

# JUST DESSERTS

*An Audience Participation Mystery*

by

Craig Sodaro

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**STORY OF THE PLAY**

Here's an hour-long audience participation mystery that's great fun for dinner theatre. Judge Reginald P. Cogsworth, a curmudgeon who hates sweets, is judging a charity bakeoff, albeit grudgingly. Countless entries have been whittled down to three -- a raspberry tart submitted by Lucy "Scooter" Bright, owner of a nail salon; a cake from a Depression-era recipe baked by Edna Mae Carter, the local librarian; and a rich chocolate torte created by Margaret Mason, a local society lady.

In the middle of tasting all the goodies, sour Judge Cogsworth drops dead, and it's up to Miss Peabody, head of the contest, and the audience to determine the murderer. There are clues in the theatre, some hidden and some quite obvious, to help. The audience also gets to question the three contestants, all of whom had some unhappy dealings with the judge in the past.

Practically no set and very few props are needed. Sell your own desserts during intermission or after the show to make one sweet evening.

**Characters**

**1 m, 4 w**

JUDGE REGINALD P. COGSWORTH

...a grouchy old jurist.

EDNA MAE CARTER

...the frosty local librarian.

LUCY "SCOOTER" BRIGHT

...a sprightly Southern belle.

MARGARET MASON

...the richest lady in town.

MISS PEABODY

...a retired teacher, head of contest.

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### **The Scene**

The play takes place in an auditorium, hall, or restaurant. On the stage or at the head of the room stands a table big enough for three desserts. A sign at the entrance to the playing area reads "Local Charity Bake-Off Today Featuring our Town's Finest Chefs' Greatest Creations." The time and place of the performance can be added.

### **Clues**

Prior to the performance, the letter from Judge Cogsworth should be taped under one of the chairs in the playing area. Also, the clues described at the end of the first scene should be either in place or have been left by the characters at the appropriate times.

As each audience member enters, he or she is given a program which has space to make notes. Be sure to supply small pencils. If this is a dinner theater presentation, the program and pencils can be placed at the tables.

### **Props**

In addition to the clues, these props will be needed:

- coats for Judge and three contestants
- waste can near stage
- desserts for the three contestants
- a small bottle of liquid for Edna Mae
- chef's hat, apron, clipboard and pen for Judge
- forks and napkins on judging table
- folding chairs for the three contestants
- handkerchief for Edna Mae

### **SFX (Optional)**

- Sound of storm and howling winds
- Police sirens

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**Director's Notes**

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**Scene 1**

*(As the AUDIENCE enters, MISS PEABODY, head of the Charity Bake-Off, greets guests and suggests where they can sit. Just as the last one is seated, EDNA MAE CARTER enters from stage or front. She wears her coat. She sets her dessert on the table, then moves into audience along one side where a chair or two sit vacant. She places her coat over the chair. She notices she still holds a book. She tucks the book into the folds of her coat. She then pulls a bundle of letters from her coat pocket and tosses them into a wastebasket near the stage. She exits the way she entered. A beat later, MISS PEABODY reappears at rear of theatre, looks around nervously.)*

PEABODY: Oh, dear, it's just about time...has anyone seen the judge? Judge Reginald P. Cogsworth? *(PEABODY specifically moves to audience members.)* You know the judge, don't you? He's been our district judge for over twenty years. Any idea why he'd be so late? I just don't think I should have let the committee talk me into having the judge judge our bake-off. I mean, I'm sure he's impartial and so on, but he isn't the most pleasant person around. I mean, have you ever been to court, ma'am? Why, you know he just bites the head off the clerk and the recorder and anyone around. Not to mention what he does with the defense attorneys! I think it all began just after he was appointed to the bench. Why...as I recall, he had a small dog, a poodle. He loved that dog more than life itself, though for the life of me, I can't imagine why. Foo-Foo was her name, and honestly, he had her hair dyed pink.

*(JUDGE enters at rear of room.)*

JUDGE: Where's that Peabody woman?!

PEABODY: Why, Judge! You've made it!

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JUDGE: No thanks to the weather! It's snowing cops and robbers out there. *(Taking off his overcoat.)*

PEABODY: We were getting worried. The bake-off was due to start five minutes ago.

JUDGE: Hang the bake-off!

PEABODY: Now, Judge Cogsworth, remember, this is for charity.

JUDGE: Charity begins at home, and that's where I belong. Got a backlog of cases I ought to be working on right now.

PEABODY: Nonsense! It'll do you good to get out and mingle. Relax a bit.

JUDGE: Mighty easy for a retired teacher to say.

PEABODY: You could retire any time you like. I'm sure everyone in town would celebrate. Oh! I didn't really mean it quite like that, but --

JUDGE: Oh, you meant it like that, and I'm sure you WOULD all celebrate. All the crooks and thieves would be REAL glad to get me off the bench. Sure, replace the hangin' judge with one who'll watch out for criminal rights. But I'm gonna stay on that bench 'til my last breath, sending the vermin of society to their just dessert!

PEABODY: Speaking of desserts, why don't you come up here...

JUDGE: I don't know why I'm doing this! I HATE sweets.

PEABODY: Why doesn't that surprise me?

*(PEABODY moves JUDGE to the front of the room.)*

JUDGE: *(As HE follows PEABODY.)* Sweets don't do anything but rot the teeth...and they do something funny to the blood. They take away our natural aggression. What's a human animal without aggression? I say eat meat, lots of it. The redder the better! Keeps you on your toes. Keeps you watching!

PEABODY: Well, we certainly are thrilled, then, that you have agreed to bend a few of your personal nutrition rules to be with us today.

JUDGE: Bah! You don't give a hang about what I do or don't eat, Miss Peabody, and you know it. You're nothing but a nosy busybody who runs these events so you feel like you're doing

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something useful with the precious little time you've got left on this world.

PEABODY: The money raised tonight will help those less fortunate than ourselves, Judge Cogsworth.

JUDGE: The only reason they're less fortunate than me is that they didn't work their tails off to get anyplace.

PEABODY: You don't really believe that, do you?

JUDGE: No! I just said it to hear myself talk. Of COURSE I believe it! With all my heart. There's no one in this country who isn't poor because of his own account. There are PLENTY of jobs. On the way here I saw signs up in two fast-food places that said, "Help Wanted, \$5.00 an hour." Now you can't tell me that anybody who wanted to work couldn't get a job.

PEABODY: But, Judge --

JUDGE: I don't want to listen to any bleeding-heart liberal nonsense from you, Miss Peabody. I'm sure you ruined enough kids expounding your philosophies in front of the classroom over the years.

PEABODY: I always tried to present both sides.

JUDGE: That's the PROBLEM! There AREN'T two sides in this issue, woman. People need to get off their butts, get out there, and work, work, work! That's the only way to achieve any kind of satisfaction.

PEABODY: But what about those who can't?

JUDGE: There aren't any who can't! You remember Billy Joe Rattstettler?

PEABODY: I don't think I had the pleasure.

JUDGE: Good boy. Came from a big family. That's the only kind, you know. Lots of kids to help with the chores. Anyway, Billy Joe wanted to be a jet pilot. Ever since he was a little kid, he'd look up at planes flying overhead and say, "That's what I want to do!"

PEABODY: So he worked hard and now he runs United Airlines.

JUDGE: Wrong. I forgot to mention that Billy Joe wasn't the brightest star in the heavens. In fact, it was a good day when he had two brain cells clicking. But he didn't give up. He managed to get a job at Jet Burgers. Remember that place?

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PEABODY: It was closed down by the FDA or something.

JUDGE: That came later. Billy Joe got to wear a pilot's uniform at work and he was prouder than a peacock during mating season. Anyway, one day he was making french fries when some of the grease splashed up and got him in the eye. Lost all the vision in his left and half his vision in his right eye.

PEABODY: How terrible!

JUDGE: That's the point! Billy Joe could have gone on public dole and collected disability or some such charity. But it wasn't charity Billy Joe wanted. He still wanted to fly!

PEABODY: But he couldn't see!

JUDGE: Can't keep a good man down. That boy, why, I'll remember it 'til the day I die, he went out and invented the Pilot Pillow. It's a stuffed pillow you take on an airplane. Got this little velcro doohicky that hooks it right to the seat. And Billy Joe stuffs everyone of those babies. It's his company and he's made thousands! Best part: he gets to fly whenever he wants to in order to keep those orders comin' in!

PEABODY: That's most enlightening, Judge Cogsworth.

JUDGE: 'Course it is! But it's not a pretty story for bleeding-heart liberals, is it?

PEABODY: Perhaps we ought to get on with the contest?

JUDGE: What do I have to do?

PEABODY: Well, we had forty-one entries in the contest, which I think is wonderful! Let's have a hand for all of those who entered the contest because many of you are out there in the audience tonight. Congratulations! *(PEABODY leads audience in a round of applause.)* Such wonderful desserts. I gained several pounds just screening the recipes.

JUDGE: Yeah, well, big surprise.

PEABODY: Our procedure was to read every recipe and then decide whether or not it could be easily made in any kitchen. That eliminated several recipes. Mr. Allen, your recipe for monkey bread called for one orangutang, which we didn't feel was easily purchased at our local grocery stores. And Mrs. Ellinshaw, I believe your recipe for Navajo bread required an outdoor adobe oven. Since we don't have any of those in town, we decided we couldn't use yours, delicious though it