

Excerpt terms and conditions



This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

Dramatic Publishing

MURDER MOST FOULED-UP

by

Nikki Harmon



The Dramatic Publishing Company
Woodstock, Illinois • London, England • Melbourne, Australia

© *The Dramatic Publishing Company, Woodstock, Illinois*

*** NOTICE ***

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty fees are given in our current catalogue and are subject to change without notice. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed anytime it is acted before an audience. All inquiries concerning amateur and stock rights should be addressed to: THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, 311 Washington St., Woodstock, Illinois 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR HIS AGENT
THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES.

This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including but not limited to the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication, and reading are reserved. On all programs this notice should appear: "Produced by special arrangement with THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois."

©MCMXCI by
NIKKI HARMON
Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(MURDER MOST FOULED-UP)

ISBN 0-87129-146-0

MURDER MOST FOULED-UP

A Play in Two Acts
For Three Men and Three Women, Doubling*

CHARACTERS

SEYMORE MEAD . . . executor of Edwin Randolph's estate
SANDERSthe Randolph's 72-year-old butler
MRS. JESSELthe Randolph housekeeper
JASON RANDOLPHEdwin Randolph's nephew
BARBARA RANDOLPHJason's wife
KYA RANDOLPHJason's sister

RIDGELY RANDOLPH (doubled by Jason)
ghost of Jason's great-great-grandfather
JUDITH RANDOLPH (doubled by BARBARA)
ghost of Jason's great-great-grandmother
CECE RANDOLPH (doubled by KYA)
ghost of Jason's great-great-aunt

*The ghosts may be either doubled or cast individually at director's discretion.

SETTING: The study of the Randolph's Catalina Island Estate, complete with secret panels, ghosts and a raven who quotes Poe.

TIME: The present. The season is autumn.

MURDER MOST FOULED-UP was first performed on February 9, 1989, at The Tibbits Opera House, Coldwater, Michigan by The Coldwater Community Theatre under the direction of J. Richard Colbeck. The play was produced by Chris Wallace Colbeck. Original set design was by Jerry Corless. Lighting Design was by Jerry Corless and Chuck Lillis. Sound Design was by Ken Delaney. Costume Design was by Marge Anchill. The Stage Managers were Tammy Sawvel and Nedra Huttenlocher. The cast was as follows:

SEYMORE MEAD	Bill Shoop
SANDERS	Tim McCauley
MRS. JESSEL	Irene Grimes
JASON RANDOLPH	Gary Adler
BARBARA RANDOLPH	Rebecca Strobel
KYA RANDOLPH	Kimberlyn Palchak
RIDGELY RANDOLPH	Tom Harmon
JUDITH RANDOLPH	Barbara Strobel
CECE RANDOLPH	Martha (Marty) Craig

MURDER MOST FOULED-UP was the 1989 winner of the Robert J. Pickering Award.

SCENE BREAKDOWN

ACT I Scene I: Eight a.m. Edwin Randolph's study.

Scene II: Ten minutes later.

Scene III: Noon the same day.

Intermission

ACT II Scene I: A few minutes later.

Scene II: Midnight.

Scene III: Seven forty-five a.m. the next morning.

ACT ONE

SETTING: *The elegant paneled study in the Randolph's Catalina Island Estate. It's eight o'clock in the morning and the autumn sun streams in through the Left stained glass windows and across the deep velvet Victorian furniture. Massive cobwebs hang high in the corners of the room and drip down from the mantelpiece. Embers glow in the stone fireplace. Ceiling to floor bookcases cover the Right wall, towering over a large raven in a silver cage. A full-length Victorian portrait of Judith and Ridgely Randolph hangs prominently in view. The feeling of the room is one of having just thrust open a musty old trunk.*

AT RISE: *Sitting at a desk, R, is SEYMORE MEAD, studying the papers before him, while SANDERS and MRS. JESSEL arrange funeral wreaths and vases of cut flowers. The ghost of JUDITH RANDOLPH, dressed to match the painting over the mantel, is straightening the books. SANDERS puts a book on the shelf just as JUDITH raises her arm. SANDERS doesn't see her. MRS. JESSEL gives a flick of the duster to the bird cage and then to one of the three side chairs set up in front of the desk, then returns to the flowers. JUDITH crosses to the chairs and flicks off a speck of dust. MRS. JESSEL doesn't see JUDITH either.*

SANDERS. Do hurry, Mrs. Jessel. The family'll be arriving shortly.

MRS. JESSEL (*arranging a single rose in a vase with two dozen others*). All I've got left to do is the coffee.

JUDITH. Make sure the pound cake's fresh.

SANDERS. And make sure the pound cake is fresh. (*JUDITH rearranges the rose as MRS. JESSEL turns away.*)

MRS. JESSEL (*to SANDERS*). My cakes are always fresh. (*MRS. JESSEL passes JUDITH, not seeing her and exits.*)

SANDERS (*to himself*). Fresh is a relative term.

MEAD. I'm sorry. Did you say something, Sanders?

SANDERS. Only to myself, sir. I was talking to myself.

MEAD. That comes from working for Edwin Randolph too long.

SANDERS. Very likely, sir. Very likely.

JUDITH. Why don't you say it? He was mad as a March Hare.

MEAD. You know, there are those who say he was...

SANDERS. Mad as a March Hare. (*Catching himself.*) If I may be so bold?

MEAD. You won't get any argument from me. Anyone who hung in the attic with bats for relaxation didn't have both oars in the water.

(ULC panel opens and the ghost of RIDGELY RANDOLPH enters, wearing a smoking jacket. MEAD returns to his paperwork as SANDERS stokes the fire.)

RIDGELY (*to JUDITH*). Haven't they started, yet? What's taking so long?

JUDITH. Ridgely, there are things to be done. An ambience to be created...

RIDGELY. A will to be read.

SANDERS (to MEAD). Should I lay another log, sir?

MEAD. No, Sanders. I don't think that'll be necessary.

SANDERS. Very good, sir. Then I shall see to the coffee.

(JUDITH looks over MEAD's shoulder, as RIDGELY paces and SANDERS exits.)

RIDGELY. Every twenty years someone in this family dies and they read a will. You'd think they'd know how to do it by now without all this rigmarole.

JUDITH. It's ambience, dear. You need ambience in this kind of situation. It gives a comforting mood for the grieving relatives.

RIDGELY. What grieving relatives? This family's never grieved. They've been grabbing, stealing and murdering each other for a hundred years. They don't need ambience. They need a cage.

JUDITH. Well, we weren't exactly bound by family ties, either.

RIDGELY. All I did, dear, was murder you for the inheritance. It was nothing personal.

JUDITH (flipping through the will). I know that, dear.

RIDGELY. Be careful. He'll see you.

JUDITH. I'm a ghost. They can't see ghosts.

RIDGELY. Well, they can see paper floating in the air. So put it down. (MEAD sees the paper "floating" down to the desk, picks it up and lets it drop to see if it'll "float" again. It doesn't. He sees the open window, assumes that's the reason and closes it.)

(MRS. JESSEL enters, pushing a rolling tea cart with a silver coffee service and a tray of cakes.)

JUDITH. They'll be coming soon and I want to fix my hair before they start. (*JUDITH turns the handle of the silver tea pot to the left, to neaten the presentation, as MRS. JESSEL watches the pot, in shock, as it turns "by itself."*)

RIDGELY. What on earth for? No one can see you. (*As JUDITH steps away MRS. JESSEL turns the handle back to the right, staring at it, waiting to see if it'll turn back again.*)

JUDITH. It's the principle of the thing, Ridgely. We're representing generations of deceased relatives. (*Opening ULC panel.*) Come on. I want you to change into something more presentable. Perhaps your dove gray morning coat. I've always liked you in that.

RIDGELY. Judith, this is absurd.

JUDITH. No, dear. It's tradition.

(JUDITH and RIDGELY exit through ULC panel, as SANDERS enters through double doors, not seeing panel open or close.)

SANDERS. Will you be needing anything else, sir?

MEAD. Just coffee. Thank you. (*MRS. JESSEL pours MEAD a cup as the doorbell rings. SANDERS exits.*)

MRS. JESSEL (*-serving MEAD*). Here you are, sir.

MEAD. Thank you.

MRS. JESSEL. Sugar?

MEAD. Thank you, no.

SANDERS (*off stage*). Let me take your coat, Miss Kya.

KYA (*off stage*). Thank you, Sanders.

(KYA RANDOLPH enters with seven league strides.)

MEAD. May I offer my sincere condolences on your uncle's death?

KYA. Yeah, well, that's the way it goes, isn't it? One minute you're alive with millions of dollars and the next you're not. My brother and his wife'll be right in. *(KYA sees the tea service and turns the handle to the left.)*

MEAD. Aaah, well, that'll be fine, then. We can start when they...

(BARBARA RANDOLPH enters, looks around and shudders.)

BARBARA *(to KYA)*. How long does it take cobwebs to get that big?

KYA. Ghoulish, isn't it?

MEAD. Excuse me. I'm...

BARBARA. It's like a Charles Addams cartoon.

KYA. So was Uncle Edwin.

MEAD. Excuse me, I'm Seymore Mead.

KYA. Where's Jason?

MEAD. I'm Edwin Randolph's...

BARBARA. Probably inventorying the silver.

(JASON RANDOLPH enters with SANDERS following.)

MEAD. Lawyer!!!

BARBARA. What?

MEAD. I'm the lawyer.

JASON. Good. Let's get on with it. *(KYA, BARBARA and JASON sit on the side chairs while SANDERS and MRS. JESSEL stand at attention. ULC and URC panels open by themselves and close unnoticed.)*

MEAD. We'll now commence with the reading of the will. (*KYA looks around the room.*)

KYA. I have the strangest feeling we're being watched.
(*The lights fade out.*)

END SCENE ONE

SCENE TWO

SETTING: *Ten minutes later. The study is the same as before.*

JASON. HE DID WHAT?!

BARBARA (*grabbing the will*). I don't believe it. Give me that!

KYA. I always said he was crazy.

JASON. They don't let crazy people write wills.

KYA. He did! He let a crazy man write one with our inheritance!

MEAD. Edwin Randolph was of sound mind when he wrote this.

KYA. He hung in the attic with bats!!!

MEAD. Nevertheless...

JASON. We'll contest it.

MEAD. It'll tie up the estate in probate for years.

BARBARA. There's got to be a loophole. You're a lawyer. Find it!

KYA (*snatching the will out of BARBARA's hand and shoving it at MEAD*). Maybe you read it wrong. Here. Read it again!

MEAD. I assure you, Ms. Randolph that...

BARBARA. Maybe you missed a codicil.

MEAD. That was the codicil.

JASON. Read it again, Mead.

MEAD. But...

KYA. Humor us.

MEAD (*reading*). "I, Edwin Randolph, being of sound mind, do hereby bequeath..."

JASON. Not the whole thing.

KYA. Just the part where he went a little nuts.

SANDERS. I beg your pardon, but since we were mentioned in the first part, may Mrs. Jessel and I assume, then, that the small inheritance we were left will not be contested?

BARBARA. SMALL?!

SANDERS. In comparison, madam. Merely in comparison.

MEAD. I'm afraid everything is contingent upon the codicil.

MRS. JESSEL. I know how concerned you all are with our well being, but please be assured that if the tax free thirty-five thousand dollars I shall receive every year and Sanders' annual fifty thousand is not contested it'll most likely be enough to see to our simple needs, until we die.

BARBARA. Which could be very soon.

MEAD. I always said Mr. Randolph was a thoughtful man.

SANDERS. A good man.

MRS. JESSEL. A fine man.

MEAD. A kind man. (*JASON has been watching the THREE like a tennis match.*)

SANDERS. A...

JASON. Dead man.

MEAD. Well, yes, that too.

JASON. So if we could get on with this?

MEAD. Certainly. Reading again the paragraph in question...

BARBARA (*under her breath*). In contention.

MEAD. ...last, so that we may be able to view in full perspective the...

JASON. Good. Great. Anything, Mead. Just read it!

MEAD. Yes, certainly. Now, let's see. We left off...here.
(*Reading very slowly.*) "To my first born blood relative, my heir, my only nephew, my brother's only son, my..."

JASON. God! Get on with it!

MEAD. Well, then, I'll just skip this little section, here, and...

JASON. Skip. Skip.

MEAD (*reading*). "To Jason Randolph and his sister Kya Randolph, I leave my art collection, consisting of three Degas, two Picassos, four Chagall sketches, two Klees, one Delvaux and a Rodin bronze. And, to my nephew's beautiful wife, Barbara, I leave my entire Estate, all its contents, my stock portfolio and twenty million dollars."

KYA/JASON. WHAT!!!

JASON. I didn't hear that before.

BARBARA. He was a good man.

MRS. JESSEL. A fine man.

SANDERS. A kind man.

MEAD. A...

JASON. STOP THAT! (*EVERYONE stops short.*) Are you saying that my uncle, *my* uncle, left everything to my wife who he only saw once, from across the room, at the wake of a cousin he didn't know? My wife gets everything?!

MEAD. Of course not. You and your sister share equally in his art collection, which, according to its last appraisal, has considerable value.

JASON. *Would* have if it could be sold, which it can't.

Each one of those paintings are on permanent loan to the L.A. County Museum and the Rodin is at the Getty.

MEAD. The Delvaux is in the Art Institute of Chicago's collection.

JASON. Great.

KYA. Is that the one with the women who look like "Stepford Wives"?

MEAD. Paul Delvaux's, *The Village of The Mermaids*, is a well valued work of art.

JASON. And an equally well guarded one.

MEAD. You do own it.

JASON. That's like owning the La Brea Tar Pits...priceless but immovable.

MEAD. But your uncle did leave the lion's share of his wealth to your wife and it's not exactly as if she were a stranger. (*JASON and KYA look suspiciously at BARBARA who grins back.*) You'll share in it equally, I assume. (*JASON and KYA are still eyeing BARBARA.*)

BARBARA. Of course. (*To JASON.*) Dear. (*To KYA.*) Kya. (*To MEAD.*) Equally, of course.

MEAD. Now, with the will read and viewed in proper perspective, this, again, is the codicil. (*Reading.*) "All bequests shall be nullified if the deed to the Estate is not found within twenty-four hours from...now.

KYA. I still can't believe he lost it.

MEAD. He didn't lose it. He hid it.

JASON. HE WHAT!?

MEAD. He hid it.

BARBARA. Hid it? (*To JASON.*) He said hid it. (*To MEAD.*) You said hid it?

MEAD. That's right.

JASON. *That's* crazy.

KYA. Now do you see what I mean?

JASON. There's got to be a way around all this. Your bank must have a copy. Everyone keeps copies.

MEAD. No copy.

JASON. What do you mean no copy? There's a Xerox machine in your lobby. All you have to do is push the button.

MEAD. We don't have a copy because your uncle didn't trust banks.

KYA. Then where'd he keep his money?

MEAD. With the deed.

BARBARA. What are you saying?

JASON. I know what he's saying.

BARBARA. He can't be saying that.

MEAD. I'm afraid I am.

KYA. Everything?

BARBARA. Twenty million of everything?

MEAD. Including certificates of ownership for all his painting, antiques, stocks...

JASON. He was crazy.

MEAD. Again, I'd strongly advise against making that claim. It could negate the entire will.

JASON. What if we can't find it in twenty-four hours?

MEAD. Then the State of California becomes the sole beneficiary.

JASON. And if we do find it in time no one'll be able to contest it?

MEAD. Exactly. (*JASON nods, pauses, considers the prospects, the time limit and leaps at MEAD, grabbing his lapels, shaking him violently.*)

JASON. WHERE'S MY MONEY?!!!

KYA (*trying to pull JASON off MEAD*). Our money! Our money! Where's our money?!

MEAD. That seems to be the essence of the codicil.

JASON. That's *my* money!

SANDERS. If I may be so bold?

JASON. He was *my* blood relative!

SANDERS. If I may be so bold?

JASON. I WAS THE FIRST BORN!!!

SANDERS. If I may...

JASON. What is it, Sanders?

SANDERS. Miss Kya is correct.

JASON. What are you talking about?

SANDERS. It *is* our money.

MRS. JESSEL. Our money, if I may, is what is missing.

BARBARA. What do you all mean *our*?

JASON. Will everyone stop saying that word?! Wait a minute. No one draws up a deed without recording it. There has to be a record somewhere.

KYA. Right.

BARBARA. Problem solved.

SANDERS. Except, madam, for those of us who were left merely money.

MRS. JESSEL. That, if I may point out, is still missing and can't be copied.

BARBARA. Oh, my God! I forgot about my money.

KYA. Our money.

SANDERS (*to KYA*). To be sure, madam.

BARBARA. Okay. First things first. We'll get a copy of the deed and...

MEAD. I'm afraid the problem is more intricate than you realize, Mrs. Randolph.

BARBARA. There's more?

KYA. I could have bet on that.

MEAD. The estate sits on a Spanish Land Grant.

JASON (*incredulously*). On Catalina Island?

MEAD. Santa Catalina Island. Yes.

JASON. I'm not buying this.

MEAD. There were quite a few Spanish Land Grants in California.

JASON. In the Santa Claria Valley, yes. In San Diego, yes. But not off-shore. Not twenty-six miles into the Pacific Ocean and not under my estate. (*KYA and BARBARA look at JASON in unison. Under his breath.*) *Our estate.*

MEAD. As a matter of fact, the grant covers the entire island and if you can find it, you'll own Catalina Island.

KYA. That's gonna be a surprise to the Wrigley's. They think they own it.

BARBARA. Wait a minute. How can they own it if we've got the grant?

JASON. We don't have the grant.

BARBARA. We will have the grant, once we find it.

KYA. Why didn't someone in the family claim the island before?

MEAD. Because your uncle only found the grant himself a month ago.

JASON. I'm not buying this.

MEAD. And, compared to the Spanish settlement of California, in 1773, the Wrigley purchase is a relatively new claim, so to speak.

JASON. And one that would be overthrown in favor of the grant.

MEAD. But without the grant...

BARBARA. We have no claim.

JASON. But if we find it...

BARBARA. In twenty-four hours...

MEAD (*to BARBARA*). It's yours.