

THE MALTESE MURDER

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The Maltese Murder was first performed on April 3, 2008 at the Johnson County Public Library in Overland Park, KS, as part of the National Endowment for the Arts Big Read with the following cast:

Matt Koenen.....Sam Spade
Michelle Cotton.....Brigit Thursday
Kevin Albert.....Caspar Gutman
Steven Eubank.....Joe Cairo
Joe Nuzum.....Tom the Cop
Susan Glennemeier.....Danelle Carter
Alex Saxon.....Kid Thug

Tara Varney.....Director

The Maltese Murder

The playing area is roped off with yellow crime scene tape. There's a tape outline of a dead body on the floor.

A couple of chairs and some rolling bookcases filled with books indicate a library.

SAM SPADE enters wearing a trenchcoat - a classic film noir detective. He's always cool and never lets on that he knows more than he does. He evokes the 1930s more than any other character.

SAM

(to audience)

She was wearing a black dress, which might have meant she was in mourning if it weren't so seductively revealing. She was the kind of woman men do stupid things for. My first thought was that it would just be another cheating husband. I had no idea it would involve murder, or that I would be duped. I should have sent her packing second I found out who she was, but instead I invited her in like a big fat sucker.

Brigit enters. Sam directs her to a chair across the room.

SAM (cont'd)

Come on in, Mrs. Thursday. Have a seat.

She crosses in front of him, scared and nervous. He checks out her figure and he's pleased.

BRIGIT

I'm trembling. That's not like me.

SAM

Nothing to be scared of here. I don't bite too hard.

BRIGIT

It's not you. I just... I don't know where to start.

SAM

Most people start at the beginning.

BRIGIT

The beginning? I can't even remember when it all began. All I can see now is the end.

SAM

Alright, tell me how it ends.

BRIGIT

That's the part that scares me.

SAM

Are you in trouble? In danger?

BRIGIT

My husband was murdered. Two days ago. Perhaps you heard about it? The library--

SAM

I knew the second I heard your name, Mrs. Thursday.

BRIGIT

Of course you did.

SAM

How come the police haven't hauled you in yet?

BRIGIT

But why should they?

SAM

Aren't you supposed to be their prime suspect?

BRIGIT

You can't believe what you see on TV.

SAM

So what should I believe?

BRIGIT

I don't know. They questioned me forever. I kept telling them the killer was getting away, but they wanted it nice and easy. Just blame it on the wife... but I didn't do it. I didn't! If you believe that, then maybe you can help me.

SAM

I believe it's best not to believe anything.

BRIGIT

Isn't that hypocritical?

SAM

Yes it is.

BRIGIT

I want you to find out who killed my husband.

SAM

That's the police's job?

BRIGIT
The police don't care who did it.

SAM
And why should I care?

BRIGIT
I'll pay you ten thousand dollars.

SAM
Alright, I care.

BRIGIT
So you do believe in something.

SAM
Now give me a reason not to believe you did it.

BRIGIT
But I didn't.

SAM
Do you have an alibi?

BRIGIT
No. I was home alone when it happened.

SAM
You get along with your husband?

BRIGIT
Yes, we were happy.

SAM
Any reason for someone to think you wanted him dead?

BRIGIT
(hysterical)
Please don't treat me like they did - all these questions. I need help. I've got nobody to turn to.

SAM
Alright, I'm sorry.

He offers her a glass of water, easing back the tension.

SAM (cont'd)
I'm on your side - as long as I'm getting paid - but I've got to know all the angles or I won't get anywhere. So who do you think did it?

BRIGIT

I don't know.

SAM

Did your husband have enemies?

BRIGIT

No. He was just a book collector.

SAM

Not exactly a dangerous profession.

BRIGIT

He was harmless.

SAM

Boring maybe?

BRIGIT

You could say that.

SAM

I don't see a woman like you married to a book collector.

BRIGIT

Why? What kind of woman am I?

SAM

Not the kind that would be in love with a bookworm.

BRIGIT

What are you implying?

SAM

You didn't love him, did you?

BRIGIT

Maybe not. Maybe I used to, but...

SAM

But?

BRIGIT

Alright, it's true, I didn't love him. We got along but the spark died out long ago. He just cared less and less about me and more and more about his books. It's like he was living in his own fantasy world. I was as good a wife as I could be, but I haven't known love for years.

SAM

I'm sorry, Mrs. Thursday.

BRIGIT

But that doesn't mean anything. We didn't hate each other. I was lonely, but we were happy together. You must believe I killed him too?

SAM

No, I don't believe you did it.

BRIGIT

(seductively)

I wonder what else you believe in, Mr. Spade?

SAM

I stopped believing in that years ago?

BRIGIT

Did she break your heart?

SAM

You've got it all wrong. This job's taught me far too much about love.

BRIGIT

So you're jaded?

SAM

I'm wise.

BRIGIT

I think there's a big, soft center to that hard shell.

SAM

Don't bother cracking it to find out.

BRIGIT

I won't, Sam.

SAM

Alright, you pay me half now, half when the job's done. Got it?

BRIGIT

Of course.

She dives into her purse and finds the cash.

SAM

You also cover any expenses.

She gives him the money, wrapping his fingers around it and holding his hands. She looks into his eyes for a moment, grateful.

BRIGIT

Thank you.

Brigit exits.

SAM

(to audience)

I didn't quite know what to think of Brigit Thursday. She ran hot and cold. I could tell she was trouble, but it was just the sort of trouble I liked. I wasn't sure where to start so I thought I'd talk to the police to see what they knew. I made a few phone calls and found out an old friend of mine was handling the investigation. He said he'd meet me down at the library where the murder happened.

Tom comes on stage. He's a cop. He looks tough, talks tough, and laughs tough. He's a brick wall with a brow.

TOM

Here to pay off your library fines, Sam?

SAM

Funny one, Tom, but I've got a client that's interested in this homicide.

TOM

Isn't your usual beat adultery?

SAM

Guess I felt like stretching my legs.

TOM

Your client wouldn't be a lady named Thursday would it?

SAM

Might be. Might be Friday or Wednesday too. Could be any day of the week.

TOM

It's a bum job, Sam. We know she did it.

SAM

Then why isn't she in jail?

TOM

She will be.

SAM

Don't tell me you couldn't break a weak little dame like that? You're losing your touch.

TOM

She's tougher than she lets on.

SAM

I say you've harassed an innocent woman.

TOM

Innocent? You've got to be kidding.

SAM

Alright, you've got me there. Mind if I have a look around the crime scene?

TOM

I doubt you'll find anything we haven't already picked over.

SAM

Then save me some time and tell me what you found.

Tom leads Sam over to the bookshelves.

TOM

Thursday was over here in the fiction aisle, 'G' through 'J', when someone clubbed him over the head with the biggest reference book in the library. Cracked his skull wide open.

Tom picks up a huge reference book and drops it on the floor. Sam picks it up.

SAM

This is the murder weapon?

TOM

That's the second biggest reference book in the library. The big one's being held for evidence.

SAM

I guess Thursday's not one for light reading.

TOM

That's a bad joke, Sam.

SAM

Any witnesses?

TOM

Nope.

SAM
Anything on Thursday?

TOM
Nope.

SAM
Not much to go on is there?

TOM
Nope.

SAM
Good luck with the case.

TOM
Maybe you've got a few leads we don't have?

SAM
Sorry, I'm still a few steps behind you.

TOM
Come on, Sam. Fair is fair.

SAM
I'm on the level with you.

TOM
Maybe you'll level better down at the station?

SAM
Don't threaten me, Tom. We've been getting along too well.

TOM
Alright Sam, but if you start interfering again, I won't be a nice guy this time. I almost lost my badge.

SAM
Maybe this time you boys won't screw everything up?

TOM
Don't push your luck, Sam.

Tom exits and Sam turns back to the audience.

KID THUG is sitting in the audience reading a children's book. He wears gaudy gold jewelry, low hanging pants, and a basketball jersey.

His cellphone rings and he whispers into it. Sam pretends not to notice.

SAM

(to audience)

As usual the cops were clueless. I doubt Tom got any more of out her than I did. Tom's alright as a cop but he'd never make it in my profession. He knows it too, and he's jealous. I didn't have any more leads at the moment so I went back to my office for a Scotch and soda and think things over.

KID THUG

(whispering)

Yo, man, what you calling me for? You gonna to blow my cover. No, I don't turn my cell off. My ladies might call. Yes, the dude be right here yappin' to the folks. No, he ain't got no book.

Irritated by the interruption, Sam finally acknowledges Kid Thug.

SAM

Excuse me, Eminem, but I'm doing a show here.

Kid Thug is startled that Sam is talking to him. He looks around at the audience.

KID THUG

Gotta fly, G.

He hangs up and darts out of the room.

SAM

(to audience)

Don't mind him. He's been tailing me since Brigit Thursday came to visit. If he was a cop I'd have ditched him right off, but it's obvious he's working for someone else. I think I'll keep him around until I can find out who.

CAIRO

Whom?

Sam turns to see JOE CAIRO hiding in the shadows. He speaks with a whiny lisp and flaunts his homosexuality.

SAM

Pardon?

CAIRO

The correct word is whom.

SAM

Sorry. To whom do I have the honor?

CAIRO

I know you have the book. Give it to me.

SAM

Why don't you try asking nicely?

Cairo holds up a pistol.

CAIRO

Please?

SAM

Didn't your mother tell you it's not polite to point?

CAIRO

Either give me the book, or I'll tear your place apart looking for it.

SAM

The only book you'll find around here's got phone numbers in it.

CAIRO

Don't play dumb with me. I want the book Mrs. Thursday gave you.

SAM

Maybe I am dumb, but she never mentioned a book.

CAIRO

Where is it?

SAM

Search me.

CAIRO

That's a good idea.

He takes a few steps closer to Sam, and with lightning speed Sam knocks the gun out of his hand and socks him in the jaw. Cairo tumbles onto the floor.

Sam picks up the gun, and Cairo screams in terror.

CAIRO (cont'd)
Ahhh! Please don't shoot me.

SAM
Alright Pretty Boy Floyd, who are you?

CAIRO
My name is... Joe Cairo.

SAM
Who do you work for?

CAIRO
Nobody!

SAM
What's this precious book you're after?

CAIRO
You really don't know anything about it?

SAM
Educate me.

CAIRO
I shouldn't have opened my big mouth.

SAM
Well it's open, so keep it open.

CAIRO
I've made a mistake.

SAM
Make another.

CAIRO
I merely wanted the book that her husband stole from me.

SAM
Asking with a gun? It must be quite a book.

CAIRO
It has sentimental value.

SAM
Your mother read it to you as a baby?

CAIRO
I'll pay you to find it for me.

SAM
My docket's full at the moment.

CAIRO
I'll double what she is paying.

SAM
Forget it.

CAIRO
Triple?

SAM
No deals. I'm not interested in working for crooks.

CAIRO
Forgive me. I thought you were in cahoots with her. Surely you can listen to reason?

SAM
I'm listening, but I don't hear no reason.

CAIRO
If she didn't tell you, then she's using you.

SAM
I'll be the judge of that.

CAIRO
You can't trust her.

SAM
Can't trust you either. First thing is you're going to tell me all about this book.

Sam raises his fist and freezes. Cairo exits. Sam turns to the audience.

SAM (cont'd)
(to audience)
For a guy wearing pink socks, he was plenty tough. But he wasn't going to tell me a thing after that first slip up. Oh, he was talkative enough, but he never gave anything away. Half an hour later I sent him packing with nothing but a shiner. The only thing I learned was that I didn't know the whole story, so I called Brigit Thursday back to my office to get the real dope.

Brigit enters.

BRIGIT
It's late.

SAM
Is it? I don't keep regular hours.

BRIGIT

What have you found out?

SAM

Not a lot, except you're in more hot water than you think.

BRIGIT

What do you mean?

SAM

I thought you said your husband didn't have any enemies.

BRIGIT

I'm sorry. I wasn't exactly honest with you.

SAM

That's alright. I wasn't exactly believing everything you said.

BRIGIT

How did you know?

SAM

Maybe it's me, but nobody ever wants to tell me the truth.

BRIGIT

But you decided to help anyway?

SAM

For ten thousand dollars, I'll believe anything.

BRIGIT

Of course, the money.

SAM

Doesn't mean I can be bought off. If you'd actually pulled the wool over my eyes, I'd be throwing the money in your face right now.

BRIGIT

But it's okay because you knew I was lying?

SAM

That, and I do believe one thing - that you are innocent.

BRIGIT

Thank you. It's good to hear someone say that.

SAM

You put me at an awful disadvantage, though. Never do that again. Level with me so we can start finding out who really did kill your husband.

BRIGIT
Alright... my husband did have his enemies.

SAM
Like Joe Cairo?

BRIGIT
How did you know?

SAM
That's what you're paying me for, right?

BRIGIT
Worth every penny, apparently.

SAM
He paid me a visit earlier. Tried to get friendly with me, but he's not my type.

BRIGIT
Don't listen to him. He's a shady character who only thinks of money.

SAM
Like me?

BRIGIT
No, not like you. He wouldn't think twice about killing a man.

SAM
Or woman?

BRIGIT
Me?

SAM
Is that why you didn't tell the police? Was it blackmail?

BRIGIT
No, not exactly. He's... he's an old friend of mine. I thought if the police knew... they'd think I... I hired him to murder my...

SAM
You keep nice friends.

BRIGIT
I never said I was good, but at least I'm not a killer.

SAM
He was more interested in finding a book than anything else.

BRIGIT
A book?

SAM
He thought I had it.

BRIGIT
I don't know what that could be. My husband had hundreds of books, of course.

SAM
Then why come to me if he's a friend of yours?

BRIGIT
He's not a friend anymore.

SAM
Didn't seem like that would keep him from getting what he wants.

BRIGIT
He knows I wouldn't give him anything.

SAM
What about the late Mr. Thursday?

BRIGIT
They hated each other.

SAM
Maybe Thursday wouldn't give him what he wanted either, and that's why he's dead?

BRIGIT
I wouldn't put it past him.

SAM
Good. We can ask him all about it when he gets here.

BRIGIT
He's coming here?

SAM
I told him if he wanted the book to come back at midnight.

BRIGIT
I should go.

SAM
I figured the two of you could sort all of this out yourselves.

BRIGIT

He'll kill us, Sam.

SAM

I'm not too worried. I still have his gun.

BRIGIT

But you don't understand...

SAM

Maybe I could if you told me the truth.

BRIGIT

I did!

SAM

Cut the lies, sweetheart. Why was your husband killed? Who did it? What's all this about a book?

BRIGIT

Don't treat me like this, Sam.

SAM

What's with you and Cairo?

BRIGIT

We were... we were lovers.

SAM

You and Cairo! I don't think so.

BRIGIT

I'm sorry if you don't believe me. I fell in love, then found out that he was just using me.

SAM

Using you for what?

There's a knock on the door.

BRIGIT

Don't let him in, Sam.

Sam deliberately goes to the door.
Brigit slinks back into the shadows.

SAM

Come on in.

CAIRO

You have the book?

SAM

Patience. I've got an old friend that wants to see you.

Cairo sees Brigit and gets disgusted.

BRIGIT

Hello, Cairo.

CAIRO

What is she doing here?

SAM

Thought you two might kiss and make up.

CAIRO

You betrayed me. I'm leaving.

SAM

Without the book?

CAIRO

Where is it?

BRIGIT

That's all you care about, isn't it? You're nothing but trouble.

CAIRO

What have you told him?

BRIGIT

What have YOU told him?

CAIRO

I could tell him a few things about you?

BRIGIT

Go ahead. It doesn't matter now anyway.

SAM

So why don't the two of you both tell me about this book?

There's another knock on the door.

CAIRO

Who's that?

SAM

I don't know.

BRIGIT

It's late for visitors.

SAM

Stay here. Don't make a sound.

They hide in the shadows as Sam opens the door. He doesn't let Tom in.

TOM

Hey Sam, we gotta talk.

SAM

At this hour?

TOM

I'm looking for Thursday's wife.

SAM

What for?

TOM

We've got a witness said she killed her husband.

SAM

A week after the killing? Isn't that a bit odd?

TOM

Everything about this case is odd.

SAM

Who is it?

TOM

What's it to you?

SAM

Curiosity? I wanna know how good you boys are doing.

TOM

Curiosity killed the cat.

SAM

Don't worry. I've still got eight lives left.

TOM

Always land on your feet, don't you?

SAM

I thought we were on the same side?

TOM

I'm not so sure anymore.

SAM

After all we've been through?

TOM
You're asking for trouble, Sam.

SAM
I might have a name for you too.

TOM
What have you got?

SAM
You first.

TOM
Alright... her name's Danelle Carter. She was in the library and said she heard Thursday hit the ground and saw a woman flee the scene. Then she identified the wife's photo.

SAM
What took her so long to get a conscious?

TOM
I didn't ask.

SAM
You're slipping.

TOM
What have you got?

SAM
There's a kid that's been trailing me... One of those hip hop types. You know, bling bling bang bang. Might be outside right now.

TOM
He has something to do with the murder?

SAM
I don't know, but it's starting to look that way.

TOM
Want him off your tail?

SAM
Not just yet, but it might be good to know who he is, and let him know the law's watching.

TOM
That's easy enough.

SAM
Thanks, Tom.

TOM
So she's not here?

SAM
I don't usually entertain clients this time of night.

TOM
Now look who's slipping.

SAM
Ha, ha.

TOM
Mind if I look around?

SAM
Not at all... if you've got a warrant.

TOM
Aw, Sam, why do you have to make everything difficult?

SAM
I'm just playing by the rules.

TOM
What are you protecting her for?

SAM
Maybe for the same reason you're so quick to finger her.

TOM
You're living dangerously.

SAM
That's my prerogative, but if you don't mind I could use some shut eye.

Brigit and Cairo struggle off-stage.
They scream.

CAIRO
Ouch!

BRIGIT
Help!

TOM
Guess I'm going in?

SAM
I guess so.

Tom enters Sam's office.

TOM
If it isn't Thursday?

CAIRO
She hit me!

BRIGIT
He was trying to get away.

TOM
(to Cairo)
Who are you?

CAIRO
Well, I'm... I'm...

SAM
He's a new client of mine. An unrelated case. You don't need to bother with him.

TOM
Not unless you want to press charges for assault?

CAIRO
Charges? Assault? No, of course not!

TOM
I don't like what you're cooking up here, Sam.

SAM
Maybe it just needs a little more assault?

TOM
You think that's funny?

SAM
I'm grabbing at straws here.

Tom grabs Brigit by the arm and leads her out.

TOM
You're coming with me, lady.

BRIGIT
Sam?

SAM
Wait, Tom.
(to Brigit)
You know this Danelle Carter?

BRIGIT
Yes.

SAM
Who is she?

BRIGIT
My husband's lover.

SAM
Oh, so the book collector's more wild than I thought.

BRIGIT
But Sam--

SAM
I thought you were playing straight with me?

TOM
Let's go.

BRIGIT
Help me, Sam?

SAM
No, you got yourself into this one.

Tom takes her out of the room.

CAIRO
I guess this means you don't have the book?

SAM
It means I don't have a client. Sorry, Cairo, but you'll have to find this book, whatever it is, on your own.

CAIRO
May I have my gun back?

Sam takes the gun from under his coat and hands it to him.

SAM
Here you go, but be careful you don't get hurt.

Cairo points the gun at Sam.

CAIRO
Now if you don't mind I'm going to search your place.

Sam laughs.

SAM

Alright, Cairo, look all you want.

Cairo exits.

SAM (cont'd)

(to audience)

Cairo politely ransacked my office to no avail, apologized, and left. Lucky for me he didn't hold a grudge for that shiner. It was two in the morning when he was done so I took a nap on the couch and then headed over at sunrise to meet this Danelle Carter. I caught her heading out the door, and she wasn't too excited to see me.

DANELLE is low class but decent. She might even be beautiful if she had any taste and made a little effort.

DANELLE

Who are you?

SAM

My name's Sam Spade. I'm trying to keep Brigit Thursday out of prison.

DANELLE

That's where she belongs.

SAM

What'd she do to you?

DANELLE

How did you find out about me? Are you a cop?

SAM

Never mind how I know, but I know you didn't see Brigit Thursday kill her husband, did you?

DANELLE

Of course I did. That's what I told the police.

SAM

It's a nice fat lie.

DANELLE

What makes you think so?

SAM

I know you just want this book too.

DANELLE

Book? I don't know what you're talking about.

SAM

Play dumb all you want, but you're going straight down to the police station and telling the truth.

DANELLE

And what is the truth?

SAM

That Thursday was your lover and you were looking for any excuse to put his wife behind bars.

DANELLE

That's your expert opinion?

SAM

I know how love goes when it goes bad.

DANELLE

She never loved him.

SAM

I'm not saying she did.

DANELLE

She only loved his money.

SAM

Everybody loves money. That's why Thursday was whacked.

DANELLE

Show some respect, will ya?

SAM

Now you're going to tell me you loved him truly.

DANELLE

I did. So what of it?

SAM

Maybe you loved him more than he loved you?

DANELLE

I don't like where you're going.

SAM

You're going there, not me.

DANELLE

He loved me, alright, and I loved him. He was kind, and gentle, and polite - unlike some guys I know - and he was going to take me away from here so we could be happy together. I know he loved me.

SAM

Why'd you wait a whole week to go to the cops?

DANELLE

What to you mean?

SAM

Seems strange to see a murder and then dilly dally about telling anyone.

DANELLE

Well I... I wasn't sure what had happened... and then I saw it on the news.

SAM

I think after the police let Brigit Thursday go you saw a chance to get revenge on her for not giving her husband a divorce. He loved you but you couldn't get him away from her.

DANELLE

I didn't kill him, if that's where you're leading.

SAM

Normally I'd think so, but this time there's just too many other queer things going on for it to be that easy.

DANELLE

Who are you anyway? What makes you so nosy?

SAM

I'm the guy who's going to find Thursday's killer. The police will take the first person they can nab, but if you play square with me I'll make sure the real killer goes to jail.

DANELLE

Honest?

SAM

Scout's honor, not that I was ever a scout.

DANELLE

I wasn't sure I could go through with it anyway. I was upset... and I thought it would help... but it just made me feel worse.

SAM

You'll go to the police and do as I say?

DANELLE

Alright.

Sam takes a card from his jacket.

SAM

Here's my card. If you think of anything else you didn't tell the police, let me know first, okay?

DANELLE

I will.

SAM

(to audience)

She hustled downtown as quick as she could to spring Brigit from jail. I headed back to the office to clean things up after Cairo's scavenger hunt, only to find that my tail was ahead of me. He didn't waste much time with pleasantries.

Kid Thug is waiting for Sam to return.

KID THUG

Yo, private dick. Boss says you're going with me.

SAM

Oh, I didn't know I was taking orders.

KID THUG

I take orders from the fat man. You take orders from Smith and Wesson.

Kid Thug aims two pistols at Sam.

SAM

Which one's Smith and which one's Wesson?

KID THUG

Huh?

SAM

I guess the extra heater's in case you miss.

KID THUG

What's a heater?

SAM

Look, if you aren't going to laugh at my jokes, I'll stop trying to be funny.

KID THUG

I don't see anything funny here.

SAM

How about this?

He disarms Kid Thug.

KID THUG

Yo, yo, yo, homie. Be cool.

SAM

Like taking candy from a baby.

KID THUG

Don't shoot me, bro. I'm too young to die!

SAM

Can it. I'm not going to kill you.

KID THUG

Honest to God, I'm just doing my job.

SAM

Do your job then. Let's go see the fat man.

KID THUG

Like this, man? That will ruin my cred.

SAM

Obviously your cred's not worth very much.

KID THUG

C'mon, give a dude his dignity.

SAM

I've had all the dignity from you I'm going to take.

KID THUG

Be righteous man.

SAM

Let's go.

GUTMAN is massive, but carries himself with high-class dignity. His clipped British accent and stylish clothes obscure the sinister mind underneath.

GUTMAN

Come in, Mr. Spade.

SAM

I found this kid playing in the street. Said he belonged to you.

GUTMAN

This little ruffian is my home boy. He goes by the name of Kid Thug.

SAM

Cute. Unfortunately I had to take away his toys. Too dangerous.

KID THUG

The man tricked me, G. He snuck up on me.

GUTMAN

Don't embarrass yourself any further. Bring our guest here something to drink.

SAM

Don't bother.

GUTMAN

These cocksure youth just aren't the same as when I got started.

SAM

I take it you're looking for this book too? Well, I don't have it.

GUTMAN

I didn't think you did, but you may be able to help me find it.

SAM

I don't even know what it is.

GUTMAN

Mrs. Thursday didn't tell you?

SAM

She only tells me what I need to know.

GUTMAN

Of course she does. Please, have a seat. There's no reason we can't be pleasant. Are you sure you don't want a drink?

SAM

Just tell me what you know.

GUTMAN

All business, Mr. Spade? Alright, I'll cut straight to the chase. Have you heard of "The Maltese Falcon"?

SAM

It's an old movie, right? Humphrey Bogart?

GUTMAN

Yes, but before that it was a novel by Dashiell Hammett. Have you heard of him?

SAM

Sorry, I don't read much.

GUTMAN

How unfortunate for you. There's a character in that story that you could readily identify with.

SAM

Look, I'm all for literature, but what's this got to do with Thursday?

GUTMAN

Everything. You know that Thursday was a book collector, right?

SAM

Yes.

GUTMAN

We'll I'm a collector too, of sorts.

SAM

Cookbooks?

GUTMAN

Oh, you can be wittier than that, Mr. Spade. No, I collect anything that's valuable. Anything that will fetch me a nice bid on eBay.

SAM

Books are worth that much?

GUTMAN

You have no idea, Mr. Spade. Do you know why Thursday was in the library? He was looking for a copy of Hammett's "Maltese Falcon". Not just any copy, of course, but an especially rare first edition, signed by the author, that just happened to find itself donated to the Friends of the Library book sale by a clueless old woman that inherited it from her uncle, who happened to be an good friend of Hammett's.

SAM

How can some old book be worth a man's life?

GUTMAN

Would half a million dollars raise an eyebrow?

SAM

Might.

GUTMAN

It may be worth even more.

SAM

Alright, so it's worth a man's life.

GUTMAN

Maybe a few men's lives.

SAM

And somebody wanted the book more than Thursday. Right now I can think of one person that could be.

GUTMAN

Who?

SAM

Cookbook collector.

GUTMAN

Ha! Me, of course, but unfortunately, I did not kill Thursday, and I did not get the book. I wish it were all that simple.

SAM

I wasn't thinking of you specifically.

GUTMAN

Home boy? No.

SAM

So who did?

GUTMAN

Isn't that what you're supposed to find out? I would very much like to know myself.

SAM

I'll bet you would. How long have you known Mr. Thursday?

GUTMAN

We've both been after this book for a great many years. You could say he was my arch-enemy. I'm almost sorry to have lost the competition. It would have made gloating over the prize that much more satisfying.

SAM

I'm sorry you're disappointed, but now that I know all about this book, what's to keep me from hunting it down and selling it myself?

GUTMAN

If anything, you're a reasonable and sensible man. I know that you will accept an exceedingly generous offer from me, and avoid any sort of... peril.

SAM

If you're referring to that gilded punk, you're not scaring me away.

GUTMAN

Trust me, Mr. Spade. If I knew you had the book, you would not have it for very long.

SAM

I'll find the killer, but I won't help you find the book.

GUTMAN

I just want you to be aware of whom its rightful owner is.

SAM

Doesn't it belong to the library?

GUTMAN

I donate generously to Friends of the Library each year. I don't think they'll mind too much if I take one book.

SAM

That's up to you and the librarian.

GUTMAN

As long as you don't get in my way, Mr. Spade. Good day to you. Come along Kid Thug. It's time to reassess your responsibilities.

KID THUG

Reass what?

Gutman and Kid Thug exit.

SAM

(to audience)

Gutman's threat was the first thing I believed from anyone all week. I'd stumbled into something bigger than I could get my hands around, and now it was time to bail before I ended up in the big house or the grave. I needed to sort things out for a bit, so I dropped into Lamar's for a cup of joe and mulled over the past day with a dunker. Might be a good idea if the rest of you took a break and did the same. Maybe when you get back up to speed, I'll tell you how the story ends.

Sam exits.

Intermission.

ACT TWO.

Sam enters the stage just like in the first act and addresses the audience.

SAM

(to audience)

Everyone remember where we left off? Let me refresh your memory real quick. A man named Thursday was killed in the public library for some rare copy of the Maltese Falcon that wound up in the book sale. The cops were quick to nab Thursday's wife, but she hired me to find the real killer, which could be any number of colorful, unsavory characters that knew about the book. Just when I thought I was getting somewhere, I find out the husband's got a lover that's pinned the whole thing on the wife and now the cops have put my client behind bars. Meanwhile I'm getting death threats from Winston Churchill and his snoop dog, and a guy that smells like petunias is rearranging the furniture. With me so far? If so then please explain it to me because I'm about to turn myself in for the murder just to make my job easier. Luckily the lover did what I asked and Brigit Thursday was out of jail that afternoon. Tom brought her over to me, and now I just needed to find a way to clean up this whole mess.

Tom shows up with Brigit.

TOM

I don't know how you did it, but your "client" is off the hook - for now.

Brigit hugs Sam.

BRIGIT

Thank you, Sam.

TOM

So what kind of promises did you make to that Carter dame?

SAM

I just told her the truth - that listening to me was her only hope for real justice.

TOM

Right, and she believed you?

SAM

Apparently.

TOM

You're good, Sam, I'll give you that much. I don't know how you do it. Keep the lady safe.

Tom starts to leave, then remembers something.

TOM (cont'd)

Oh, I've got an ID on that punk that's been tailing you.

SAM

Who is he?

TOM

His name is Marion Jordon.

SAM

Alias Kid Thug.

TOM

Ex-gang member - he's wanted for armed robbery and murder.

SAM

Thanks Tom.

TOM

Should I take him in?

SAM

Not until I say so.

TOM

I can't leave him on the street.

SAM

You arrest him now and you'll never get the big man. Don't worry, he's not going anywhere.

TOM

He'd better not, Sam. If he gets away you're going to pay.

SAM

I know what I'm doing.

TOM

Me too. You're playing with fire.

Tom leaves.

BRIGIT

Sam, you're risking too much.

SAM

Relax, doll. Tom doesn't like it when I solve his cases for him, even though he always takes the kudos.

BRIGIT

I'm afraid you'll get in trouble.

SAM

Leave the police to me.

BRIGIT

He wasn't very happy to let me out.

SAM

Why not? He thinks you killed your husband.

BRIGIT

Oh Sam, you've got to convince him I didn't do it. He'll believe you. I can't tell you how frightened I was spending the night in jail. I couldn't do that again. It was so cold and terrible. I didn't sleep at all.

Sam takes her in his arms and comforts her.

SAM

I'm sorry, baby.

BRIGIT

I don't know what I'd do without you.

She kisses him just as Danelle enters.

DANELLE

So that's your game, is it?

SAM

Miss Carter.

DANELLE

Her husband's not even cold yet.

SAM

It's not what you think.

DANELLE

I think I know Mrs. Brigit Thursday.

SAM

I owe you a thanks.

DANELLE

Forget it. I don't want you owing me a thing.

BRIGIT

But I do. Thank you. I know how you felt about my husband.

DANELLE

And you know how I feel about you.

BRIGIT

I know. I can't change that. All I can say is, I don't hate you. He loved you and I didn't love him, and I see now that I was holding him back. I'm sorry.

DANELLE

I don't know what kind of game you're playing. You said you'd put the killer behind bars.

SAM

I will as soon as I find out who it was.

DANELLE

It was her, I tell you.

BRIGIT

You're wrong.

DANELLE

Even your husband didn't trust you. He told me so.

BRIGIT

You're a liar!

DANELLE

He told me all sorts of things about you.

BRIGIT

You scum!

Brigit grabs her and they fight. Sam seems amused by it and takes his time breaking them up.

SAM

Alright, ladies. Let's keep our tempers in check.

DANELLE

I can't believe he's dead.

Danelle starts to cry.

BRIGIT

I wish I had never set foot in that library.

SAM

The library! Of course. Why didn't I see it?

BRIGIT

What?

SAM
(to Danelle)
Have you heard of the Maltese Falcon?

DANELLE
So that's it? You're another one of those book collectors?

SAM
What do you mean another one?

DANELLE
There was man came to my house talking about the same book.

SAM
What'd he look like?

DANELLE
I don't know. Short guy, kinda light in the loafers. Had a black eye.

BRIGIT
Cairo?

SAM
So you've heard of the book?

DANELLE
Of course, I just got done reading it. Well, I didn't actually finished. I got bored and just watched the movie.

SAM
Did you give the book to him?

DANELLE
No, I don't have it.

SAM
Where it is?

DANELLE
I returned it to the library.

SAM
Thanks! You two can stay here and work things out between you. I'm heading over to the library. Be right back.

He turns to leave.

DANELLE
What's all this about, anyway? Why does everybody want this book?

SAM

It's the Big Read. Can't find a copy anywhere.

DANELLE

The Big Read?

SAM

And if anybody else asks about the Maltese Falcon, you've never heard of it, understand?

DANELLE

Why should I trust you? You're working for her.

SAM

If you cared at all about Thursday, you'll want to see whoever killed him behind bars. I know you both want the same thing.

BRIGIT

But, Sam...

SAM

Don't worry, sweetheart. I think I'm onto something.

BRIGIT

Be careful.

Brigit and Danelle exit.

SAM

(to audience)

Suddenly the pieces of the puzzle were starting to fit together. Thursday knew where the book was all along, and gave it to his clueless lover to keep it safe. She didn't know what she had. I high-tailed it back to the library, and crossed my fingers that it wasn't too late.

Sam goes to the bookshelves, digging through the books. He finds the Maltese Falcon. He takes it out, looks it over, and opens the cover.

He reads something inside and smiles.

Kid Thug sneaks up behind him, grabs a hardbound book, and raises it to hit Sam over the head.

He freezes with the book in the air.

Sam sets the Maltese Falcon on the shelf and Kid Thugs disappears.

SAM (cont'd)

(to audience)

That was the last thing I remembered. I got careless because of the book and was blindsided. I didn't even know who hit me. When I came to, I figured out I'd been dumped in the stacks. Luckily nobody ever goes back there so everything was quiet and normal. I stumbled out just in time to see Cairo looking for the book.

Cairo searches frantically through the shelves for the book, and gives up in exasperation.

He spots it sitting on the shelf. He grabs it hungrily and whips the cover open. There's a greedy gleam in his eye as he closes the book and turns to see Sam waiting for him.

CAIRO

You!

SAM

It's my turn to ask for the book.

Cairo reaches for his pistol.

CAIRO

You can't have it.

SAM

Don't try to scare me with that pop gun. You know I can take it away if I want.

Sam advances on Cairo, scaring him.

CAIRO

Stay away from me!

SAM

Give me the book!

Sam grabs the book and pushes Cairo away.

SAM (cont'd)

It's mine.

Gutman enters with Kid Thug, taking Sam by surprise.

GUTMAN

I didn't think you would get so greedy, Mr. Spade.

Kid Thug aims both pistols.

SAM

Looks like I'm caught in a crossfire.

Gutman approaches Sam with confidence.
He's also carrying a book.

CAIRO

What is that book?

GUTMAN

What? This? Oh, apparently next time I need to at least find an errand boy who can read. He was supposed to grab the Falcon, but picked up A Million Little Pieces instead.

SAM

You keep waving those irons around the library, someone's bound to call the cops.

GUTMAN

Lucky for us interest in classic fiction just isn't what it used to be. Now, give me the book, Mr. Spade.

SAM

Hold on just a minute.

GUTMAN

No stalling! This is one of those moments when emotions are liable to cloud our judgment. I'd like it if that didn't happen. Just hand it to me. No excuses, no banter, and no bad jokes.

Sam hesitates - should he dare a quip or is Gutman really serious? After a moment, he holds the book out for Gutman.

Brigit sneaks into the room and puts a gun to Kid Thug's head.

BRIGIT

Don't give it to him Sam.

SAM

Hello, doll. Good to see you.

BRIGIT

Put the guns down.

KID THUG

Yo, yo, be cool, lady.

Sam takes the guns from him.

BRIGIT

When I got here I saw Cairo and I hid and watched.

SAM

Good job baby.

BRIGIT

Then I called Tom when Gutman showed up. He said he'd come right over.

SAM

You shouldn't have done that.

BRIGIT

He had you at gunpoint.

SAM

This book is far more trouble than it's worth. Alright, since I don't have much time, I want to know who killed Thursday.

CAIRO

Who cares about Thursday?

SAM

That's what I was hired for. So who did it?

They all look at each other, waiting
for a confession that never comes.

SAM (cont'd)

Nobody? That's alright. I think I've learned enough so far to start talking to the police, right Cairo?

CAIRO

Me? I didn't do it.

SAM

You were ready to kill me to get the book. Why not Thursday?

CAIRO

I didn't even know about the library.

SAM

Thursday hated you for taking advantage of his wife. You only did it to get the book, but he wouldn't give it to you - not for any amount of money.

CAIRO

Lies!

SAM

So you followed him to the library and thought he had the book. He wouldn't bargain with you, and that's when you did him in.

CAIRO

That's quite a story.

SAM

But he didn't have the book. He loaned it to his lover. You tried to get it, but I beat you to it.

GUTMAN

Come on, Mr. Spade. Even I don't believe Mr. Cairo has the wherewithal to kill anyone, even for the Maltese Falcon. I doubt he has the strength to even lift the murder weapon, let alone hit Thursday on the head. Thursday was a good half meter taller than him.

SAM

Alright, what about MC Hammer over here?

GUTMAN

I already told you he didn't do it.

SAM

Maybe he didn't kill Thursday, but I'm sure he's killed someone. Right?

KID THUG

You're asking for trouble, dawg. I will bust yo' face.

SAM

If it's not one crime it's another - it's best to just get the scum off the street.

GUTMAN

Are you suggesting he take the fall?

SAM

Doesn't matter to me one way or the other.

GUTMAN

And the police will believe you?

SAM

Of course, if we all tell the same story. They'd like to see this over with more than I would.

GUTMAN

That's rather dishonest of you.

SAM

What do you think, doll? Hip hop killed your husband and my work is done?

BRIGIT

If you say so, Sam.

SAM

I say so.

Kid Thug grabs Brigit's gun and holds her hostage.

KID THUG

I ain't serving time for no stupid book.

SAM

Let her go.

KID THUG

I'm just gonna beat it, and I'm taking Miss Weekday with me.

GUTMAN

Marion, don't make this any worse for yourself.

He backs her up to the door and then his cell phone rings.

KID THUG

(to phone)

Yo, baby, wassup? This is a bad time... I'm at the library... so what if I can't read... No, I'm not with another woman...

Tom enters and puts a gun in Kid Thug's back.

TOM

Alright, Kid Thug. Drop the gun and let her go.

KID THUG

I loves you too, sweetie. Hang it!

He hangs up and drops the gun. Tom handcuffs him.

Brigit rushes to Sam's arms.

SAM

He's the one that killed Thursday.

TOM

Is that so?

BRIGIT

Yes.

CAIRO

He just confessed to all of us.

KID THUG

Boss man! Tell the pigs they're all lying.

GUTMAN

I'm sorry, home boy, but soon I'll have the resources to hire the finest lawyers in the country. You won't be in jail long. Consider it a noble sacrifice.

TOM

Let's go.

KID THUG

I'll remember you, Spade. I'll get you.

Tom takes Kid Thug away.

SAM

Sorry about your stooge.

GUTMAN

Next time I'll hire someone who's literate. Now, about that book?

SAM

That's between you and Cairo.

GUTMAN

Why don't you just hand the book over now and avoid any difficulty?

CAIRO

The book is mine. I found it first.

SAM

Seems like the two of you could share and share alike.

GUTMAN

Share? With him?

SAM

Just an idea.

Cairo draws his pistol and aims at Sam.

CAIRO

You'll give it to me. Now.

SAM

Looks like Cairo is winning.

GUTMAN

Put that away.

CAIRO

Stay back! You forget that I worked with Thursday for years to find this book. Long before you knew anything about it. It's mine.

GUTMAN

That doesn't mean anything. None of you would have found it without my help.

CAIRO

Give me the book, Mr. Spade.

Sam takes the book to Cairo.

GUTMAN

Don't you dare give it to him.

SAM

I'm afraid bullets speak louder than words.

GUTMAN

But couldn't I... couldn't I just look at it? At least give me some satisfaction. All I've dreamed about is seeing that book.

Sam looks at Cairo. Cairo nods, and Sam takes the book to Gutman. Cairo follows, raising his pistol.

CAIRO

No funny business.

Gutman takes the book in his hands, handling it like a precious artifact.

GUTMAN

At last!

He opens the book to read the signature. He looks shocked at first, then slowly a long, deep laugh overtakes him.

CAIRO

What is it?

Gutman hands Cairo the book.

GUTMAN

Here's your book. Enjoy the riches.

CAIRO

Why are you laughing?

GUTMAN

Because that's not Hammett's signature.

CAIRO

What?

Cairo whips open the book and looks at the signature, unconvinced.

CAIRO (cont'd)

It's right here!

GUTMAN

It's mine.

CAIRO

Yours?

GUTMAN

Don't you remember? Toronto? The forgery? We almost fooled Thursday with it.

CAIRO

This is that same book?

Gutman nods. Cairo looks at the signature again, anger building up inside him. He throws the book to the floor and steps on it.

Gutman chuckles.

GUTMAN

I thank you, Mr. Spade, for all your trouble.

SAM

So now what?

GUTMAN

The search continues. Back to Canada. What else can I do?

SAM

And Kid Thug?

GUTMAN

Oh yes, the poor boy. I'm sure a little jail time will be good for him.

He heads for the exit, then stops and looks back to Cairo.

GUTMAN (cont'd)

Are you coming, Mr. Cairo?

CAIRO

What?

GUTMAN

I need a new partner in crime, and at the very least you are literate.

CAIRO

Canada?

GUTMAN

Do you want the book or not?

Cairo considers a moment, then shoves his pistol into his pocket and follows Gutman.

CAIRO

My apologies, Mr. Spade.

SAM

And I'm sorry for that shiner.

Cairo touches his black eye.

CAIRO

Oh. That's quite alright.

GUTMAN

Of course, Mr. Spade, if you're looking for a little adventure?

SAM

And give up a thriving business?

GUTMAN

Suit yourself.

They head for the exit, stopping only to say a few words to Brigit.

GUTMAN (cont'd)

I'm sorry about your husband, Mrs. Thursday. He was a courageous man.

BRIGIT

Joe?

Cairo glares at her, then back at Sam.

CAIRO

You have your prize.

He storms off after Gutman.

Sam and Brigit are alone.

SAM

Looks like things are just about wrapped up. There's just one question left unanswered?

BRIGIT

What's that?

SAM

Why did you kill Thursday?

BRIGIT

What are you talking about?

SAM

Don't play dumb with me. I know it was you.

BRIGIT

How could you think that?

SAM

You weren't the only one with a motive. If the cops looked any further than their toes they could have figured that out, but you were the one that did him in.

BRIGIT

That's a lie.

SAM

Lie! You've been lying to me from the start. Now you're going to tell me the truth.

He grabs her and shakes her. She squirms in pain.

BRIGIT

Sam!

SAM

Admit it! You killed your husband.

BRIGIT

Alright, I killed him.

SAM

You found out he was having an affair, then you followed him to the library and while he was alone looking for the Maltese Falcon, you clobbered him.

BRIGIT

Something like that.

SAM

And when things got too hot for you, you came running to me. You thought I would protect you from the police, and I was stupid enough to do it.

BRIGIT

When did you figure it out?

SAM

When you let that Kid Thug take the rap. You didn't care who got sent up for killing your husband, as long as it wasn't you.

BRIGIT

You're right, I don't care.

SAM

The only thing I don't know is why.

BRIGIT

It was love.

SAM

Love? You didn't love Thursday.

BRIGIT

But I couldn't let someone else love him either.

SAM

I don't buy that.

BRIGIT

Maybe there's some things about love you still don't understand?

SAM

Not likely.

BRIGIT

You know that people will do anything for love. Anything!

SAM

I stopped being surprised long ago.

BRIGIT

The real truth is I love you, Sam. I'd do anything for you. And I know you couldn't send me to jail because... because you love me too, don't you?

SAM

Love? I don't know.

BRIGIT

I know you do. You've denied love for so long, you don't even know what it feels like anymore.

She moves in on him, ready to kiss.

SAM

Maybe you're right.

BRIGIT

You don't have to give me up? You don't want to, Sam.

SAM

It's not that I don't like you, doll.

BRIGIT

Then what is it?

SAM

You killed a man. Killed him for love. I'll never be able to trust you. It'll never work.

BRIGIT

But, Sam--

SAM

I'm sorry. That's the way it is. Now, let's head down to the station so I can get straight with Tom.

BRIGIT

But, Sam... I have the book.

SAM

What?

BRIGIT

I got to the library before he did. I found the book and switched it with the one Gutman signed. He caught me. He was going to take the money and give it to that Carter woman. They were going to run off together. That's why I killed him.

SAM

You've had it all this time?

BRIGIT

Yes.

SAM

Where is it?

BRIGIT

In a safe place.

SAM

Then why all the run around?

BRIGIT

Cairo was after me. Gutman was after me. The police. I didn't know where to turn.

SAM

So you turned to me?

BRIGIT

We could share it, Sam. You and me. And all you'd have to do is not tell the police.

SAM

Sounds like a nice dream, doll face, but it's not that easy. You'll just have to wait and spend the money when you get out of jail. Every dollar I earn is honest.

BRIGIT

I counted on you to be crooked. You might be the only person in this crazy world that isn't.

SAM

Keeps me out of trouble.

BRIGIT

That was my mistake.

SAM

And now it's all over. Let's go.

He shows her out, then turns to the audience one last time.

SAM (cont'd)

(to audience)

Brigit resigned herself that she wasn't going to get away with this one. The judge gave her ten years, and all things considered she seemed to take it pretty well. After the trial I decided to do a little light reading and checked out a copy of *The Maltese Falcon*. Gutman was right; that Sam Spade character was a little like me. Maybe too much. I'm sure there's a few of you here that haven't read the book yet.

(MORE)

SAM (cont'd)

I recommend you do, and don't try skipping it and just watching the movie. That's cheating. Now what do you say I bring everyone back out for a curtain call...

CURTAIN.