

BLESS THIS BREAD

An Audience-Participation Play

by
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STORY OF THE PLAY

Is this play a fund-raiser, an audience-participation mystery, or just entertainment for a potluck dinner? Well, one thing is for sure, it's fun no matter how you use it!

Rev. Longacre is gathering a small group of church members together at a potluck dinner to broach the subject of starting a building fund. Duty-bound Hazel arrives first to set up everything and tell the Reverend she hasn't yet found out who's been sending him anonymous love letters.

Jenny, a local politician, and Cornelia, a local poet, arrive next, followed by Annie, the church secretary who is hiding something under her coat—and it's not a covered dish.

Malcomb, the head of the building drive, brings his famous lasagna, and is followed by the most liberal member of the congregation, Della, who has brought her hot wings. The final member to arrive—except for the audience, of course—is the richest woman in town, Lillian Kingsley.

Before Rev. Longacre is able to give his two-hundred-plus reasons for the drive, Lillian startles the members by saying she is giving the church \$1.5 million in jewelry so there won't even need to be a fund drive. All are stunned. But when Lillian's purse is retrieved from the cloakroom, it is empty of jewels. A thief has struck!

Well-versed by reading so many mystery novels, Rev. Longacre begins an investigation that leads his church members – and yours! – to unveil the culprit who has made good use of the covered-dish supper.

(A complete description of clues for the audience to find is included at the end of the script.)

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 m, 6 w)

REV. GAVIN LONGACRE: 28, new pastor of Fairhaven Community Church, an energetic, single man who loves mysteries.

HAZEL HOLGATE: 40s, the real head of the church, she is present at every event and runs the show. She knows everyone and, she thinks, everything that's happening.

JENNY LOU JEFFERSON: 30s, a local politician running on the fact that she is a direct descendant of Thomas Jefferson. Unfortunately, she's a bit on the ditzy side.

CORNELIA ST. JEROME: 30s, the local poet who tries to appear as ethereal as possible.

ANNIE CHRISTIE: 20s, the church secretary, a shy, almost naïve young lady who seems like a minnow in a pool of sharks.

MALCOMB PENDLETON: 40s, a new member of the church who has volunteered for the thankless task of heading up the building fund drive.

DELLA DRINKWATER: 30s, provocative in appearance and action, she's got a good head on her shoulders for business and for spotting hypocrites.

LILLIAN KINGSLEY: 60, the richest woman in Fairhaven who revels in her wealth and power.

CASTING NOTE: The ages of the characters can be adjusted, if necessary, to fit your available actors.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Act I

Fairhaven Community Church hall, a winter's evening.

Act II

The same, following the dinner.

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SETTING

The Fairhaven Community Church hall. (*If desired, change the name to your actual church name.*) Entrance right leads to cloakroom, offices, and restrooms. Entrance left leads to outside and the church itself. At center stands a table covered with a long tablecloth ready to receive the covered dishes. Smaller tables left and right each set with four chairs that the cast may use as blocking dictates. Upstage, to the right of the food table, stands a podium. Décor should simulate a typical church hall. If actually performed in a church hall, use the space as is and simply adjust the blocking so that there is one way to enter from outside and another exit to accommodate the cloakroom and so on.

COSTUMES

Except for the Reverend, all characters wear modern, everyday clothes, coats, and, if desired, gloves and hats. The women should carry purses. Lillian should wear a fur coat along with sparkling jewelry, including rings on all fingers. Della should dress more provocatively than the other ladies. Hazel should dress more conservatively and perhaps wear an apron.

PROPERTIES

(See back of script for a complete list of clues to hide for the audience to find.)

Covered dishes for each character except the Reverend. (All the dishes can be empty containers which are covered. Put a couple of damp towels inside to give the dish weight.)

Note cards

Bouquet of fake flowers

Paper plates, napkins, cups, silverware

Gift bag holding an Agatha Christie mystery

Folder

Large purse (decorated with a poodle) containing an empty wooden jewelry box and cell phone

Glass of water

Cell phone

Tissue

Coffee cup

Baskets of bread

Large, flashy ring

Phone book

Glittering necklace and other jewelry hidden in covered dish

ACT I

(AT RISE: HAZEL bustles on left carrying a covered dish.)

HAZEL: Reverend! Rev. Longacre! Where ARE you?

(GAVIN pops up from under the table. HAZEL screams.)

GAVIN: Sorry!

HAZEL: What are you doing under there? Playing Sherlock Holmes?

GAVIN: Oh, no ... this would have been small potatoes for Mr. Holmes. I ... I dropped my note cards. *(Gathering up note cards.)*

HAZEL: Whatever are those for?

GAVIN: *(HE rises.)* My ... my speech.

HAZEL: Good heavens, Reverend! You give us a sermon every week and you don't need note cards!

GAVIN: Well, when I'm preaching, the word of God inspires me. Tonight, I'm talking about money, and you know what God thinks of money. Consider the lilies of the field, Ms. Holgate.

HAZEL: Yes, well, easy for Him to say! He doesn't have to replace the roof of Fairhaven Community Church! *(Sets dish on table.)* There!

GAVIN: And what do you have in your covered dish?

HAZEL: Cold pea salad! My grandmother's recipe from the Great Depression. Healthy and easy on the pocketbook! *(Bustles off right.)*

GAVIN: Oh, Ms. Holgate? Ms. Holgate?

(HAZEL enters right carrying a large bouquet of fake flowers which she sets in center of the table.)

HAZEL: We need some lilies of the field, Reverend, don't you think?

GAVIN: Yes, well, very nice. Have you ... have you had a chance to ... you know ... ask around?

HAZEL: Oh, about your problem?

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GAVIN: *(Nervously.)* Shhhhhh!

HAZEL: Nobody else here yet. I always get to these things first. Somebody's got to set up! *(Exits right.)*

GAVIN: *(Calling off right.)* Well, have you, Ms. Holgate?

(HAZEL enters right carrying paper plates and napkins, which she sets on one side of the table.)

HAZEL: Have I what?

GAVIN: Had a chance to ... you know?

HAZEL: Sorry, but I don't have a thing to report. Nobody knows a thing about them.

GAVIN: Have you been ... discrete?

HAZEL: Really, Reverend ... I'm the soul of discretion!

(HAZEL exits right as JENNY LOU and CORNELIA enter left, each with a dish.)

JENNY: Evenin', Rev. Longacre!

GAVIN: Ms. Jefferson! How nice of you to come. And Ms. St. Jerome, welcome.

JENNY: Any luck finding out who's been sending you those letters?

GAVIN: *(Covering.)* Letters? What letters?

CORNELIA: The ones Hazel's been asking everybody about.

JENNY: *(Coyly.)* Sounds to me like you've got a girlfriend!

(HAZEL enters right carrying a tray of silverware.)

HAZEL: I told him they're harmless.

GAVIN: I thought you were the soul of discretion, Ms. Holgate.

HAZEL: Well, I haven't told the newspapers yet. Look, do you want to find out who's sending 'em or not? *(Slams silverware down on table.)* You two go on and put your coats and things in the cloakroom. We don't need 'em cluttering up the dining room.

CORNELIA: Dining room! Reverend, like the Bible says, you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

End of Freeview

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