

The Maltese Falcon: A Musical Nightmare

based on Dashiell Hammett's novel
adapted by Scott Guy

CAST:

Sam Spade, hard-boiled detective
Effie Perrine, his gal Friday
Brigid O'Shaunessey, femme fatale
Joel Cairo, unscrupulous treasure-seeker
Casper Gutman, gentleman mob boss

Cairo also plays various cameos
Gutman also plays Lieutenant Dundy

PLACE:

prosecution offices, San Francisco

TIME:

October, 1939

THE MALTESE FALCON

SAM SPADE directly addresses us.
1. Moody Spotlight.

SPADE

(to us)
 Sam Spade, detective. Rugged, tough. And right now, accused
 of....

(Overly-dramatic light change, revealing
 that we're in a legal deposition room. There
 are several small desk lamps throughout the
 set, capable of causing overly-dramatic film
 noir lighting. There are grimy windows to
 one side and apparently along the fourth
 wall, useful for fog, rain, shuttery
 shadows, and blinking neon. Suddenly lit
 are EFFIE, CAIRO, GUTMAN, and BRIGID. **2.**
Murder!)

ALL but SPADE

MURDER!

SPADE

I was going to say disarming handsomeness --

ALL but SPADE

MURDER!
 YOUR PERSPECTIVE, DETECTIVE,
 IS GRIM, GRIM, GRIM.
 WHO KILLED MILES ARCHER?
 HIM, HIM, HIM!

SPADE

(to us; trying to dismiss the interlopers)
 It ain't true. Don't listen to th --

ALL but SPADE

WITH INVECTIVE, DETECTIVE,
 YOU, YOU, YOU,
 YOU KILLED YOUR PARTNER:
 (miming shooting)
 PW! PW! PW!

SPADE

There's more to it than meets the --

EFFIE

More to it! I'll say!

(Re-enactments/foreshadowing of flashbacks:)

CAIRO

(pulling out a pistol)
Put your hands behind your back!

BRIGID

(striking her most vulnerable pose; re-enactment)
You gotta help me, Sam!

GUTMAN

(offering money)
I'll offer you ten thousand dollars.

EFFIE

(grabbing the phone; re-enactment)
Don't make me do it, Sam!

ALL but SPADE

BE AFRAID, SAM SPADE.
TOO LATE TO LIE.
YOUR FATE IS MADE:
YOU'RE GONNA DIE.
AND ALL BECAUSE OF
MURDER!
MURDER!
MURDER!

SPADE

Why would I kill my partner!?

ALL but SPADE

THE FALCON!
THE FALCON!
THE MALTESE FALCON!
PRICELESS STATUE MADE IN MALTA.

SPADE

SWEAR TO GOD, IT'S NOT MY FAULT.

ALL but SPADE

A

LIE! A LIE!
 A LOCK-JAW LIE.
 MR. SPADE, PREPARE TO DIE.
 GRAB YOUR BIBLE, CLUTCH A PSALTER,
 WON'T ABSOLVE A CRIME IN MALTA.

BE ASSURED YOU'LL BE INTERRED
 CUZ MURDER, MURDER IS THE WORD.

(spooky wailing)

WOO...OO!
 WOO...OO!
 BE AFRAID, SAM SPADE.
 TOO LATE TO LIE.
 YOUR FATE IS MADE:
 YOU'RE GONNA DIE.
 AND ALL BECAUSE OF
 MURDER! WOO...OO!
 MURDER! WOO...OO!
 MURDER!

SPADE

(to the four of them)
 What's happening here?

EFFIE

You're asleep, Sam. You're having a nightmare.

SPADE

(indicating us)
 I'm giving my deposition.

CAIRO

It's the night before your deposition, and you're tossing and turning with second-guessing.

SPADE

I ain't second-guessing. I got it all figured out.

EFFIE

If you got it figured out....

BRIGID

Why're you accused of --

ALL but SPADE
MURDER!

SPADE
(giving up trying to be heard)
Lemme know when you're done.

ALL but SPADE
BE AFRAID, SAM SPADE.
TOO LATE TO LIE.
YOUR FATE IS MADE:
YOU'RE GONNA DIE.
AND ALL BECAUSE OF
MURDER! WOO...OO!
MURDER! WOO...OO!
MURDER!

(Music ends. Dramatic lighting lessens; but
still noir-shadowy.)

GUTMAN
You're tossing in your sleep because you can't figure out where
to start. Is it:

CAIRO
(pulling out pistol)
You will please clasp your hands together at the back of your
neck.

EFFIE
Or do you start where all your troubles start, Sam, with...a
femme fatale!

(BRIGID O'SHAUNESSEY, tousled hair, never-
say-no lips, makes quite a voluptuous
entrance. **3. Hot Drums.**)

SPADE
Hard to sleep with all those...tom-toms.

GUTMAN
Or me saying: "I will give you ten thousand dollars when you
find the falcon."

ALL but SPADE
The Maltese Falcon!

CAIRO

(caw!)

(EFFIE, BRIGID, and GUTMAN look at Cairo.)

GUTMAN

What -- was that?

CAIRO

Making a falcon sound.

BRIGID

Sounded more like a crow.

CAIRO

No, a crow is more like
(caw!)

EFFIE

Sounds the same to me.

GUTMAN

No, a falcon's more like --
(hchhhehh!)

BRIGID

It's more of a
(scree!!)

EFFIE

Don't they sort of --

ALL but SPADE
(free-for all bird sounds)

SPADE

Knock it off!

(THEY grow silent.)

SPADE

Now, look here. This might be a dream, but I gotta get a good night's sleep for my deposition. My partner's been killed.

EFFIE

But you can't say it like that, Sam. It has to be more like --

(EFFIE strikes a pose. **4. Killed!**)

EFFIE
MY PARTNER'S BEEN...KILLED!

BRIGID/GUTMAN/CAIRO
KILLED...KILLED...KILLED!

SPADE
Nix on all that. I got it all mapped out. I'll introduce each
of you when it's time.

EFFIE
Oh, it's time, Sam....

ALL but SAM
Your time!

SPADE
All right, siddown. Lemee rehearse this like I planned.
Wait'll I call you.

ALL but SAM
Whatever you say, Sam.

EFFIE
We'll sit over here.

BRIGID
We'll be real quiet.

(THE FOUR tiptoe to side seating.)

CAIRO
Caw!

BRIGID
Well, now that sounds like a chicken....

CAIRO
Who you calling a chicken?

BRIGID
If the pecking order fits....

CAIRO

(chicken threat)
B'kaw!

BRIGID

B'kaw? Like Lauren B'kaw?

EFFIE

Different Bogie movie.

SPADE

(throwing up his hands; *are you done?*)

GUTMAN

All right everyone, let Sam talk. Give himself just enough rope to hang himself with.

(Lights change; re-set. **5. Grifter Underscoring.**)

SPADE

(to us; beginning again)
Spade. Sam Spade. Rugged. Impossibly handsome. It all started when this grifter came into my office.

(CAIRO gets up; preens, as Spade describes.)

SPADE

His hair was black and smooth and very glossy. A square-cut ruby, its sides paralleled by four baguette diamonds, gleamed against the deep green of his --

EFFIE

(to us)
Wait!

(EFFIE leaps up. Lights un-re-set; underscoring stops awkwardly, then EFFIE addresses us. **6. Red Herrings.**)

EFFIE

(to us)

Before he starts...

RED HERRINGS! RED HERRINGS!
 HE'S TRYING TO DISTRACT.
 HE'LL OVERLOAD WITH PURPLE PROSE
 TO CAMOUFLAGE THE FACT
 HIS TESTIMONY TWISTS AND TURNS
 BECAUSE IN WHAT HE'S SAID
 ARE COVERT ACTS AND BURIED FACTS
 AND HERRINGS THAT ARE RED.

YOU'LL NEVER KNOW WHICH WHICH IS WHICH,
 AND WHICH A WHAT IS WHAT.
 HE'LL THROW YOU OFF YOUR STEADY BEARINGS
 SHARING
 RED RED HERRINGS.

ALL but SPADE
 RED HERRINGS, RED HERRINGS!
 HE'S TRYING TO DISSUADE.
 THE SCALES OF JUSTICE SWIM AWAY
 WITH FISHY MISTER SPADE.
 THE UNIMPORTANT SOUNDS IMPORTANT:
 HAS HE FOUND A CLUE?
 OR IS HIS PRATTLE FIDDLE-FADDLE
 MEANT TO RATTLE YOU?

YOU'LL NEVER KNOW WHICH WHICH IS WHICH,
 AND WHICH A WHAT IS WHAT.
 HE'LL THROW YOU OFF YOUR STEADY BEARINGS
 SHARING
 RED RED HERRINGS.

SPADE

I SAY: WHO KNOWS WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT
 AND WHAT IS COMMONPLACE?
 ATTENTION! MENTION DETAILS:
 A SMELL, A SOUND, A FACE.
 A PRIVATE EYE LETS NOTHING BY,
 NOT WHILE HE'S ON THE CHASE.
 YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT'S GOSSAMER
 AND WHAT WILL CRACK THE CASE.

ALL but SPADE
 RED HERRINGS, RED HERRINGS!
 DELIBERATELY OBTUSE.
 BY PLYING YOU WITH INSIDE DOPE
 HE HOPES YOU WON'T DEDUCE
 THAT HE'S THE CON IN PRO AND CON:
 CONFOUND, CONFOUND, CONFOUNDER.
 WITH FISHY TALES AND HERRINGS, SEE,
 HE WANTS YOU ALL TO...FLOUNDER.

SPADE

(wincing)
 This is going to be a long night.

ALL but SPADE
 YOU'LL NEVER KNOW WHICH WHICH IS WHICH,
 AND WHICH A WHAT IS WHAT.
 HE'LL THROW YOU OFF YOUR STEADY BEARINGS
 SHARING
 RED RED HERRINGS.

SPADE

But...the real Effie won't do that tomorrow.

EFFIE

You don't know that, do you? Who knows what I'm going to say tomorrow. That's why you're tossing and turning. You're really worried whether the prosecutors are going to believe your deposition. Really worried. Really really really worried.

(sits)

Sorry I'm done now.

(one more)

Really worried.

SPADE

I'll begin at the top.

(Lights change. SPADE faux-starts a few times, testing to see whether they are going to let him speak unfettered. HE finally begins again. **7. Grifter Underscore 2.**)

SPADE

(to us)

Spade. Sam Spade. Rugged. Egregiously handsome. And right now, accused wrongly of --

(they don't interrupt him; so:)

murdering his own partner. But you're going to put all that straight, see, once you know all the facts, see. Exoneration. That's what I'm after. It all started when this grifter walked into my office.

(JOEL CAIRO enters the central playing area.
NOTE: "Enter" in this script means coming into Spade's active narration; "exit" means sitting to the neutral side. All five actors are visible throughout.)

CAIRO

(pulling out a pistol)

You will please clasp your hands together at the --

SPADE

No, you can't -- you can't start with that. I first need to describe you.

(Underscoring dribbles away again.)

CAIRO

Disagree. Start with something dramatic! Get their attention.

SPADE

But...no...you won't be there. It's just me up there, no actors, so I have to describe everything.

CAIRO

It's your funeral.

SPADE

It's my partner's funeral. Anyway, this grifter walked into my office.

(JOEL re-enters, modeling and posing.

8. Grifter Underscore 3.)

SPADE

His hair was black and smooth and very glossy. A square-cut ruby, its sides paralleled by four baguette diamonds, gleamed against the deep green of his cravat. His black tie threatened to dominate under his slightly weak chin.

CAIRO

(offended)
Slightly weak --

EFFIE

Red herrings. Get to it, Sam.

SPADE

I gotta rehearse them; know which ones to put in, and which to leave out.

CAIRO

Leave out the weak chin.

SPADE

He came towards me with short, mincing, bobbing steps. The fragrance of chypre came with him. At first it was all pleasant.

(NOTE: In this script, "(in scene)" denotes a re-enactment of events, and "(to us)" means Sam is addressing the audience directly.)

CAIRO

(in scene)
Mr. Spade, my name is...Cairo! I am trying to recover an expensive ornament, a solid gold statuette of a falcon...a Maltese Falcon.

GUTMAN

Caw!

EFFIE

Shhh....

CAIRO

Which I have reason to believe you are hiding.

SPADE

And I believe you have no reason to have reason. I'm a gumshoe, I collect justice, not art.

(to us)

Oh, that's good. I'm going to have to remember that.

CAIRO

(in scene)

I am prepared to pay five thousand dollars for its return.

SPADE

I'm listening.

(to us)

Things turned darker when he pulled out a pistol, see, and said:

CAIRO

(pulling out pistol)

You will please clasp your hands together at the --

EFFIE

(leaping up; accusingly)

Only...that's not actually how it all began, Sam, is it?

(Underscoring stops.)

SPADE

Would you let me finish!

EFFIE

I probably won't, considering they're taking my deposition at the same time.

SPADE

Double-deposition. No such thing.

EFFIE

Stuff of nightmares, I get it. But honest, Sam, I don't think you should start with Joel Cairo.

CAIRO

C'mon, I'm dramatic!

GUTMAN

Even with your slightly weak chin?

CAIRO

Hey, you're not even in the scene.

GUTMAN

And who wears chypre, anyway?

SPADE

I am so not in control.

EFFIE

Start at the beginning of the case.

SPADE

Which is -- ?

EFFIE

Aww come on, Sam. Where do all cases begin with you?

(BRIGID makes a dramatic entrance. **9. Bad.**)

SPADE

Oh yeah. With a dame. They all begin with dame.

BRIGID

THERE'S SO MUCH BAD
 BAD
 BAD NIGHT AND DAY
 IT'S ALL YOU CAN DO
 TO
 FEND IT AWAY.
 O GOD HOW I TRY
 TO
 NOT BE A CAD.

BUT WE ALL HAVE BEEN A LITTLE BIT BAD.
 (YOU GOTTA HELP ME!)
 WE ALL HAVE BEEN A LITTLE BIT BAD.
 (O SAM YOU MUST!)
 CAN'T YOU GIVE A GIRL A
 CAN'T YOU GIVE A GIRL A
 TEENSIE WEENSIE ITTY BITTA TRUST?

(BRIGID makes her way over to one of the
 lamps; extreme noir lighting on her.)

BRIGID

It's horrible! I'm in trouble, I'm in trouble. No, I don't mean me, I mean my sister! She's in the hands a marauder! You gotta help me, Sam! I mean, my sister.

WE ALL HAVE BEEN A LITTLE BIT BAD.

(YOU GOTTA HELP ME!)

WE ALL HAVE BEEN A LITTLE BIT BAD.

(O SAM YOU MUST!)

YOU GOTTA --

(drums)

HELP ME!

(drums)

HELP ME!

HELLLLP ME.

CAN'T YOU GIVE A GIRL A

CAN'T YOU GIVE A GIRL A

TEENSIE WEENSIE ITTY BITTA TRUST?

SPADE

Nah, that's so confusing. It takes forever to figure out what she wants. I want to start with Cairo, with the moment when he first mentioned the falcon.

(Ensemble races to the nearest noir light.

10. Maltese Sting.)

ALL but SPADE

THE MALTESE FALCON!

GUTMAN

Caw!

CAIRO

You've got to stop doing that.

SPADE

Come back up here, Cairo. Right where you say --

(SPADE poses Cairo, pointing the pistol.
BRIGID takes her seat.)

CAIRO

(in scene)

I intend to search your offices, Mr. Spade.

SPADE

(nods; a good place to pick up)

CAIRO

I warn you that if you attempt to prevent me I shall certainly shoot you.

SPADE

Go ahead.

CAIRO

You will please stand.

(SPADE is already standing.)

CAIRO

(oblivious)

I shall have to make sure that you are not armed.

SPADE

I don't carry a gun.

CAIRO

(sticking to the line he's memorized)

Likely story. Stand up.

SPADE

(beat; *are you not noticing I'm standing?* Then, to us:) Now, what's going to happen here is I'm going to show you in real time what happened, and then I'm going to explain it. I did as this nervous fella told me, I stood up.

(SPADE realizes his mistake. HE sits, then stands.)

SPADE

And the next thing he knew -

(Action happens faster than we can follow: SPADE makes a move, and suddenly SPADE has Cairo's gun, with Cairo's arms twisted around his back. **11. Cairo's Gun underscore.**)

BRIGID, EFFIE, GUTMAN

(impressed!)

Ooh!

SPADE

See why I don't need to carry a gun, Mr. Cairo?

(to us)

Now here's that same move, only slow, so you can follow it, see?

(SPADE and CAIRO execute a goofy slow-motion re-enactment as SPADE explains. **12. Cairo's Gun Slo-Mo.**)

SPADE

As I stood up, I spun to the right, and dropped my elbow. Cairo's face jerked back

(CAIRO's voice is slo-mo; like an old 16rpm record.)

CAIRO

YOU CAN'T HURT M --

SPADE

not far enough.

(SPADE's elbow connects with Cairo's jaw.)

CAIRO

m-OWWWW

SPADE

My elbow struck him beneath the cheek-bone

CAIRO

DID

SPADE

staggering him so that he would have fallen

CAIRO

NOT

SPADE

had he not been held by my foot on his foot. See?

CAIRO

SEE

SPADE

Then my elbow went on past his astonished dark face

CAIRO

THAT

SPADE

and my hand struck down at the pistol.

CAIRO

COMING.

SPADE

Cairo let the pistol go the instant that my fingers touched it.

CAIRO

WAAA!

SPADE

With my left hand I gathered together the smaller man's coat-lapels

CAIRO

YOU'RE

SPADE

the ruby-set green tie bunching out over my knuckles

CAIRO

A

SPADE

while my right hand stowed the captured weapon away in a coat-pocket.

CAIRO

BULLY.

SPADE

There were tears in his eyes.

(in scene)

What do you have to say for yourself now, Mr. Cairo?

CAIRO

I NEED A CAIRO-PRACTOR.

(SPADE frowns, displeased.)

SPADE

Aw, I don't know, I don't know if that's the right way to start my deposition! I got to get them to believe me, that's the thing that's got me all twisted in knots! Maybe you're right, Effie, and I should start with Brigid. Let me try that again. Stand up, Cairo; I mean, sit down.

(SPADE turns to BRIGID; ushers her to her feet.)

SPADE

Lemme see once more what happens if I start with you. Show me that.

BRIGID

You want me to...play it again, Sam?