

MIND OVER MURDER
By Adrian Ahlquist

Cast of Characters

10 Females; 12 Males

<u>DR. FLATLY:</u>	A psychiatrist.
<u>PEGGY:</u>	Dr. Flatly's secretary.
<u>JANITOR:</u>	Dr. Flatly's janitor.
<u>MR. GRAY:</u>	A patient of Dr. Flatly.
<u>STU "STICKY-FINGERS" STANGER:</u>	A kleptomaniac.
<u>OPHELIA DESDEMONA:</u>	A schizophrenic.
<u>LILY/IVY DAYSPRING:</u>	A girl with two personalities.
<u>JASPER QUEASY:</u>	A phobic.
<u>CARSTINA GOOSENS:</u>	A scientist.
<u>MISTY BRIGHT:</u>	A woman with disordered emotions.
<u>ROBERTA MCCASH:</u>	Dr. Flatly's boss.
<u>MISS BLAINE:</u>	Roberta McCash's assistant.
<u>LAVA LOVEJOY:</u>	A girl with a lot of soap.
<u>GEORGE WOLFINGTON:</u>	A patient, Martha's husband.
<u>MARTHA WOLFINGTON:</u>	A patient, George's wife.
<u>SNIFFLY:</u>	A sad-looking clown.
<u>RICKY JANGLE:</u>	A rockstar celebrity.
<u>COP 1:</u>	A cop.
<u>COP 2:</u>	A cop.
<u>STRAITJACKET GUY:</u>	A man from the insane asylum.
<u>MR. FENWICK:</u>	A hotel manager.

Scene Breakdown

ACT I – Dr. Flatly’s Office.

ACT II – Dr. Flatly’s Office.

Approximate Length

90 minutes

Time

Modern Day

Place

A psychiatrist’s office

ACT I

Setting: A psychiatrist's office, complete with couch, chairs, desk.

At Rise: Before the lights come up, we hear distant thunder and rain in the dark. Then the lights come up and DR. FLATLY is lying on the couch as if he were a patient, while PEGGY is sitting as if she were the psychiatrist.

DR. FLATLY

I am so dead.

PEGGY

You are not dead yet.

DR. FLATLY

I'm going to be by the end of the day.

PEGGY

Do you want to know my theory?

DR. FLATLY

Not particularly.

PEGGY

I believe your incessant indolence and habitual procrastination stems from adolescent pampering and overindulgence. This unhealthy rearing has fostered the self-destructive tendencies that you are currently exercising.

DR. FLATLY

Hmm...

PEGGY

But then again, I'm not the psychiatrist. You are.

DR. FLATLY

And you are my secretary. So what is the agenda, Peggy?

PEGGY

Well, as you know, you must fill your monthly quota by the end of today, and you have neglected to attend to any patients whatsoever for the last thirty days. So, since it is impossible to have a month's worth of sessions in one afternoon, I have selected a number of patients and scheduled them to arrive a few minutes apart from each other. It's also an excuse to bring them in to sign their forms.

DR. FLATLY

How did you select these patients?

PEGGY

By the amount of money they are willing to pay. I have convinced them to pay an additional rate for the upcoming sessions.

DR. FLATLY

So what's the catch?

PEGGY

These individuals happen to be a little more...certifiable.

DR. FLATLY

They're a bunch of nutjobs, aren't they?

PEGGY

Not to worry. I have organized the sessions in order of the patient's hysteria, so as to ease you into the more unruly.

DR. FLATLY

So I don't get hit with a whole bunch of crazy all at once.

PEGGY

Precisely. Your first patient should be fairly lucid, but your last patient is officially certified.

DR. FLATLY

Why can't this wait until tomorrow?

PEGGY

Because tomorrow is the beginning of next month, and then you will be dead.

(DR. FLATLY returns to his desk)

DR. FLATLY

Is Mr. Fenwick on the list again?

PEGGY

He is coming later this evening. He is still seeing *more bodies*. Please try to make some progress with him.

DR. FLATLY

Why do people have to be insane? If they could just keep their heads together, we wouldn't have to deal with them.

PEGGY

And you would be out of a job.

DR. FLATLY

That'll be the day. In case you haven't noticed, I hate this job and the people I'm supposed to "care" for. But for some reason, I decided to get a Degree in Medicine. So technically, this is the only job I am qualified to do. What was I thinking?

(JANITOR enters and begins spraying the insides of books with Windex)

DR. FLATLY

Hey, Janitor!

JANITOR

I'm sorry, I don't respond to "Janitor." It's demeaning.

DR. FLATLY

Demeaning! That's your job!

JANITOR

I prefer "Custodial Engineer."

DR. FLATLY

Is that what they're calling you guys these days?

PEGGY

Actually, the word "janitor" is derived from "Janus," an ancient Roman god. The Gatekeeper to Olympus. So are you saying that you would rather indulge in banal modern officialism rather than be named after a god?

JANITOR

Janitor works, I guess.

DR. FLATLY

Janitor! Stop spraying my psychology books with Windex!

JANITOR

But they're the windows to the soul. And they're very, very opaque. I mean, Nietzsche? Really? Don't tell me you buy into this garbage.

DR. FLATLY

Janitor, I need you to stay out of my hair today.

JANITOR

Oh, is it that time of the month again?

DR. FLATLY

Don't change the subject. You are annoying.

(Enter MR. GRAY)

PEGGY

Dr. Flatly, your first patient has arrived. Mr. Gray.

JANITOR

Have fun.

(JANITOR exits)

PEGGY

Be sure to take notes for written proof that these sessions occurred.

DR. FLATLY

I'll take down what is noteworthy, so I don't know how many notes I'll be taking down.

MR. GRAY

Hello.

DR. FLATLY

Mph.

MR. GRAY

So, Dr. Flatly, I—

(Phone rings. PEGGY answers it.)

PEGGY

Dr. Flatly's office. Oh.

(To DR. FLATLY)

Dr. Flatly?

DR. FLATLY

I am in a session.

PEGGY

It's your boss, Roberta McCash.

DR. FLATLY

Ugh. Hold on.

(Answers the phone)

I don't want to talk to you. Yeah. Yeah. Yes. Uh-huh... No. No! No! No no no no!

(DR. FLATLY hangs up and runs frantically over to PEGGY)

MR. GRAY

Eh-hem.

DR. FLATLY

McCash is coming later to observe my sessions!

PEGGY

That is potentially problematic.

MR. GRAY

Hello?

DR. FLATLY

That is very problematic! And on top of that, she wants me to arrange a group session for the end of the day.

PEGGY

So what would you like me to do?

DR. FLATLY

Arrange a group session for the end of the day.

PEGGY

That is going to be challenging. Patients despise group sessions. And your patients will already despise the fact that their individual sessions have been cut short. On top of that they despise you anyway, because you bring that out in them.

(Lightning strikes)

PEGGY

And now there's a storm brewing.

DR. FLATLY

Great. I knew I could count on you.

MR. GRAY

Excuse me!

DR. FLATLY

Yes?

MR. GRAY

Are you quite finished?

(Enter STU)

DR. FLATLY
Yeah. You can leave now.

MR. GRAY
What? I didn't get my session!

DR. FLATLY
Too bad.

MR. GRAY
I want my session!

DR. FLATLY
Not now. Leave.

MR. GRAY
But—

DR. FLATLY
Bye.

(Exit MR GRAY, shaking his head)

PEGGY
Your next patient is here. Stu Stanger.

(Exit PEGGY)

DR. FLATLY
Stu "Sticky-fingers" Stanger.

STU
I prefer just my real name. I'm trying to leave the "Sticky-fingers" part of my life behind, you know.

DR. FLATLY
Well, you should have thought about that before you stole from me.
(DR. FLATLY holds out his hand and STU gives him all the stuff he stole)
My wallet, my fountain pen, my watch.

STU
And this.
(Pulls out a diploma)

DR. FLATLY
Why would you take my diploma?

STU

Never got one of my own.

DR. FLATLY

But it's my diploma, it's not yours.

STU

What can I say, Doc? I'm a kleptomaniac.

DR. FLATLY

And a pretty lousy one at that. I mean, you're trying to steal from the person whose job it is to stop you from stealing. But despite the obvious lack of self-control you've shown from the moment you walked in, how are you coping with your kleptomania?

STU

(Lies down on couch)

Well, I'm not going to lie. It's been tough. For instance, when I walk into a store and they have everything so openly displayed and unattended, it's as if they are begging me to take the stuff.

DR. FLATLY

I'm sure that's the idea they had in mind.

STU

I just can't help it. Stealing: it's what I do. It's in my nature. Fish gotta swim. Birds gotta fly... I gotta steal. It's a part of me. I can't change who I am. What do you think?

DR. FLATLY

You know, you don't have to lie down on the couch like that.

STU

Isn't that what it's for?

DR. FLATLY

It's a stupid tradition and pretty cliché.

STU

Well, can we focus on my problem now?

DR. FLATLY

I guess so.

STU

Don't you think there are people out there that are too rich, like those monopolists? Why should we put up with them? Hey, I'm like Robin Hood. I steal from the rich, give to the poor. That's me. It's just redistribution. So what do you have to say, Doc?

DR. FLATLY

You don't have to call me "Doc."

STU

What?

DR. FLATLY

I'd like to think that we are not the Looney Tunes. But who am I kidding?

STU

What's the deal? I come to you for help, and here you are, talking about cartoons!

DR. FLATLY

What do you want me to say, Stanger? Do you want me to examine your stealing disorder? Do you want me to talk you out of stealing? Here it goes: it's bad. Don't do it.

STU

I want you to do your job and help me!

DR. FLATLY

Fine. How about this: you are going to rot in hell.

STU

What?

DR. FLATLY

You can go on stealing and then convincing yourself that it is all right, but only if you are prepared for your soul to be stolen.

STU

How is condemning me helping me?

DR. FLATLY

I am revealing the nature of your situation.

STU

But you're a psychiatrist. You don't believe in that stuff.

DR. FLATLY

Oh, of course not. But you do.

STU

So you're trying to scare me out of my habit?

DR. FLATLY

No, this isn't about therapy anymore. It's quite the opposite, in fact. I want you to understand that you deserve eternal damnation.

STU

You are the worst psychiatrist ever!

(Enter OPHELIA)

DR FLATLY

Mr. Stanger, our time is up.

STU

No it's not!

DR. FLATLY

Look at it this way: I have a tight schedule right now and I need to steal a bit of time from you. You can't object to that, can you?

STU

This is crazy!

DR. FLATLY

You're one to talk, seeing as how you are crazy. A maniac, in fact.

STU

That's it! I have had it! I am going to sue you and this company for all its worth!

DR. FLATLY

Frankly, that's not saying much, but go right ahead. Steal our money. It would fit right into your character.

STU

You are the one who is going to hell, doctor, and I ought to be the one to put you there!

(STU exits. PEGGY enters. DR. FLATLY walks over to PEGGY.)

DR. FLATLY

That went better than I had expected.

PEGGY

You told him he was going to hell.

DR. FLATLY

It's all part of the process. Don't question my work.

PEGGY

Very well. Your next patient is Ophelia Desdemona.

(Exit PEGGY)

OPHELIA

Greetings.

DR. FLATLY

Yeah, good. Let's begin, shall we?

OPHELIA

(Pauses)

I forgot my line.

DR. FLATLY

Ophelia, how many times must I tell you. There are no lines. This is not a play. You can say whatever you'd like. This is real life!

OPHELIA

But I suffer from a rare case of schizophrenia. I believe that I am always in a play, performing for a live audience.

DR. FLATLY

Yes, I know that, Ophelia. This is not our first session together.

OPHELIA

I know you know, but they don't know.
(OPHELIA points to the audience)

DR. FLATLY

There is no audience there! This is the real world! You are not on stage!

OPHELIA

All the world's a stage.

DR. FLATLY

Ophelia, what you are staring at is a wall.

OPHELIA

The fourth wall!

DR. FLATLY

Yeah, I suppose it is the fourth wall, depending on how you choose to number them. So you think that you are currently in a play, yet in this "play" you have admitted to thinking you are in a play.

OPHELIA

Yes, it is a play within a play, to some extent.

DR. FLATLY

Wow. You have schizo-schizophrenia.

OPHELIA

Well then, Dr. Flatly, can you cure me?

DR. FLATLY

Probably not. I won't be able to get through to your thick head, especially when you are so avid about pleasing the "audience."

(DR. FLATLY makes air quotes and gestures to the audience)

OPHELIA

You know, you shouldn't break the fourth wall like that.

DR. FLATLY

You just addressed the audience earlier!

OPHELIA

Yes, but I can because I am crazy.

DR. FLATLY

I am trying to reason with a madwoman.

OPHELIA

Can you at least try to help me?

DR. FLATLY

What if I said you are bad at acting?

OPHELIA

I would be offended! But I really don't see what that has to do with my situation!

DR. FLATLY

It has everything to do with it. See, I can tell that your life-long dream was to be a famous actress. You even pursued a career in theater, but you found yourself rejected over and over again because you were just no good. Finally, it was too much, and you snapped. If you couldn't find the life you were looking for, you would create it, and just like that, reality was pushed aside to make way for your little fantasy.

OPHELIA

This is ridiculous!

DR. FLATLY

It most certainly is. I mean, to be so pitifully lonesome. It's laughable.

OPHELIA

I didn't come here to be insulted, Dr. Flatly.

DR. FLATLY

Then why did you come here? Because it sure wasn't for therapy. That's not your intention in the least. You just want company because you are so helplessly attention-starved.

OPHELIA

You are an abysmally bad psychiatrist!

(Enter LILY)

DR. FLATLY

And on that note, Ophelia, it's time.

OPHELIA

Time for what?

DR. FLATLY

Time for you to exit stage left. I mean right.

OPHELIA

What? It's only been a couple of minutes!

DR. FLATLY

Is it left?

OPHELIA

Dr. Flatly, this is unacceptable!

DR. FLATLY

Life is unacceptable, Ms. Desdemona. You of all people should know that, seeing as how you have chosen not to accept it.

OPHELIA

Hear, ye, Dr. Flatly! Consider your own fate! I may have suffered my miscues, I may have flubbed my lines, I may have lost my way in the footlights, but I at least recognize life for what it is: a privilege! You, on the other hand, are a cynical human being who does not deserve that privilege! I shall now exit. And by the way, it is stage right!

(Exit OPHELIA. Enter PEGGY.)

DR. FLATLY

She's making progress. The first step to fixing a problem is admitting you have one.

PEGGY

That sounds logical. You should abide by your own teachings.

DR. FLATLY

Are you trying to say that I have a problem? Don't answer that, just tell me who my next patient is.

PEGGY

Lily Dayspring.

(Exit PEGGY)

LILY

Why hello, Dr. Flatly. Isn't it just a wonderful day!

DR. FLATLY

Ah yes, Lily. How positively positive I anticipated you'd be.

LILY

I can't say the same for Ivy.

DR. FLATLY

How can I forget? How is your other personality faring today?

IVY

Shut it, you worthless buffoon! I want to leave now!

DR. FLATLY

Hostile as ever, I see.

LILY

That's obviously why I'm here, Dr. Flatly. My dissociative disorder, or rather multiple personality disorder, has not gotten better. We had this schedule all worked out: I would have the morning to myself and she would have the afternoon to herself. But recently she has gotten a bit restless. She frequently bursts out with excla—*I do not! Quit gossiping behind my back! ...See?*

DR. FLATLY

You just can't trust anyone, especially yourself.

LILY

Anyway, I'm trying to reclaim ownership over the morning.

DR. FLATLY

Who has jurisdiction over the evening?

LILY

Oh, it's still undecided.

DR. FLATLY

So it's anarchy in the evening.

LILY

Now, I've been wondering, who is the genuine personality? I've heard that if the definition of personality is that which makes a person a person and distinguishes ourselves from others, both of my personalities are real and part of me. I, as a person, am fundamentally comprised of both of us together.

DR. FLATLY

That's a load of rubbish. You are the real one for sure.

LILY

Oh. I have a feeling that Ivy won't react well to this news. *What? Did you just say that I'm not real! You're about to find out how real I really am!* Ivy! It's my turn!

DR. FLATLY

Might I share my hypothesis as to why this other personality exists?

LILY

Certainly.

DR. FLATLY

When your mind realized that you possess such an incessantly cheerful disposition, it had to counterbalance this calamity with an equally negative and vile one.

LILY

So you're saying I shouldn't be happy?

DR. FLATLY

It would be better for everyone.

IVY

He's right about that! You're always a bundle of feathers! It's despicable! But, Dr. Flatly, I can't stop being happy. It's against my nature.

DR. FLATLY

Then you will be doomed to a life with your other half.

LILY

Oh no.

DR. FLATLY

There. You're demonstrating some unhappiness right now. Good for you.

IVY

Ha! Oh dear, now *she's* happy about me being *unhappy*.

DR. FLATLY

Can't win, can you?

LILY

I don't like this.

DR. FLATLY

Good, you're making progress.

LILY

Are you sure about this?

DR. FLATLY

Positive.

(PEGGY and JASPER enter)

PEGGY

Jasper Queasy has arrived.

(Exit PEGGY)