

The Case of the School Suspect: A Play about Pests

Characters

Narrator (*human*)

Inspector Leppie (*a Paper Kite--type of butterfly*), black and white butterfly wearing a Sherlock Holmes hat)

Principal Odan (*a dragonfly, principal of Insecta School, wearing a suit and tie*)

Mrs. Ortho (*a grasshopper, head kitchen supervisor, wearing a chef hat and/or chef smock or apron*)

Mr. Coleo (*a beetle, head custodian, wearing a baseball cap, jeans, and a custodial shirt*)

Mrs. Hym (*a honey bee, teacher, wearing casual clothes, maybe black and yellow*)

Molly Maggot (*fly larva, student, wearing white or ivory*)

Suki Cockroach (*Oriental cockroach nymph, student, wearing black*)

Germi Cockroach (*German cockroach, Suki's cousin, punk attitude, wearing brown*)

Filth Fly (*a housefly, wearing crumpled brown or black clothes, wings, and looking dirty*)

Scene: *Insecta School for Nymphs and Larvae*

Narrator (*reading from script at one corner of the room*): Inspector Leppie has been called in to investigate the Insecta School for Nymphs and Larvae. The staff has complained that someone raided the kitchen one night and stole crumbs and other food off the counter. It's time for Inspector Leppie to question the students and staff and find potential suspects!

Leppie (*walks into the principal's office*): Principal Odan, I presume?

Odan (*shakes the Inspector's foreleg*): Ah yes, Inspector Leppie, thank you for coming.

Leppie: Please tell me more about what happened.

Odan: A couple of nights ago, someone ate food from the kitchen counter.

Leppie: What type of food do you keep here?

Odan: All kinds. Flour and corn kernels, raw meat, small aquatic animals, human blood; we have a variety to appeal to our whole student body. What's been eaten is mainly bread crumbs, though.

Leppie: I see (*scratches his chin in thought*). Have there been reports elsewhere in the building?

Odan (*nods*): In the staff lounge. We leave breadcrumbs and nectar out for the staff, and these appear to have been disturbed, too.

Leppie (*finished making notes*): Might I talk to the kitchen supervisor?

Odan: Of course. Mrs. Ortho should be in the kitchen preparing lunch. You might also want to speak with Mr. Coleo, our custodian.

Narrator: Inspector Leppie thanks Mr. Odan and moves onto the kitchen, where he finds Mrs. Ortho dishing out meals onto plates.

Leppie: Mrs. Ortho?

Ortho: (*looks up*) Well hello, Inspector. I heard you were coming, and not too soon!

Leppie: I will do my best to help!

Ortho: Would you like some nectar?

Leppie: Thank you, but I'm on duty. Can you tell me what you've seen?

Ortho: Wednesday morning I came in to make lunch for the day. When I got here, my breadcrumb bags were chewed through and crumbs were eaten or spread out on the counter!

Leppie: Was any other food touched?

Ortho: I saw a nibble on the raw meat, but the thief ate more of the bread crumbs. And my bag...ruined! My thimbles of water and nectar were down a bit, too. Who knows what filthy legs or mouthparts have been in there. I can't serve dirty food to the students!

Leppie: You say dirty...did you notice anything strange other than the disappearing food and water?

Ortho: Why yes...actually there were little brown specks nearby.

Leppie: Interesting. Can you show me the scene of the crime?

Narrator: Mrs. Ortho leads Leppie to a nearby counter. Only a few crumbs remain scattered on the counter, along with several brown specks and a chewed through plastic bag. Leppie looks thoughtful, and scribbles in his notes.

Leppie: Can you think of anyone who would do this?

Ortho: Could be some of those nasty house flies; they like to hang out at our dumpsters out back, and sometimes try to slip past the door and steal from us. Mr. Coleo, the head custodian, could you tell you more.

Leppie: Thank you, Mrs. Ortho. I will speak to him and let you know what I find out.

Ortho: Thank you, I would appreciate your help!

Narrator: Leppie's next stop is the janitor's office, where he finds the head custodian, Mr. Coleo. He suspects that he can learn a lot about what's been going on from him because the beetle knows his way around the school so well.

Mr. Coleo: (*turning the Leppie*) Hi there! Mr. Odan mentioned you were on your way. What can I do for you?

Leppie: Mrs. Ortho mentioned that you might be able to help with her missing food mystery.

Coleo: Well, that woman keeps the kitchen spic and span. Year or so ago we had some drain fly invaders, laying eggs in the gunk inside the drain. They had A LOT of kids. We're a school, not an apartment building!

Leppie: I imagine that was a nuisance.

Coleo: You bet. We told the parents they had to move, and since then, Mrs. Ortho cleans that drain regularly so no one else is tempted to call it home.

Leppie: Sounds reasonable. What about her food storage?

Coleo: She keeps it in cardboard boxes in the back until ready to use. The night before, she lays out bags of food on the counter that she's going to make the next day.

Leppie: I see.

Coleo: She also has complained that I need to increase security on the door because of the flies.

(AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION) Narrator: (*turns to the audience*) Inspector Leppie wonders what things might have attracted the culprit to the kitchen. From what you know about IPM, can you help him out?

Leppie: Thank you for your help, Mr. Coleo. I think I'll take a look around outside.

Coleo: Good luck!

Narrator: Leppie now goes outside to scope the area for clues. He notices that it's recess time, and many of the students and teachers are outside. Leppie decides to find out if any of them have noticed anything odd.

Leppie: (*walks up to one of the teachers*) Excuse me?

Mrs. Hym: Yes?

Leppie: I'm Inspector Leppie, I'm here investigating the missing food in the kitchen. Have you heard about that?

Mrs. Hym: I have--awful business. Who would take food from the students?

Leppie: I'm hoping to find out. Have you seen any strange behavior around the school? Any unknown insects in the building?

Mrs. Hym: Not that I am aware of. I have kept a close eye on the students after the recent break-in, though.

Narrator: At that moment, a couple of children come over, Molly Maggot and her friend Suki Cockroach. They are curious about what's going on.

Molly: Hey mister, I like your hat!

Leppie: Well thank you, little one!

Suki: Mrs. Hym, Molly's complaining about wanting a snack.

Molly: Am not!

Suki: You told me a minute ago that you wanted some dog feces.

Molly: Well, I'm growing fast. I'm already in my third instar! And I thought you were thirsty. You always want water.

Suki: Well, it's better than feces.

Mrs. Hym: (*holds her leg up*) We'll get lunch when I'm done talking to this gentle-butterfly. Don't be rude, girls.

Suki: What you talking about?

Leppie: We are just wondering who might have stolen the food from your kitchen.

Suki: Oh THAT. (*rolls her eyes*) Bo-ring.

Leppie (*laughs*): It probably is to a nymph and larva. But we grownups want to catch the bad guy.

Molly: Or girl.

Leppie: Or girl, that's right.

Mrs. Hym: Now go play. I'll be over in a few minutes. (*turns to Leppie*) Sorry, it seems all they think about at this age is food.

Leppie: I remember those days...chewing on a leaf...

Mrs. Hym: And all the delicious honey...

(*the bell rings for lunch*)

Mrs. Hym: I guess I should go...let me know if you have other questions.

Leppie: I will.

Narrator: Just as he is about to continue on his way, Molly and Suki join Mrs. Hym again, accompanied by an older, brown-colored German cockroach nymph.

Leppie: I will. Nice to meet you, Mrs. Hym, Molly, Suki, and this is?

Suki: Germi, my cousin. He's visiting.

Germi: 'Sup?

Leppie: Nice to meet you Germi. How long have you been in town?

Germi: Veek or so. Just came by to grab some grub vit my cousin. Almost ready for my last molt, man.

Leppie: You staying with your cousin?

Germi: Nah, got a cardboard box nearby. Best house der is. Only gonna be here a few more days.

Leppie: So have you heard about the theft here at the school?

Germi: Yeah, harsh. Dude's pretty smart though, they have a feast in this place. Which reminds me, let's get lunch before the line gets long. Then I gotta bolt, Suki. Got things to do.

Suki: Awwww. I wish I was in my last instar.

Mrs. Hym: Come on, let's go. I know Mr. Leppie has work to do.

Narrator: Leppie waves goodbye and heads for the other side of the building, where he spots a figure looking through the dumpster.

Leppie: Hey! You there. What are you doing?

Figure (*looks up, startled, then grins widely; he is a house fly in tattered clothing*) I'm not doing nothing. This is a free country, a fly's gotta eat.

Leppie: Not on school property. Who are you?

Filth: Filth Fly's the name. You know they throw out some perfectly good scraps, here. Course the stuff inside's gonna be fresher, but I'm not that picky. Hate that mean old Ortho, she always shoos me back out.

Leppie: With good reason. Where have you been in the evenings over the last week?

Filth: Here or there. I gotta a house not far from here I crash most nights cause they leave the windows open. This is my day hangout though; they got the best vittles.

Leppie: Hmm, you do know you are trespassing? (*closes his notepad*)

Filth: Eh, no one seems to be doing anything to keep me away. I ain't gonna bite the hand that feeds me (*snickers*), if you know what I mean. I have sponging mouthparts, after all!

Leppie: Which spreads disease to everything you touch.

Filth: (*shrugs*) Man's gotta live.

Leppie: You know there was a robbery here the other night...food taken from the kitchen counter?

Filth: Not my prob. That 'hopper inside is always quick to turn me out if I try to get inside. So don't blame me.

Leppie: We'll see. Good day (*turns to head inside*)

(AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION) Narrator: After meeting and talking with so many insects, Leppie believes he has a good suspect list. Can you say why each of these characters could possibly be the thief?

Each character is introduced by the Narrator and comes to the front of the stage. Audience gives reasons each could be a suspect.

Molly Maggot

Suki Cockroach

Germi Cockroach

Filth Fly

Narrator: Any other thoughts? (*waits for suggestions, then continues*) Let's find out what Leppie discovered!

Leppie: (*heads back to the principal's office*) Principal Odan, I think I've found your thief.

Odan: (*looks surprised*) Oh good! So who is it?

Leppie: I talked to several students and staff, as well as a few other people who aren't usual members of the school population. Let's list off my suspects.

Odan: I'm listening.

Leppie: First, as Mrs. Ortho mentioned, flies like to slip in the door when she opens it for deliveries or fresh air. I found Mr. Filth Fly lurking outside today by the dumpster. He had motive and opportunity.

Odan: So it's him! I've been trying to get rid of that vagrant for months. He always tries to take advantage.

Leppie: Well it's possible that Mrs. Ortho forgot to keep the door shut the evening of the robbery, giving Filth easy access into the building. However, whoever did this had to chew through the bag to get at the crumbs, and since Filth has sponging mouthparts, it couldn't be him. No, it was someone else.
Filth Fly leaves the line up.

Odan: You aren't suggesting a student or staff member did this, are you?

Leppie: No, although I did put them on my list. Mrs. Hym, being a honeybee, is a very unlikely suspect. She only collects pollen and nectar, and even though some nectar was gone, the crumbs were the primary target. So I say she can be ruled out.

Odan: Plus she's very reliable and brings honey in for some of our staff parties.

Leppie: I also wondered about ants. An ant could chew through plastic and carry food back to her colony. But I noted that your roster doesn't include any ants.

Odan: That's right. At least not right now...most of them attend the private Colony School across the yard.

Leppie: And of course the ant larvae couldn't do something like this, so it would have to be one of their staff. My guess is they stick closer to home, though.

Odan: Right, and I have good relations with the principal, Queen Harvester, over there. Her staff is exemplary.

Leppie: Even with their good reputation, they don't fit the MO, anyway. They aren't going to leave specks at the scene.

Odan: OK, so who else?

Leppie: I did consider Molly Maggot and Suki Cockroach when I heard them talking about how important food is to them. This is typical of larvae and nymphs, though, so they weren't high on my list. Plus, we are talking bread crumbs here...Molly wouldn't like that. She's more of a meat girl...raw hamburger, feces, or dead animals. Even though the meat was nibbled upon, she wouldn't have touched the crumbs, which is what our main focus is.

Molly leaves the line up.

Odan: *(makes a face)* I prefer live prey myself, but to each his own. And Molly's cute, so I'm glad it's not her.

Leppie: No, we can rule her out. Suki, being a cockroach, would like crumbs, but she isn't usually found in kitchens...at least when she can spend time in a more humid location, like the boiler room or a bathroom.

Odan: Mrs. Hym has mentioned that Suki likes to make a lot of trips to the bathroom during the day. Even spends some of her recesses in there!

Suki leaves the line up.

Leppie: So that leaves me with the one person who I think fits all the criteria...Suki's cousin, Germy. He's here only temporarily and the theft occurred just two days ago. He's a German cockroach, and we know how they like kitchens.

Odan: He's got a bad attitude, too, the punk.

Germi remains standing, mopping his brow from sweat, looking nervous.

Leppie: *(goes on)* The specks we found at the crime scene are often left by feeding German roaches, and they eat almost anything...bread or cracker crumbs would have been quite appetizing to him. And the meat, water, and nectar would have also been welcome.

Odan: Chewing through a plastic bag would have been no problem for him, either. I've wanted an excuse to get that boy out of here! He's not even one of our students, he just lurks around.

Leppie: Free meals...that's what many of the German roaches are about.

Odan: I will take care of it and let Mrs. Ortho and Mr. Coleo know, too. Thank you for your help, Inspector Leppie! *Odan escorts Germi off the stage.*

Leppie: It was nothing...call me a study of insect nature. *(winks)*

Narrator: *(show all of this acted out)*

So you see, Inspector Leppie used his knowledge about pest insects to solve the crime! Principal Odan confronted Germi, letting him off with a warning as long as he promised to never come on the premises again. Suki told her cousin she didn't like him giving roaches a bad name, and Germi was ashamed to have let her down. He assured Odan it wouldn't happen again. Meanwhile, Mrs. Ortho is taking measures to keep the kitchen clean, with food being stored in sealed containers rather than plastic bags. She has also begun clearing out cardboard boxes when shipments arrive, because roaches love to eat the glue or live in corrugated cardboard. Mr. Coleo has also installed door sweeps on the door to keep out intruders, and has moved the dumpster farther away from the building to discourage flies like Filth from trying to come in the kitchen where they're not wanted. Mr. Coleo also cleans the dumpster on a regular basis so that Filth will take his business elsewhere. All in all, a successful case!