>	Ham radio enthusiast
<i>Doctor Patricia Ainsley</i>	Sarcastic and unpleasant physician
<i>Inspector Linda Horton</i>	Able-bodied and quick-thinking
<i>Millicent Bain</i>	Talkative orchid aficionado
<i>Tony Harper</i>	Runs the Bach Society
<i>Delia Sutton</i>	Runs the bridge club
<i>Vito Fox</i>	Early twenties, the innkeeper's assistant

PLACE

The library of a quaint old New England Inn.

TIME

The present.

ACT 1.

SCENE 1.

Setting: Two separate, unspecified locations where a meeting is underway.
This scene may be played in front of the curtain.

Lights up: The stage is black. HENRY and JUNE each stand in a pool of light.
Each is chairing a meeting.

JUNE

Thank you, Mrs. Diamond, for that very insightful presentation, "The Depraved Heart Is A Deprived Heart."

HENRY

Let's all thank Mr. Johnson for teaching us some very useful techniques on detecting trace amounts of Madagascar vanilla. I'm sure we are all very anxious to apply this knowledge in our investigations.

JUNE

I'm sure that our newfound understanding will be a great benefit in our work.

JUNE AND HENRY

That concludes tonight's program.

HENRY

One brief item before we adjourn.

JUNE

I want to let you know that as your President of the Agatha Christie Detection Club, I received an invitation from a wonderful little boutique hotel called Cliff House. Their slogan is "A quaint New England Inn with English Country House charm."

HENRY

Some of you are familiar with Cliff House, that little hotel perched way out of town along the cliff road. The hotel has offered me, as President of the Sherlock Holmes Detective Society, a free night's lodging as a way of encouraging us to have our monthly meeting there.

JUNE

It's just the sort of place where you'd like to solve an English country house murder.

HENRY

I will examine it in detail. They're expecting me tonight—

JUNE

The invitation is for tonight, and so without further ado—

HENRY

Let us adjourn with our motto,

HENRY and JUNE speak at the same time.

HENRY

You know my methods. Use them.

JUNE

Rely on the little gray cells.

Blackout.

SCENE 2.

Setting: The library of a large old house. A set of French windows UC looks out onto a verdant walkway. These windows will be referred to as the UC door. The windows may be covered by sheers or curtains; it is not vital that the audience see what is outside the windows. An umbrella stand near the door, with an umbrella and a pair of hiking poles in it. A staircase UR leads to guest rooms on the upper floor. A hallway UL leads to guest rooms on the main floor. A doorway DL (a wide door, or possibly a double door) leads to the dining room. A small doorway DR leads to the cellar. The cellar door opens into the room, with the hinges on the downstage side. A card table and chairs, a sofa, a desk, a piano (which need not be practical; something that looks like it might be the back of a piano will suffice), a vase of irises, a music player, a fireplace (which need not be practical), and as many books as can be crammed into the space.

Lights up: Music is playing within the room. It is the Overture to The Barber of Seville, starting about two minutes into the piece with the well-known staccato notes in a minor key. CLIFFORD HOUSE is tidying up the room. CLIFF is middle-aged or later and amiable. He keeps a pair of reading glasses perched on his nose. He sings along with the melody: da da DA da, da da DA da, da da DA da, di DA da, di DA di da. He is a jovial middle-aged man. He sings nonsense syllables as the music continues, something like: da, di di di da, di di di da di di di dah di di di doddly dobbly doddly doddly dobbly doddly doddly dobbly bah!

Note that when the music sounds da da da DA da, CLIFF sings da da DA da. That is to say, he sings two short da sounds instead of three.

VITO FOX enters from hallway UL, unseen by CLIFF. VITO is an eager, fresh-faced young man, the sort who is instantly likable even though he is plainly not the sharpest knife in the drawer. VITO stares warily at CLIFF. At length CLIFF sees VITO, crosses to the music player, and turns the music off.

CLIFF

Vito! There you are!

VITO

Yes, sir, I've just been tidying up the first-floor guest rooms.

CLIFF

Has anyone arrived yet?

VITO

Yes sir, Doctor Ainsley. She's in room fourteen.

CLIFF

Thank you, Vito. Well done. Now will you please give the dining room a once-over and see how that cook is getting along? I'm a little worried about him.

VITO

Worried?

CLIFF

We have a full house tonight, thank the Lord, and I hope that cook—what was his name again?

VITO

Bub, I think. I don't know if that's his first name or his last name. Or maybe he's just got one name. Bub.

CLIFF

Poor creature, he looks like a name is the only thing he owns in this world. Still, charity for all, and whatnot. Just see how he's getting along.

VITO

Yes sir.

VITO exits into dining room DL. CLIFF turns the music up.

CARL SPARKS appears at the door UC and knocks. CLIFF turns down the music and opens the door for CARL. CARL enters carrying an overnight bag and some sort of carrying case for an object.

CLIFF

Come in, come in! Welcome to Cliff House. Let me take that bag. Did you have any trouble finding us?

CARL

No, not at all. It's a long drive out here. But what a beautiful view along the cliff.

CLIFF

Much prettier in the daylight. Still, it's not quite dark yet. You could see the ocean. Let's see, you must be Mister—?

CARL

Carl Sparks.

CLIFF

Yes, Mr. Sparks. Your room is on the second floor. I hope you don't mind.

CARL

No, not at all. All the better, in fact.

CLIFF

Vito! I'll have my assistant carry your bags upstairs.

CLIFF

Oh, that's quite all right. I can manage. My transceiver is quite light.

CLIFF

Your transceiver? Oh, yes, you are with the ham radio club. I think you'll find our facilities to your liking if your group would like to have your regular meetings here. As for the radio reception—

CARL

We're on a cliff. That's a good start.

CLIFF

Vito! And there's no one around to complain of interference. It's over a mile to the next house along the road.

VITO enters from dining room.

VITO

Yes sir, Mr. House?

CLIFF

Vito, take Mr Sparks's bags to room twenty-two. Please make yourself at home here in the library. The dining room is through that door. If you need anything at all, I'll be pottering about somewhere.

VITO carries the bags to the staircase.

VITO

What's in this case?

CARL

A shortwave radio. A transceiver.

VITO

Wow. Don't you need an antenna?

CARL

I brought a portable one. It's just a simple dipole, but it ought to be fine up here. I'll show you if you're interested.

VITO and CARL exit upstairs. CLIFF calls to VITO, too late to be heard.

CLIFF

Vito, how is the cook doing? Oh, well, no matter. I ought to check on him myself anyway. Calm down, Cliff, it's only eight people for dinner. Any cook worth his salt can manage a dinner for eight.

CLIFF exits into dining room. HENRY enters through door UC, carrying an overnight bag. He looks around the room, politely waiting for someone to attend him.

HENRY

Hello? Hello? Anyone home? Wow, what a place! This hotel is like a do-it-yourself mystery kit. A lonely winding road, a dramatic cliff, roiling ocean surf, an old hotel in a secluded wood. All we need now is a bunch of weird, tormented guests, each nursing his own private demon, with one of them—the last one you would expect—driven inexorably toward murder! It's perfect!

A knock at the door.

HENRY

Aha! Our first suspect! What black and wicked heart seeks refuge here?

HENRY throws open the door UC. JUNE enters with a bag. JUNE and HENRY, it must be understood, do not affect any mannerisms of the fictional detectives they admire, excerpt perhaps in the

extreme heat of a dramatic solution. They are youngish: old enough to be settled and responsible, young enough to flush with excitement upon the prospect of romance. The attraction is instant and mutual.

JUNE

Hello? Oh, hello!

HENRY

Hello!

JUNE

Are you the manager?

HENRY

No, sorry.

JUNE

I'm sorry, I saw you standing there and I thought you might be the manager.

HENRY

I just arrived myself. I haven't seen anyone. Here, let me help you with that bag.

JUNE

Why, thank you. I'm June.

HENRY and JUNE shake hands.

HENRY

Henry.

JUNE AND HENRY

Nice to meet you.

HENRY

So, are you traveling somewhere? Driving the cliff road, in a sports car with the top down, brisk wind in your face and joy in your heart? Stopped for the night at a quaint roadside inn?

JUNE

You mean, am I a woman of mystery?

HENRY

Well?

JUNE

In a sense, I suppose you could say that. But no, I'm not traveling through. I live in town. I came out here to get a first-hand look at this beautiful old building. It is really something, isn't it?

HENRY and JUNE examine the library.

HENRY

Yes, so many old houses like this fall into disrepair. I love old houses.

JUNE

So do I. And what about you? Are you a man of mystery?

HENRY

You could say that. I was just contemplating the mystery of the lonely and long-forgotten soul who built such a fine house in such an out-of-the-way place. The present owner should be rewarded for taking the risk of turning it into a hotel.

JUNE is examining a plaque sitting on the fireplace mantle.

JUNE

I think he already has. Look, it's a historic preservation award.

HENRY

And a well deserved one, I'd say. "Cliff House." I wonder if that's the original name?

CLIFF has entered from dining room.

CLIFF

Oh no, when I bought the place, I named it after myself.

HENRY

Cliff House?

CLIFF

At your service.

HENRY

Your name is Cliff House? Cliff as in Clifford? House as in—house?

CLIFF

House as in Houseman, originally. I dropped the “-man” when I opened the hotel. I think it makes a good joke.

JUNE

I love a man with a sense of humor.

HENRY, in response to her comment, laughs loudly.

HENRY

Ha! And a very good joke it is! Ha ha ha!

JUNE rolls her eyes at Henry's behavior, smiling with amusement nevertheless.

HENRY

Mr. House, may I introduce Miss June something, whom I have just met.

JUNE

June Dotson.

HENRY

Henry O'Neill.

CLIFF

How very nice to meet you. Now if you will come over to the desk I will just get you both registered.

JUNE

We've been admiring this room. I can't wait to see the rest of the hotel.

CLIFF

Well, they certainly don't build them like this any more. Up here on this bluff, with the wind and the sea air, it takes a sturdy house to stand up to the weather. The house was in good repair when I bought it, but there was quite a lot of remodeling to do. You see how we added the walkway along the garden so I could use these French windows as the main entrance. What used to be the front door is on the other side of the house, facing away from the sea. Not at all inviting, to my way of thinking.

HENRY picks up the hiking poles from the umbrella stand.

HENRY

I see you have some hiking poles. For guests? Is there a trail up here?

CLIFF

Yes, there's the cliff path, but I don't recommend it. It's in rough shape. Hasn't been maintained. The poles are mine. I like to go for a brisk walk now and then, and I feel a little safer when I have something to help keep my balance. If you want to see the path, I'll show you in the morning. I'm afraid it's got dark on us now.

The sound of a voice along the garden walk. HENRY hands the poles to JUNE, who looks them over and places them somewhere other than the umbrella stand. The relocation of the poles should be unnoticed by the audience.

CLIFF

Here are your keys. Main floor, and second floor. Vito!

VITO enters from staircase.

VITO

Yes sir?

CLIFF

Mr. O'Neill in twenty-one, and Miss Dotson in fifteen.

MILLICENT and TONY enter through door UC.

MILLICENT

I think it used to be a funeral home or an orphans home or something like that and then it was sort of abandoned for a long time. I remember driving through here years ago with my mother. She always said it looked like the kind of place somebody should fix up. Fix it up or tear it down, that was her motto. Fix it up or tear it down. If I heard that once I must have heard it a million times. Not that she ever fixed up our place. Or tore it down either. God rest her soul, she's been gone now it's going on fifteen years. I don't think she ever stayed in a nice hotel. Probably not in any hotel, ever. People didn't get out and go places in those days.

HENRY

Tell you what, Vito, you can take my bag upstairs, and I'll escort Miss Dotson to her room.

VITO

I get your drift.

HENRY and JUNE exit into the hallway UL. VITO exits upstairs.

CLIFF

Welcome to Cliff House. If I could just have your names?

TONY

Tony—

MILLICENT

This is Tony and I'm Millicent. We just met. He helped me get my bags out of the van. They're kind of heavy. Tony said let's just leave them here and get the porter or bellboy or whatever he's called to come and get them. Tony's suitcase is on rollers. He just rolled it right in. Anyway, it's Tony and Millicent, and we're not together, we just arrived together. Oh, what a lovely room! It's Millicent, not Millie, if you call me Millie that's OK I won't get mad or anything but I do prefer Millicent. That's the name my mother gave me. She's been gone for fifteen years now. Can you believe how time just flies by?

TONY

Sometimes it passes awfully slowly.

VITO enters from staircase.

CLIFF

Vito, this lady's bags are outside—

VITO

I heard.

VITO exits through door UC.

CLIFF

Room twelve. Just along that hallway.

MILLICENT

Thank you very much. This key works the room and this key works the front door? I like real keys so much better than those plastic cards they give you nowadays. I don't trust them. And they don't work half the time. What's wrong with a real key? That's what I say. Use the real thing. That's my motto. I like real

cream in my coffee, not that powdered stuff. They don't even call it creamer any more. It's whitener, or lightener, or something like that. Can you believe it? I think it's talcum powder, that's all it is. Talcum powder. Room twelve. Which one is room twelve? Is this one of those hotels where the room numbers aren't next to each other? Ten is next to thirteen or whatever? Here we go. Room ten. Let's see if the next one is eleven.

And so she exits, chattering away.

CLIFF

Let me get you a drink. On the house.

TONY

Please hurry.

CLIFF

Come with me.

CLIFF and TONY exit to dining room. VITO enters UC carrying a bag, sets it down, crosses to music player, and turns up the volume. The music is the aria "Tu che di gel sei cinta" from Puccini's Turandot. VITO exits UC.

HENRY and JUNE enter from hallway.

JUNE

I can't believe you like Art Deco. Most men don't have any sense of appreciation for it.

HENRY

Oh, I love Art Deco. Victorian and Edwardian are nice, too, for some things, but Art Deco is just really special.

JUNE

Oh, listen to that music! It's beautiful!

HENRY sighs blissfully.

HENRY

Ahhh. I love opera.

JUNE

Me too! What is that aria? I should know that.

HENRY

I'll think of it in a second. Do you see many operas?

JUNE

Not as many as I'd like. There's one on public television from time to time, but I don't watch them. It's not the same, you know?

HENRY

I couldn't agree more. You have to be there. Opera on television is just, I don't know, empty.

JUNE

Right!

HENRY

Empty and lifeless. What IS that aria? I know it. I just can't think of it.

JUNE

I think it's Puccini.

HENRY

Tosca? No, it sounds like it's from his later works.

JUNE

Madama Butterfly, maybe?

HENRY

Maybe, but I don't think so. Darn, what is that aria?

VITO enters UC, struggling with a heavy trunk.

HENRY

Looks like Millicent is just staying the one night.

VITO

There's more.

HENRY

Carry on, then.

VITO exits to get another bag.

HENRY

Shall we sit?

HENRY and JUNE cross to the sofa. CLIFF and TONY enter from dining room.

TONY

Thank you. I owe you my life.

CLIFF

You know where to find it. Just save some for the rest of us. I have a feeling we'll all be needing it.

JUNE

Hello.

TONY

How do you do?

CLIFF

June Dotson, may I introduce Tony Harper. Tony, June Dotson and Henry—um—

HENRY

O'Neill. Nice to meet you.

JUNE

I'm afraid we may be in for a long evening.

TONY

Let us enjoy this respite while Millicent is in her room.

CLIFF

A moment of silence. Excellent idea.

CLIFF crosses to music player and turns the volume down.

CLIFF

Ah, sessions of sweet silent thought.

HENRY

I have an idea. We'll play charades, and let Millie go first. We won't get any of her clues. When she has to go that long without talking, she'll explode!

HENRY laughs loudly, hoping the joke will impress JUNE. It doesn't.

CLIFF

Tony, I'll just take your bag. Room eleven.

CLIFF exits with bag to hallway.

TONY

Eleven? Isn't that next door to—

HENRY

Would you prefer that we call you Saint Anthony?

JUNE

Will you join us? We were just wondering the name of that aria that was playing. Do you happen to know it?

TONY

No, sorry, I couldn't say. I'm no opera expert.

JUNE

I hope you don't mind if they play some more. We both enjoy it.

TONY

Oh not at all. As a matter of fact, I—

VITO enters UC with the last of the bags.

VITO

Damn! I don't know how her van made it up the hill! Oh, hello. Sorry. Never mind me. What happened to the music?

VITO turns the music volume up. It plays Bach's Gavotte from Suite No. 3. VITO exits to hallway, struggling with bags.

TONY

Anyway, as I was saying—ah, now it is my turn to ask. Do you recognize that Bach piece?

HENRY

Recognize it, can't name it.

TONY

Gavotte from Suite Number 3.