Finding J Mitchell
A Comedy Mystery Play
By Kiernon James

8 F, 5 M (age 20s-60s with a 10-year-old girl)
Set in the lobby of a cozy lodge
Two Acts | ~2 hrs

Alex Taylor, a female private investigator, turns up at a cozy lodge with a lead that a burglar known as J Mitchell might strike that night. After her cover is blown, Alex must work fast to catch the thief before another crime is committed. She finds unexpected help from a few locals, including a sassy 10-year-old girl who mimics what she sees on TV to guide them to the truth.

This comical script is filled with quirky characters, laughs, and twists to keep audiences guessing. And some returning for a repeat performance to see what they missed the first time around.

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~ IMPORTANT NOTICE ~

All producers of FINDING J MITCHELL *must* give credit to the author of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play, and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising and/or publicizing the play for a production. The name of the author *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, and either immediately precede or follow the play's title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent of the title's font size.

No changes shall be made to the script's text for the purpose of the production. Where appropriate, the author has provided suggestions for making minor staging changes in the Production Notes section of this script.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

JERRY BRENNER ..... an innkeeper
CHUCK HAYWOOD ..... Jerry's hunting friend
SHELLY BRENNER ..... another innkeeper
ALEX TAYLOR ..... a loner private investigator
JOLIE DONOVAN ..... a mysterious lodger
MOLLY WAGNER ..... the Brenners' errand girl
DIANE ROLAND ..... a high-profile senator
KYLE MASON ..... Diane's personal aide
VICTORIA REICHERT ..... a wealthy lodger
NATE LOWRY ..... Mrs. Reichert's driver
BELINDA MILLER ..... Alex's client
HEATHER SULLIVAN ..... an investigative reporter
ROB WAGNER ..... Molly's father

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action takes place in the lobby of the
Shady Oak Lodge in Door County, Wisconsin.

ACT I

Scene 1 – Mid-afternoon on October 27th
Scene 2 – Later that evening

ACT II

Scene 1 – Middle of the night
Scene 2 – The next morning
Scene 3 – An hour later

Time: The present

Finding J Mitchell scene design by Marvin Jonason

ACT ONE

SCENE I

SETTING: Curtain rises on the lobby of the Shady Oak Lodge. The lobby has the appearance of something right on the cover of Bed & Breakfast Monthly. It's located on the edge of Lake Michigan in the touristy Door County of Wisconsin.

A side door in the DSL corner opens into the lobby. The door has a large glass pane in the upper half that allows people to see outside without opening the door. Next to the side door is a large, cushioned window seat with a scenic view. The afternoon sun shines through the bay windows.

In the USL corner is a small seating area with waist-high railings that provides a separate visiting area for any business travelers. Two wingback chairs face each other and are separated by a small coffee table. In the corner is a fireplace that isn't lit. Beneath the DS railing is a buffet with coffee service, cups, cream, and sugar. The buffet has drawers and cabinets to store service items.

Along the back wall is a Victorian style porch with pillars and a railing. Lodgers enter the lodge through the main door which is currently open. Large windows are positioned on both sides of the main door.

In the USR corner, there's a service counter with a guest book and some area brochures on the DS end. Behind the counter is a door that leads to the owners' office and suite. The door has a small plaque labeled "Office."

Near the counter is a hallway which leads off to the guest rooms. A second door leading to the lodge's office can be seen through the archway.

In the DS part of the stage are two seating areas for conversing. A love seat sofa and two armchairs face each other. A small table is arranged between them with an assortment of magazines and the local newspaper. On the other half of the DS area is a small dining table with four chairs. A tablecloth is draped over the table.

AT RISE: It's late afternoon on October 27. JERRY BRENNER and CHUCK HAYWOOD, both 50s-60s, are at the DSL table going through packed bags for a hunting trip. CHUCK rummages through a bag on one of the chairs while JERRY reads from a checklist.

JERRY: Bug repellent?

CHUCK: Check.

(CHUCK pulls the bug repellent out of the bag and places it among the pile on the table.)

JERRY: Turkey caller?

CHUCK: *(searches a bag)* Nope.

JERRY: *(hunts through another bag)* Not in here either. We can improvise. *(improvises a bad duck call)*

CHUCK: No! We're not luring another near-sighted hunter this year.

JERRY: It'll turn up.

CHUCK: Mark it as missing.

JERRY: *(makes a note, then reads from checklist)* Hunting licenses? *(retrieves his license)* Check.

CHUCK: *(pads himself down)* Shoot! Now where did I put that?

JERRY: *(teases)* Someone doesn't have his license?

CHUCK: It's here somewhere.

JERRY: That's okay. I'll hunt, you watch.

CHUCK: Trust me, I'll find it.

JERRY: Maybe you dropped it outside.

(JERRY crosses to the service counter while CHUCK rummages through the gear. SHELLY BRENNER, 50s, enters from the hall. She moves about dusting with a feather duster and straightening things to make everything look perfect.)

SHELLY: Is Molly back?

JERRY: Not yet.

SHELLY: She's late again. I won't have her barging through once the lodgers arrive.

JERRY: Shelly, everything's going to be fine.

(SHELLY looks at CHUCK and the mess on the dining table. She points to the table.)

SHELLY: What's that?!

CHUCK: *(looks where she's pointing)* Bug spray.

SHELLY: *(to JERRY, annoyed)* Must you do this now? You know Diane's arriving any minute now.

JERRY: What's the big deal? She's only a politician.

SHELLY: Jerry, be nice!

JERRY: I am. I can think of worse things to call her.

SHELLY: We're not going into this again.

JERRY: You want me to be nice? What about her? Every time she visits she makes snide remarks at me.

SHELLY: Promise me you'll be on your best behavior today.

JERRY: *(angelic look)* Yes, dear.

(ALEX TAYLOR, 30s, enters through the main door. She carries a brochure and looks as if she might be lost. JERRY and SHELLY both turn to ALEX with a warm smile. SHELLY tries to shield CHUCK and the hunting gear from ALEX's view. CHUCK continues searching the gear for his license.)

SHELLY: May we help you?

ALEX: Is this the Shady Oak Lodge?

JERRY: You found her!

SHELLY: Do you have a reservation?

ALEX: No. Actually, I'm looking for someone.

JERRY: Aren't we all. *(crosses to service counter)* Let's take a look at the reservations. Who are you meeting?

ALEX: *(gauges their reactions)* I'm looking for J Mitchell.

(CHUCK looks at ALEX. JERRY looks in the reservation book.)

SHELLY: Who?

JERRY: Jay Mitchell? No one in the book by that name.

SHELLY: Maybe you have the wrong place?

ALEX: I…don't think so.

(Confused, ALEX glances down at the brochure in her hands. CHUCK resumes searching the gear.)

JERRY: What does he look like?

ALEX: I'm not sure.

JERRY: *(smiles)* Odd place for a blind date.

ALEX: *(quickly)* Oh, no! Nothing like that! *(pulls out her private investigator ID)* I'm Alex Taylor, a private investigator.

JERRY: Wow! A bona fide P.I.! Chuck, did you hear that?

CHUCK: *(unimpressed)* Great. Maybe she can help me find my hunting license.

SHELLY: Who's Jay Mitchell?

ALEX: A burglar who's eluded the police for years.

JERRY: What makes you think he's coming here?

ALEX: I think his next target is this very lodge.

(CHUCK stops his search and looks at JERRY.)

SHELLY: *(nervously)* Why would a thief target us? We don't have anything worth stealing.

ALEX: Maybe not you, but one of your lodgers might.

CHUCK: Why this place?

ALEX: Mitchell targeted my client last week in Chicago. Your brochure was found at the crime scene. *(ALEX hands the brochure to JERRY and SHELLY while CHUCK looks over*

JERRY's shoulder) My client thought the burglar was heading here. Turn it over. See the note written on the back?

(AUTHOR'S NOTE: Change the last number to reflect the current year.)

JERRY: *(reads)* "J Mitchell. Ten dash twenty-seven dash [twenty-three]."

CHUCK: That's today. Is that a diamond symbol by the J?

JERRY: Looks like it.

(CHUCK returns to the table to search.)

ALEX: May I stick around? To see if Mitchell shows up?

JERRY: *(excited)* Like a stake out? Ooh, count us in!

SHELLY: Jerry, I don't know. This sounds dangerous.

ALEX: We should keep it low-key. The fewer people who know why I'm here, the better.

JERRY: Shelly, we'll be fine. Besides, Chuck can help us.

(CHUCK is now tangled up in one of the bag straps. He frantically tries to wiggle free and manages to spill the contents of the bag onto the floor.)

SHELLY: *(doubtful)* Yes.

JERRY: Alex, where are your bags?

ALEX: Bags?

JERRY: If you're going to stake out the place, might as well do it right. You need a cover. What better way than to pose as a lodger?

SHELLY: Uh, Jerry—

ALEX: I don't want to impose.

JERRY: *(hands her a room key)* Nothing to it. We'll give you the Oak suite. Great view of the lake.

SHELLY: Jerry, what about our lodgers?

JERRY: Diane says we lack excitement in our lives. I think it just walked into our lodge.

(JOLIE DONAVON opens the side door and glides into the room. It's difficult to determine her exact age because she's wearing long, flowing garments and a head wrap. She carries a hippie bag. She stands in the doorway and peers around the room as if inspecting the ambiance of the place. CHUCK is beneath the table picking up the fallen gear.)

JOLIE: *(drifts to the table)* Ah, yes. I feel a good aura here. So welcoming and peaceful...

CHUCK: *(rises in front of JOLIE)* You say something?

(JOLIE studies CHUCK for a moment. She stretches a palm over his chest without making physical contact.)

JOLIE: I sense you are a man of action and authority. When you speak, people listen.

CHUCK: *(peers at her suspiciously)* Look, lady—

JOLIE: *(interrupts as she places her index finger over his lips)* Shhh, shhh, shhh. *(moves her open palm to his forehead)* There's something troubling you. You're….searching for something of great importance. *(CHUCK stares at her unsure if he should speak or not)* Do not worry for you shall find it. An innocent remark guides you down the right path.

(JOLIE smiles at him and drifts to the sofa. She studies ALEX for a moment. JERRY approaches JOLIE with a big smile.)

JERRY: Welcome to the Shady Oak Lodge. I'm—

JOLIE: *(interrupts without looking at him)* Jerry. I know.

JERRY: *(impressed)* Yes. And you are...?

JOLIE: *(pronounced Joe-Lee with a slight French accent)* Jolie Donavon. Perhaps you have heard of me? *(they shake their heads no)* Makes no difference. I am here none the less!

(JOLIE drifts up to the main door and reads the room's energy. CHUCK shakes his head and resumes picking up the contents on the floor. ALEX stands by the hall and studies JOLIE.)

JERRY: Are you planning on staying with us, Miss Donavon?

JOLIE: Please, call me Jolie. Do you have rooms available?

JERRY: Three rooms left.

JOLIE: I'm getting good energy here. Yes, I'll stay.

(Still searching through a bag, CHUCK finds the turkey caller. He stands up and inspects it.)

JERRY: Excellent! You'll enjoy it here.

JOLIE: Yes, such a cozy, quiet place.

(CHUCK takes a big breath and blows into the turkey caller. It makes an awful sound and startles everyone in the room. CHUCK isn't satisfied with the way it sounds and blows again.)

SHELLY: CHUCK!!

CHUCK: *(innocently)* Yes?

(SHELLY quickly crosses to the table and starts putting the hunting gear back into the bags.)

JERRY: Jolie, you'll love it here. Might I suggest the suite at the end of the hall, the—

JOLIE: *(finishes his sentence while looking at the alcove)* The Willow suite? Yes, that will be perfect.

JERRY: How did you—?

(JOLIE stands on the steps leading up to the alcove.)

JOLIE: I sense something here… *(stretches her open palm out over the small table)* A strange coldness.

JERRY: I'll stoke up the fire.

JOLIE: *(vaguely)* That won't help. The cold—it still lingers.

(JERRY doesn't know how to respond to JOLIE. Before they can say anything, the side door suddenly flies open and MOLLY WAGNER, age 10, runs in carrying several brown grocery bags. She quickly darts around the furniture and people on her way to the service counter.)

MOLLY: Move it or lose it!

SHELLY: *(a parental tone)* Molly!

(MOLLY sidesteps SHELLY and barely manages to avoid colliding with JOLIE. She places the groceries on the service counter.)

MOLLY: *(to SHELLY)* Here's the stuff from the Food Mart you wanted—except for the apples. They're all out. And here's the change.

(MOLLY pulls a wad of crumpled bills out of her pocket and plops it down on the counter.)

SHELLY: Thank you.

MOLLY: *(spots JOLIE)* Cool costume! *(runs her hands over JOLIE's long flowing garbs)*

JOLIE: Pardon?

SHELLY: *(pulls MOLLY aside)* Molly, what did I say about running in through the side door?

MOLLY: What's the big deal? Besides, her royal highness won't be here for another five minutes.

SHELLY: Let me guess where you heard that.

(JERRY whistles innocently. MOLLY immediately heads back to the side door but gets distracted by the hunting gear on the table. Spotting the turkey caller, she picks it up and is about to blow on it when CHUCK puts his hand over the mouthpiece.)

CHUCK: Kid, if you know what's good for you…

(CHUCK nods towards SHELLY who is looking through the grocery bags. MOLLY understands perfectly and continues inspecting the hunting gear.)

SHELLY: Molly, where's the mail?

MOLLY: Oh, I forgot again. I'll get it next time.

SHELLY: That's what you said the last three times.

MOLLY: Can't it wait—?

SHELLY: *(interrupts)* Molly, please.

MOLLY: *(big dramatic sigh)* Fine. I'll get it now!

(MOLLY runs out the side door and forgets to close it behind her. SHELLY crosses to the door and shuts it. She gazes out the window at MOLLY. JOLIE drifts off down the hall. ALEX exits to the porch and goes off to her car.)

JERRY: *(to CHUCK, teasingly)* Any luck, my friend?

CHUCK: Day's not over yet.

SHELLY: Jerry! Diane's here! *(points to gear on the table)* Get this mess out of here, now!

(SHELLY arranges the bags at the table. JERRY takes a bag and turns to CHUCK who's behind the counter searching.)

JERRY: Chuck! Office!

(JERRY tosses the bag to CHUCK and points to the office door behind him. CHUCK catches the bag, opens the office door, and tosses the bag offstage. SHELLY tosses the next bag to JERRY, he tosses it to CHUCK, etc. SHELLY, JERRY and CHUCK are on rapid autopilot. Meanwhile, ALEX enters through the front door carrying her own duffel bag. She steps into the path of the flying bags. JERRY tosses a bag to CHUCK, but ALEX sees the bag flying at her and instinctively drops her own bag to catch the new bag. CHUCK claps his hands to get ALEX's attention and motions for her to throw it. ALEX quickly tosses the bag and sees the next one flying at her. Once all bags have been removed, SHELLY and JERRY quickly cross to the counter. JERRY sees ALEX's duffel bag on the floor and picks it up assuming it's another gear bag. He tosses ALEX's bag to CHUCK who tosses it into the office with the others. SHELLY rushes behind the counter and shoves CHUCK into the office before closing the door.)

SHELLY: Jerry, the groceries!

(SHELLY gestures for JERRY to remove the grocery bags from the service counter. He scoops them up and rushes off into the hall. ALEX turns around to grab her duffel bag and is puzzled that it's gone. SHELLY encourages ALEX to sit in the alcove. ALEX picks up a newspaper from the alcove

table and begins reading. SHELLY makes one final pass over the counter to make sure everything's picture perfect. She then takes a deep breath, turns towards the main door, and is the picture of a perfect hostess. At the same time, DIANE ROLAND, 50s, enters through the front door pulling a suitcase with wheels and carrying a laptop case. She's dressed in a business suit with slacks and wears a trench coat. She sees SHELLY and sets her bags on the floor by the alcove. The two friends embrace like long time friends.)

DIANE: Shelly!

SHELLY: Diane!

DIANE: Look at you! You haven't changed one bit.

SHELLY: Neither have you. *(leads DIANE to the sofa)* Listen, there's something I should tell you.

(JERRY enters from the hall and pauses to get ready for his reunion with DIANE.)

DIANE: *(looks around)* This place is marvelous! If you did something like this in Chicago, you'd have a gold mine. *(spots JERRY, smirks)* Jerry! I thought you were off killing things.

JERRY: Not 'til tomorrow. *(smiles)* But I could start today if you'd like.

SHELLY: *(changes subjects)* Did you have trouble finding the place?

DIANE: Your directions were perfect, as usual.

SHELLY: Good.

DIANE: So this is where you ended up. *(beat)* Are you happy here?

JERRY: Of course.

DIANE: I wasn't asking you.

SHELLY: Uh, yes.

DIANE: I'll never understand why people prefer living in the country. There's nothing to do out here.

SHELLY: *(smiles to JERRY)* It's so quiet, relaxing. Our little safe haven.

(DIANE shakes her head. KYLE MASON, 20s, enters through

the front door carrying several suitcases. He's dressed in a polo and khakis. As he enters, he makes eye contact with ALEX and smiles. ALEX resumes reading her newspaper while eavesdropping.)

DIANE: Kyle, set those by the counter. Jerry knows what to do with them.

JERRY: *(aside)* Take them to the fire pit.

(SHELLY shoots JERRY a dirty look.)

DIANE: What was that?

JERRY: *(sweetly)* I'll take them in a bit!

(ALEX places the newspaper back on the alcove table. She grabs a magazine and moves to the window seat where she can better observe.)

DIANE: Kyle, this is my good friend, Shelly Brenner.

KYLE: A pleasure to finally meet you, Mrs. Brenner.

SHELLY: I've heard many great things about you.

KYLE: From Diane?

JERRY: *(teasingly to KYLE)* Shocking isn't it?

SHELLY: *(to KYLE)* I was once in your shoes.

KYLE: Really.

DIANE: Shelly was my aide when I first hit the campaign trails years ago. What a team we made. Nothing could hold us back!

KYLE: What happened?

DIANE: Shelly remembered Jerry, that's what happened.

(KYLE's phone rings with a distinctive ring tone. He retrieves it from his pocket.)

KYLE: Hello?

DIANE: If it's for me, tell them I'm busy.

(KYLE steps down to the side door to take the call. ALEX, seated at the window seat, listens discreetly.)

KYLE: Yes, we just arrived.

(DIANE watches KYLE until he waves his hand in an "it's not for you" gesture. KYLE stands by the side door and talks quietly on the phone.)

DIANE: That phone hasn't stopped ringing since we left.

JERRY: You can always turn it off.

SHELLY: I'm so glad you're here. I can't wait to show you around town—

DIANE: *(interrupts)* Shelly, my plans have changed.

SHELLY: Oh?

DIANE: I must review an odious referendum before I turn in tonight. They need my corrections faxed over first thing in the morning.

SHELLY: *(disappointed)* I understand.

JERRY: Still married to your work, I see.

DIANE: Shelly, you should come back with me on Sunday. We can extend our visit. *(glances at JERRY)* A change of scenery would be good for you.

JERRY: No can do!

SHELLY: Jerry's been looking forward to his annual hunting trip.

JERRY: Besides, she had her fun last week maxing out the credit cards in Chicago.

SHELLY: *(laughs)* I did not! I met my sister for a little Christmas shopping.

JERRY: Which we'll be paying off until next summer.

(KYLE stops by the table and turns slightly to the side door. ALEX watches subtly.)

KYLE: *(cryptically into the phone)* Yes, the weather is fine. Proceed with the plan.

(ALEX looks at KYLE curiously. He ends the call and suddenly sees her. They share a polite smile.)

ALEX: Nice fall weather, wouldn't you agree?

KYLE: Y-yes.

(KYLE heads back to the sofa while glancing back at ALEX. JERRY picks up their luggage.)

JERRY: Kyle, let me show you to your room.

KYLE: Sure thing.

JERRY: And you'll love the dirt I have on your boss. Oh, which one to start with? So many possibilities.

KYLE: You don't say?

DIANE: *(calls after them)* He exaggerates, Kyle!

(JERRY and KYLE exit into the hall. DIANE crosses to the alcove and looks around. SHELLY follows her.)

SHELLY: *(quietly)* Diane, there might be some trouble tonight.

DIANE: With Jerry? I can handle him.

SHELLY: No, not Jerry. A private investigator—

(The main door opens to reveal VICTORIA REICHERT, 60s, standing in the doorway. She's wealthy and isn't afraid to flaunt it. She's dressed in a fashionable outfit for a governor's wife and carries a purse. She wears several pieces of expensive jewelry and has a fake mink wrap around her shoulders. She smiles at everyone as she makes her grand entrance.)

MRS. REICHERT: Hello, everyone! It's so good to be back.

SHELLY: *(quickly crosses to her)* Mrs. Reichert! What are you doing here? We're not expecting you until tomorrow.

MRS. REICHERT: I know, dear. I'm shopping early this year.

SHELLY: I—I wish you would have called.

MRS. REICHERT: But I did. I left a message with your help—now what's her name? Ah, yes! Millie.

SHELLY: *(understands)* Oh, Molly.

MRS. REICHERT: *(removes her gloves)* I simply had to move my trip up a day. You see George is meeting with the other governors next week. And it just wouldn't look right if I wasn't there beside my husband for the publicity photos.

SHELLY: Yes, of course. But, Mrs. Reichert—

MRS. REICHERT: *(crosses to the hall)* Tell Jerry my suitcases are in the back seat. I'll be in my room.

SHELLY: *(rushes in front of her)* Uh, Mrs. Reichert, about your room—

MRS. REICHERT: Is it not ready?

SHELLY: Not until tomorrow.

MRS. REICHERT: Tomorrow? I don't understand.

SHELLY: We weren't expecting you until tomorrow. The room has been given to someone else. But only for tonight.

MRS. REICHERT: Are you full?

SHELLY: No, we still have two rooms open. Aspen or Pine.

MRS. REICHERT: But they don't face the lake…

SHELLY: Tomorrow you can have the Birch suite again.

MRS. REICHERT: *(disappointed)* I see.

(Still seated in the window seat, ALEX gets SHELLY's attention and holds up her room key. SHELLY sees the gesture over MRS. REICHERT's shoulder and smiles. Meanwhile, CHUCK enters from the office. He's hunting for the missing license and starts at the counter. While searching, he's oblivious to the action around him.)

SHELLY: Mrs. Reichert, maybe I can work something out. Just give me a minute.

MRS. REICHERT: *(sweetly)* If it's not too much trouble, dear.

SHELLY: Not at all.

(MRS. REICHERT sits at the sofa and pulls out her shopping list from her purse. SHELLY crosses to ALEX to get the room key. NATE LOWRY, 40s, enters through the main door. He's dressed in a suit for a driver. He carries several pieces of woman's luggage and a dark duffle bag. As he sets the luggage down by the alcove steps, he and DIANE exchange a look of recognition. SHELLY turns away from the service counter and sees NATE.)

SHELLY: Nate! Did you drive Mrs. Reichert here?

NATE: Yes, Mrs. Brenner. She phoned ahead.

SHELLY: We're happy to accommodate you. The Maple room

okay again?

NATE: Whatever's open.

SHELLY: Maple it is.

(SHELLY crosses behind the service counter to grab the room key. JERRY and KYLE enter from the hall.)

JERRY: We were high school sweethearts until she went off to college. But I'd see Shelly whenever she visited her family.

KYLE: And this lodge?

JERRY: Belonged to Shelly's uncle until she inherited it three years ago.

KYLE: It's so cozy. Just like a setting for a mystery novel.

JERRY: That's all Shelly's doing. She has an eye for little details. *(to NATE as he bends to grab the duffle bag)* Hello, Nate! Let me take your things.

NATE: *(steps in front of the duffle bag)* That's okay. I can manage.

(KYLE sits in the SR armchair and checks messages on his phone.)

JERRY: You drive up from Chicago?

NATE: Yes.

JERRY: *(hint of matchmaking)* What a coincidence.

NATE: Oh?

(ALEX senses where this is going and tries to signal JERRY to stop. JERRY smiles and gestures to ALEX.)

JERRY: Alex is also from Chicago.

NATE: *(smiles politely)* Is that so? Business or pleasure?

ALEX: Excuse me?

NATE: Are you here on business or pleasure?

(ALEX hesitates a moment. JERRY crosses to her side.)

JERRY: She's here to take in the sights. Take a little break from the big city.

NATE: I see. What line of work are you in?

JERRY: *(simultaneously)* Retail.

ALEX: *(simultaneously)* Fitness.

(NATE raises an eyebrow. JERRY smiles apologetically at ALEX.)

ALEX: I sell fitness equipment.

JERRY: In fact, she just about had me sold on a brand new treadmill.

NATE: *(gestures to the brochure in ALEX's hands)* Fascinating. Maybe I could look at one of your brochures.

ALEX: *(hides the brochure)* Uh, yeah.

SHELLY: *(hands NATE the room keys)* Here you go, the Birch and Maple rooms.

(NATE grabs the luggage and duffle bag before exiting into the hall. SHELLY hands ALEX a room key and mouths "Thank you." Then SHELLY retrieves a deck of cards and scorepad from the hutch, places it on the table. DIANE crosses to KYLE.)

DIANE: Kyle, I need a hand arranging that alcove area into a make shift office. It's going to be a long night.

KYLE: On it!

(KYLE moves to the alcove to clear the magazines and newspapers from the table and situate the armchairs for best privacy arrangement.)

MRS. REICHERT: Oh, Senator Roland! I didn't know you would be here. Long time, no see.

DIANE: Afternoon, Mrs. Reichert. *(starts for the alcove)*

MRS. REICHERT: Last week, you left the fundraiser so fast I didn't get to say goodbye.

DIANE: Well, you know how it is. So many people to see, so little time.

MRS. REICHERT: My husband and I would like to invite you to dinner next week. We're having—

DIANE: I've got plans. Give my regards to Gov. Reichert.

(DIANE turns to the alcove. MRS. REICHERT follows.)

MRS. REICHERT: Look, if this is about that argument I saw last week at the gala—

DIANE: *(coldly)* Mrs. Reichert, some friendly advice if I may. Don't believe everything the Millers say. People will pretend to be something they're not, especially when they have everything to gain.

(DIANE enters the alcove. MRS. REICHERT stares at DIANE without speaking while crossing to the sofa. JOLIE drifts in from the hall and crosses to the sofa. Both ladies sit on the sofa at the same time. MRS. REICHERT realizes JOLIE is sitting next to her. She moves to the edge of the sofa—as far away from JOLIE as she can get. A beat as neither speak. MRS. REICHERT is very uncomfortable with JOLIE staring at her intently.)

MRS. REICHERT: What are you doing?

JOLIE: Reading your aura.

MRS. REICHERT: My what?

JOLIE: Your aura. It's quite strong actually.

MRS. REICHERT: I wish you wouldn't. *(crosses to the buffet as she mutters)* Whole world just going crazy!

(MOLLY barges in through the side door with the mail. She runs around a startled MRS. REICHERT on her way to the counter.)

MOLLY: Mail's here! Coming through!

MRS. REICHERT: *(startled)* Oh, dear!

SHELLY: Molly!

(CHUCK looks up from the buffet where he's been searching for the license. MOLLY sidesteps around CHUCK and runs right into KYLE. MOLLY falls onto the floor and the mail scatters everywhere—including underneath the buffet.)

KYLE: *(to MOLLY)* Are you okay?

(KYLE bends down to help MOLLY up.)

MOLLY: I, uh, didn't…see you.

SHELLY: Is she okay?

KYLE: Here, let me help you pick this up.

(KYLE and MOLLY gather the dropped mail. MOLLY hands it to SHELLY in a jumbled mess. A thick manila envelope is left on the floor beneath the buffet. NATE enters quietly from the hall and watches the scene.)

SHELLY: Is this all of it?

KYLE: I think so.

MOLLY: *(looks around)* Wait, there's a large envelope somewhere.

JERRY: Look under the buffet.

(SHELLY points to the envelope. CHUCK bends down to pick it up. He sees his hunting license on the floor beneath the buffet and holds it up in the air.)

CHUCK: I've found it! Jerry, here's my license. Now we can go hunting!

(MOLLY grabs the large envelope and hands it to SHELLY. BELINDA MILLER, 40s, enters quietly through the front door without any luggage. She's dressed in dark expensive designer clothes and carries a black clutch purse. ALEX is the first to notice her and quickly rushes to her side before she can get too far into the lodge.)

ALEX: Belinda, what are you doing here?

BELINDA: *(eager)* I want to watch you catch the thief!

ALEX: You promised to stay home and let me handle this.

BELINDA: I know, but I couldn't help myself. *(takes a few steps into the room and looks around)* I want to find him, too!

MRS. REICHERT: Find whom?

BELINDA: *(surprised)* You mean she didn't tell you?

ALEX: Belinda—!!

MRS. REICHERT: *(intrigued)* Tell us what?

BELINDA: *(ignores ALEX)* I hired Alex to find J Mitchell.

KYLE: Who?

BELINDA: J Mitchell. The thief who shot my husband!

SHELLY: *(shocked)* Shot?!

MOLLY: *(excited)* No way!

(EVERYONE is stunned by the news. ALEX glares at BELINDA who stands in the center of the room watching people's reactions. MRS. REICHERT covers her necklace protectively. SHELLY looks at JERRY nervously. DIANE studies BELINDA shrewdly as the lights dim.)

(CURTAIN)

Has the elusive burglar J Mitchell
shown up at the Shady Oak Lodge?

What is the plan Kyle referred to on the phone?

Will the strange predictions Jolie made come true?

Who shot Belinda's husband?

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FINDING J MITCHELL

A COMEDY MYSTERY

BY KIERNON JAMES