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A Virtual Whodunnit

By

FLIP KOBLER and CINDY MARCUS

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A Virtual Whodunnit

CHARACTERS

STERLING: The patriarch of the family who runs it with an iron fist. A hard man used to getting his way.

FLORINA: Sterling's latest trophy wife who speaks with a thick vampire-esque accent. A spoiled little gold digger who's had it with his exes.

JUNIPER: Daddy's little girl who can do no wrong. The apple of Daddy's eye, even if she doesn't wanna be.

EUGENE: Juniper's husband and CFO of the company. A milquetoast man who's oh-so-easily forgettable.

BULLION: The first-born son and heir apparent. Except it's not apparent to Sterling who treats this son as an inconvenient afterthought.

MACY: The flower-child tree-hugger who wants nothing to do with Daddy's money.

HALEY: Sterling's VP of technology. Hates that Sterling thinks of her as an assistant.

BARRY: Sterling's lawyer with his own secret agenda.

DETECTIVE SLOAN: The hard-boiled cop who will wade through the quicksand of lies to find the truth.

AUTHORS' NOTE

The coronavirus, or COVID-19, has upended our world. With so many of us sheltering at home, it seems that theatre is the first casualty. How do you bring actors together for a show, when it's unsafe to rehearse and there can't be an audience anyway?

We believe this show is the answer. This show is designed to be performed on Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts or any other multiperson platform. The actors can be at home or in separate locations but playing off other actors in real time.

Strange times may have inspired us to find a new theatre outlet. Enjoy.

PRODUCTION NOTE

Although this show is meant to be performed online, we suggest trying to make it as theatrical as possible. What costumes, props and sets can you do from home? Maybe hats or other costume pieces? Can you do a set? Or drop in a virtual set via green screen? Even Zoom has virtual backgrounds available. Harsh noir lighting and venetian blinds can add to the mood. The more theatre you can put into this, the more fun you'll have and the more your audience will enjoy it.

A Virtual Whodunnit

(A title card fills our screen: "A Virtual Whodunnit." Then a face [DETECTIVE SLOAN], all in shadows, replaces the card. A match flares to life, revealing his face under the fedora as he lights his cigarette. It's all so noir.)

DETECTIVE SLOAN. My name is Sloan. Rockford Sloan. And I'm a homicide detective. It was a dark and stormy night. The wind howled like a Kardashian who didn't make the cover of *People*. We're about to solve a crime, you and I. So keep your peepers peeled, pay attention to clues. Because someone is about to get murdered, and it's up to us to figure out who done it. Ready? This is how it all began.

(His face vanishes from the screen, replaced by another card. "The Birthday." Then we're in a virtual meeting. STERLING, BARRY and HALEY are the first faces we see.)

STERLING. Is this it? The meeting's started? Where is everybody? You told them to be here, yes?

BARRY. I emailed the invitations, sir.

STERLING. You don't email invitations. You subpoena. You demand they be here.

BARRY. Well this isn't really a legal action, so I can't do that.

STERLING. What kind of lawyer are you?

BARRY. One who passed the bar.

STERLING. Nobody knows more about the law than I do. People say that. A lot of people say that. You know who says that?

BARRY. Everybody?

STERLING. Every. Body. Nobody's here.

BARRY. Is it a tech problem?

STERLING. Why would it be a tech problem. This is the greatest tech company of all time. The best.

BARRY. The app is a prototype.

STERLING. So is my new phone.

BARRY. You never found the old one?

STERLING. Why would I? This one has all the bells and whistles. So it's a software problem?

HALEY. I ran diagnostics all morning. Appears to be working perfectly. I'm sure everyone is just running a little late.

STERLING. Fine. Get me a cup of coffee.

HALEY. Sir, I'm not your assistant. I'm VP of technology.

STERLING. Do I pay your salary?

HALEY. Yes, sir.

STERLING. Then get me a cup of coffee.

HALEY. Sir, I'm at the office. Do you want me to drive to the airport, fly to your city and take a cab to your house to make you coffee?

STERLING *(beat)*. How long is the flight?

(HALEY bites her tongue as BULLION comes on. He's all plastic smiles and overly amped enthusiasm.)

BULLION. There he is! The man. The myth. My dad! Happy birthday, Dad. Happy birthday to you. Happy birth—

STERLING. What have I said about singing?

BULLION. Sorry, Dad.

STERLING. I notice you couldn't be bothered to be in town for my birthday party.

BULLION. Sorry. I'm away on business. We're developing a new software—

STERLING. Which you seem to love more than your father.

BULLION. No. But you always said nothing is more important than work—

STERLING. Stop making excuses, Bullion. You sound like a whiney loser.

(BULLION's feelings are hurt. That's when JUNIPER appears on screen. She's eating saltine crackers.)

JUNIPER. I'm here. Happy birthday, Daddy. Mwah.

STERLING. Hello, princess.

JUNIPER. I'm sorry I couldn't be there in person. I'm away on business.

STERLING. Good for you, sweetheart.

BULLION. What?

STERLING. I'm proud of you.

BULLION. What?!

STERLING. Business should always come first.

BULLION. WHAT?! You literally just said—

STERLING. Stop living in the past, Bullion.

JUNIPER. Yeah, Bull.

STERLING. Are you all right, sweetie? You look a little pale.

JUNIPER. I was just a little nauseous earlier.

STERLING. Is that all. 'Cause you look a little puffy—

(Now EUGENE appears, looking awkward and guilty.)

EUGENE. I'm here. Sorry I'm late. Happy birthday, sir.

STERLING. Who are you?

EUGENE. Eugene, sir.

BULLION. You remember Eugene, Dad. He's Juniper's—

STERLING. Don't question my memory, boy.

JUNIPER. You remember Eugene, Dad.

STERLING. Of course, princess.

BULLION. What?

JUNIPER. Eugene is my husband.

EUGENE. And your CFO. I've been overseeing the upgrade, but Vista wants more money for the licensing—

STERLING. Yeah, yeah, blah-blah-blah. Money. Princess, where's your mother?

BULLION (*steaming*). She's not our mother.

STERLING. Bullion.

BULLION. What, she's not.

JUNIPER. He's right, Daddy. She's not.

STERLING. I know, princess. You're right, of course.

(FLORINA appears on screen. All mink-coated, veiled hat and smokey eyes. She's way too close to the screen.)

FLORINA. Vat, is zis thing on? Is zis vorking? Hello, am I in ze virtual vorld?

STERLING. Yes, Florina.

FLORINA. Zere is my husband. My beautiful twenty-four-carat husband whom I love so much. Kiss kiss. I see your children from your three ozzer marriages are all in zis meeting, but I am not knowing why.

BULLION. Hello, Florina.

FLORINA. Hello, Bullion. Couldn't be bothered to show up for your father's birthday I see.

BULLION. Yeah, where exactly are YOU, Florina?

BARRY. Bullion, don't attack your mother.

BULLION. She's not my mother. And don't talk to me that way, ambulance chaser.

STERLING. Shut up, Bullion.

FLORINA. You see? Zis, right here, is why I don't come to zese family gatherings. Ze hostility against me, iz too much. Ze don't like I replaced zier mother.

BULLION. Why do you sound like a vampire, Florina?

(FLORINA gasps.)

STERLING. Bullion! Apologize to your mother.

BULLION. She's not my mother.

JUNIPER. He's right, Dad. She does sorta sound like a vampire.

STERLING. I know, princess. That's just the way stepmommy talks, isn't it silly?

BARRY. Sir, we have a meeting on the revamp of the mainframe in a little over an hour.

STERLING. Fine, yes. Is everybody here?

EUGENE. No, sir, we're still waiting on Macy.

STERLING. Who said that?

EUGENE. Me, sir.

STERLING. Who are you?

JUNIPER. My husband, Daddy.

EUGENE. And your chief financial officer.

JUNIPER. And you're a very good one.

STERLING. Haley! Get my daughter online. Now!

BULLION. Dad, Haley can't force her to log on.

STERLING. Does she know how to operate this tech or not?

HALEY. Yes, sir, I've devoted my life to creating this software.

(Now MACY appears. She's all tie-dyed, flower-child, daisies-in-her-hair free-spirity.)

MACY. OK, so like I'm here, or whatever, even though my horoscope said I should avoid family gatherings or whatever. It'll get my chakra all like, outta line.

STERLING. Macy. Still trying to revive the summer of love.

MACY. You know it, *Dad*. Still trying to like, rape the environment, pollute the air, and oppress the working class?

STERLING. Why do you have to be such a disappointment?

MACY. Must be, like, in my genes or whatever.

FLORINA. You did not get any of your father's good genes.

You are just like your mother, ze fashion model.

MACY. Oh, like, hey Florina. Didn't expect to see you out in daylight.

BARRY. Sir, we really need to get this meeting started.

BULLION. Meeting? I thought this was a birthday party thing.

STERLING. Shut up, Bullion. Did you not read the memo?

JUNIPER. So this isn't a birthday party?

BARRY. No.

JUNIPER. I'm sorry.

STERLING. It's all right, princess. How could you know?

(BULLION sighs.)

BARRY. OK, everyone, now that we're all here. Your father asked me to gather everyone here so we could discuss his new will.

(And that gets a startled reaction. If startled means total freak out. Everyone talks at once. Finally, HALEY calms them down.)

HALEY. Whoa, whoa. If you all talk at once it overloads the system.

STERLING. I thought you were going to fix that.

HALEY. It's in the next upgrade.

BULLION. The third-party integrations—

MACY. Oh, like that is so yesterday. You're using archaic infostructure when you should be using like totally green technology. But you know, like, whatever.

BARRY. So Mr. Sterling is changing the will and—

BULLION. Wait. Changing the will. Why?

STERLING. None of your business, Bullion.

JUNIPER. But why, Daddy?

STERLING. Well, princess, I thought it was prudent. You all know that our latest software app, "Mind Meld-O-Gram" was the biggest app last year.

BULLION. Thanks to you.

STERLING. Don't butter me up, boy.

JUNIPER. But you're a genius, Daddy.

STERLING. Thank you, princess.

HALEY. It was a group effort.

BULLION. Spearheaded by Haley.

STERLING. The girl that gets me coffee?

HALEY. I'm head of your IT.

FLORINA. So now our little family company is worth billions?

EUGENE. Seven point five and climbing.

STERLING. Who said that?

EUGENE. Me, sir. Your son-in-law.

STERLING. Are you running this meeting, Eustice?

EUGENE. Eugene. No, sir.

STERLING. Then shut up. Now, I think somebody is deliberately putting glitches into the new software. Somebody here is trying to sabotage the company.

(Again, everyone talks at once. Finally it settles.)

STERLING *(cont'd)*. You know who you are. And so do I. That's why I'm changing my will. Some people here are not going to be happy. You will be cut off without a cent.

FLORINA. Surely you don't mean me. I am ze love of your life.

BULLION. My mother was the love of his life.

MACY. No, MY mother was the love of his life.

FLORINA *(flashing her diamond)*. But who's got ze ring now?

MACY. Well, like, since I don't care about the business or whatever, and I don't like, like any of you people, and since I like, don't care about the money, you vultures can fight over it, I'm gonna sign off. Peace out.

STERLING. Not yet, Macy. I know what you've been up to.

MACY. Like, whatever, or whatever.

JUNIPER. Daddy, is this a good idea?

STERLING. I think it is, princess. If you knew what I knew, then you'd know there was no other way.

BULLION. Can't we talk about this?

STERLING. It's already done.

EUGENE. What?

STERLING. Larry here—

BARRY. It's Barry sir.

STERLING. Right. Harry's sent me the revised will. When I hang up from this call I'm going to sign it. It goes into effect immediately.

FLORINA. But—

STERLING. There are no buts. I just wanted to see all your faces when I told you the news. You, and you know who you are, think you got the best of me, trying to sabotage the company that I built—

HALEY. Team effort—

STERLING. Well, the joke's on you. Because when I'm through with you, you will be jobless, homeless, friendless, drinking Woolite in the gutter. I'm not a man to be trifled with. One signature, *(Now he puts a cellphone to his ear.)* and one simple phone call and your life is over—

(Suddenly we hear a loud ZZZZZZZZ. And STERLING is shaking violently. His phone is electrocuting him. It's weird and oddly funny in a sitcom-ish kinda way. Five seconds later, he collapses onto his desk. Unmoving. The others freak again.)

JUNIPER. Daddy?

BULLION. Dad. Dad?!

BARRY. Oh my word. I think he's dead.

(And as everyone's freak-out hits the red zone, the screen goes black. After a beat or two, a new title card comes up. "The Interviews." Then DETECTIVE SLOAN appears as we hear some noir music.)

DETECTIVE SLOAN. That's the way it went down before I got the call about the old man. The play smelled fouler than a porta-potty in July. It was time to start digging.

(Ring, ring. BARRY answers.)

BARRY. Hello?

DETECTIVE SLOAN. Mister Schwartz?

BARRY. Yes?

DETECTIVE SLOAN. I'm Detective Sloan. I'm investigating the death of Augustus Sterling.

BARRY. Investigating? His death was an accident.

DETECTIVE SLOAN. Was it?

BARRY. I just—I thought—I don't know. You think he was murdered?

DETECTIVE SLOAN. I understand you were his personal lawyer.

BARRY. Yes. Uh, yes. I mean, well he had a whole team of lawyers for his business. An army of them. I took care of his personal needs.

DETECTIVE SLOAN. Personal needs?

BARRY. Wills. Probate. Prenups. Nondisclosure agreements. That sort of thing.

DETECTIVE SLOAN. Right. So you drew up his will?

BARRY. I've drawn up several of his wills over the years.

DETECTIVE SLOAN. Including the latest one.

BARRY. Yes.

DETECTIVE SLOAN. Tell me about it.

BARRY. I can't. Attorney/client privilege.

DETECTIVE SLOAN. Your client is dead.

BARRY. And still protected.

DETECTIVE SLOAN. But you can confirm he changed his will.

BARRY. Yes. But he never signed it.

DETECTIVE SLOAN. To be clear, since he died *before* he signed his new will, then the old will is still in force.

BARRY. That's right. He died moments before he was going to sign it.

DETECTIVE SLOAN. And who stands to inherit the most from the old will?

BARRY. He'd divided the money equally.

DETECTIVE SLOAN. So who stood to lose the most if the new will took effect?

BARRY. Again, I can't tell you that.

DETECTIVE SLOAN. I can get a warrant.

BARRY. Then you should. I'm not going to be disbarred over this.

DETECTIVE SLOAN. So you can't tell me who had the most to gain by stopping the new will.

BARRY. I can tell you this. He cut out everybody. The entire family, cut off without a cent.

DETECTIVE SLOAN. Powerful motive.

BARRY. Not my department.

DETECTIVE SLOAN. So everybody might've wanted to kill him, but somebody had the technical skills to pull it off. Who?

BARRY. Not my department. You'll need to talk to his VP of technology.

DETECTIVE SLOAN. Well, thank you for your time.

BARRY. I hope you find his killer.

DETECTIVE SLOAN. I will.

(Now BARRY leaves the screen. DETECTIVE SLOAN stays on screen. Ring, ring. Then HALEY joins the call. She's very