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Dramatic Publishing

IT'S MURDER IN THE WINGS!

by

Pat Cook



The Dramatic Publishing Company

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for Rose Ann,
for teaching me how to use a
word processor and then giving
me a reason to write.

ACT ONE

SETTING: *The outer lobby of the Wings Publishing Company. This slightly disreputable office contains a couch and chair, L, with adjoining table, covered with magazines related to theatre. There is a desk with accompanying chair for TYROLIA located R. There are four doors to the office. Door One, R, leads to ELGARTH MOON's office, Two, UC, leads to hallway, Three, UL, leads to other offices and Four, DL, leads to outside. The whole place has been spruced up for some kind of gala.*

AS THE LIGHTS COME UP: *TYROLIA is busy answering phone lines.*

TYROLIA. Yes, that's correct, the contract signing will take place tonight. Yes, reporters are welcome. Just between you and me, they could use all the publicity they can get. (*Buzz.*) May I put you on hold thank you. (*Click.*) The Wings Publishing Company. Remember, your best play is just waiting in The Wings, can I help you? Yes, that's correct. After tonight we will be handling Lionel Upshaw, author of *The Main Corpse* and *That Was No Cadaver, That Was My Wife*. His new play? It's called *Done In*. (*Buzz.*) May I put you on hold thank you. (*Click.*) The Wings Publishing Company. Remember, if it's not in The Wings, it's not in

the theater, can I help you? No, we don't handle puppet shows. That's right, no puppet shows, no games and no animal acts. *(Pause.)* Okay, we had a pony once. *(Buzz.)* May I put you on hold thank you. *(Click.)* The Wings Publishing Company. Remember, if you want your theater to really fly, don't forget The Wings, can I help you?

(KITTY and DORIS enter through Door Four.)

DORIS. Did he get fresh? Did he get fresh? I want to tell you!

KITTY. Well, did he?

DORIS. That's what I said. I want to tell you he did.

TYROLIA. Do we do revivals? Oh, religious revivals! Is this call coming from a prison? *(KITTY and DORIS cross to a table and start thumbing through a stack of scripts.)*

DORIS. Well, anyway we're going out again tomorrow night.

KITTY. Aren't you bringing him to the party?

DORIS. Nah, he has this thing about not wearing socks.

KITTY. At last, a man you can take to a food fight.

TYROLIA. Yes, we do handle religious matter! Of course, that's in our Wings and a Prayer section. *(She opens up a file.)* Well, let's see, we have tirades against Greed, Envy, Sloth...Sloth! What's Sloth?

KITTY. Anybody who doesn't wear socks.

TYROLIA. We run the entire gamut. We got your seven basic vices covered, or you can choose our weekend pack in which we charge you for three vices and then throw in two for nothing. You have our catalogue? The

prices are covered in the back. Look under "The Wages Of Sin."

KITTY (*to TYROLIA*). What time does the Gala event start? (*TYROLIA waves her to be quiet.*) One of these days I'm going to be more than just a reader here and then she's going to have to answer me before that stupid phone.

DORIS (*to TYROLIA*). Will there be doughnuts? I love doughnuts.

KITTY. You wouldn't if you had any hindsight.

DORIS. What's *that* mean?

KITTY. Turn around.

DORIS. Hey!

(MADDIE enters through Door Four.)

MADDIE. Okay, guys, line up.

DORIS. Here it comes.

KITTY. The old Knute Rockne.

MADDIE. Let's go, let's go. It's check list time! (*KITTY and DORIS stand in a sort of semi-attention and in line.*)

TYROLIA (*quickly*). Listen, you need to come by and pick up one of our new catalogues. (*Pause.*) Well, see you in fifteen to twenty. (*Click.*) Tell you what, I'll call you next week. I think we're getting in a zebra! (*Click.*) Just show up with plenty of flash bulbs and I'll show you where I was operated. Yeah, we'll drive right past there. (*Click.*) The party starts at six-thirty, so you have a half hour to rent something! (*Click. Now, finished with the phone, TYROLIA gets in line with KITTY and DORIS. MADDIE paces in front of them like a commanding officer.*)

MADDIE. Guys? I don't need to tell you what this all means to us. (*TYROLIA, KITTY and DORIS start to relax.*) Tonight we get our heads above water. (*The WOMEN return to the line-up.*) I don't mind telling you we were on pretty rocky terrain there and we're not out of the woods yet.

KITTY. Excuse me, Maddie, but aren't you mixing your metaphors a bit there?

MADDIE. Mixing my...well, I see it as one patch of rocky terrain on which stands these woods...of which we're not out of as yet.

DORIS. Apparently, since we're still in the lake. (*MADDIE looks at her curiously.*) That stuff about getting our heads above water?

MADDIE. What was I saying?

DORIS. Have you been dating a lumberjack?

KITTY. Now, you *know* she only has eyes for Don-nald.

DORIS. Woo woo.

MADDIE. Stop it, you two. Now, we're all like a family here, right? Now, what is a family?

TYROLIA (*to DORIS*). Watch it, it might be rhetorical!

DORIS (*waving her hand frantically*). Ooh! Ooh!

MADDIE. Doris?

DORIS. Are we going to have doughnuts?

MADDIE. What?

TYROLIA (*to MADDIE*). It's your own fault, you asked a question.

MADDIE (*pacing in front*). Okay, here's the story. Tonight we sign up Lionel Upshaw to *our* publishing company. I don't have to tell you that this dignified establishment has seen better days. We've hit a brief slump, a minor set back. But we're not down yet. We are signing up a literary lion tonight. And on the

strength of that, J. B. Odell from First Federal will loan us fifty thousand to refurbish the printing equipment. So, it is vitally important that everything run like clock-work tonight. Any questions?

DORIS. No doughnuts, huh?

KITTY. You got that, did you?

TYROLIA. Is Mr. Moon going to give us a speech as well? (*She indicates his door.*) I don't want to waste all these yawns.

MADDIE. No, he's been preparing his speech for the media *and* Mr. Upshaw. He also said something about some big announcement he's going to make. (*She crosses to his door.*) He's been in there all day going over Mr. Upshaw's manuscript. In fact, I better just go in and see how it's coming. (*She looks back.*) At ease. (*She exits into Door One.*)

KITTY. What's the point in even reading the thing, we're already set to publish it, aren't we? I mean just so long as it has a lot of women in the cast, no set changes and it appeals to teen-agers, we're set, right?

TYROLIA. Kitty, why don't you and Doris go and make sure your offices are cleaned up. You know, hide the magazines, take down the pin-ups, like that.

KITTY. They're straight. I even threw away the cheese sandwiches.

DORIS. Not the pimento cheese? (*DORIS nods.*) Great. No sandwiches, no doughnuts. (*She exits into Door Three.*)

KITTY. Why don't you have the sockless wonder bring something over. He probably eats with his feet, right? (*She crosses to the door.*) Oh, Tyrolia? (*TYROLIA is now straightening up her desk.*)

TYROLIA. Hm?

DORIS. Buzz us when it's time to come out of our hole.
(*She exits. The telephone buzzes.*)

TYROLIA. The Wings Publishing Company. If you want to feather your theatrical nest, don't forget The Wings. May I help you?

(*MADDIE bursts out of Door One and shuts the door. She looks frantically at TYROLIA.*)

MADDIE. Oh my God!

TYROLIA. Can I put you on hold thank you. (*Click.*)
What?

MADDIE. Mr. Moon. He's...he's dead.

TYROLIA. What do you mean, dead?

MADDIE. I mean dead. *Dead* dead. You know, post alive.

(*DORIS enters through Door Three.*)

DORIS. Did the dog come in here?

MADDIE. Doris. Mr. Moon's dead.

DORIS. What do you mean dead?

MADDIE. Why is it nobody understands dead?! He's dead! Look it up! (*DORIS, totally unmoved, picks up a dictionary and thumbs through it.*)

TYROLIA (*crossing to MADDIE*). You mean he's unconscious?

MADDIE. I mean he's dead! You know, one minute he's...(She opens her mouth and pants.) and the next minute he's...(She opens her mouth and doesn't pant.) Dead! (*Mimics an umpire calling someone Out.*)

TYROLIA. Isn't that just like a man. He was okay a while ago. (*It sinks in.*) You mean he's really...?

MADDIE. Who would make up something like that?

TYROLIA. But how could he just...Wait. When was the last time anybody saw him?

MADDIE (*frantic*). Okay, okay, let's keep calm, let's try to be rational! It's no reason to panic, is it?

TYROLIA. One of the best. (*She pushes a button on her phone, cutting off her caller.*)

MADDIE. I haven't been in there since this morning. I've been out all day. Now, Tyrolia, try to remember. Who's been in there?

TYROLIA. Everybody.

(*KITTY enters through Door Three.*)

KITTY. Who took our laundry? (*TYROLIA shushes her.*)

No, really. It hadn't dried yet.

TYROLIA. Not now.

KITTY. What's wrong?

TYROLIA. Mr. Moon's dead.

KITTY. Dead? What do you mean, dead?

MADDIE. Ohhh!

DORIS (*reading from the dictionary*). Dead. Devoid or deprived of life. To die. (*She shuts the book and smiles.*)

MADDIE. What do you mean, everybody?

TYROLIA. Well, all of us, Mr. Upshaw, Mr. Odell, Donald McShane. Shoot, I guess everyone who's coming to the party tonight.

MADDIE (*realizing*). The party!

KITTY. Wait a minute, you two are serious?

TYROLIA. As a heart attack.

MADDIE (*thinking*). Don't say that!

KITTY. Brother, you leave the room for two seconds...

MADDIE. How could he *do* this to us?! Tonight of *all* nights. Couldn't he wait until he got home?

DORIS. I think it's one of those spur-of-the-moment things.

KITTY. Wait. What you just read. That deprived of life thing. What if it wasn't his idea?

MADDIE. What?

KITTY. Crimomently, we've published enough whodunits, haven't we? Didn't you ever read any of them?

MADDIE. I try not to read too much of the stuff we publish. Keeps me awake at night. And the nightmares...!

DORIS. You think somebody murdered him?!

TYROLLA. I think he needs a second opinion. (*She exits through Door One.*)

MADDIE. Okay, okay, we got to get organized here. Hypothesis. What happens if everyone finds out that the president of The Wings Publishing Company has just died?

KITTY. Well, we get flowers?

MADDIE. No.

DORIS (*hopefully*). Doughnuts!

KITTY. NO! Oh, I get it. She means business-wise, right?

MADDIE. Right. I'll tell you what happens. Lionel Upshaw won't sign with us, which means that J. B. Odell won't give us the loan, which means...

DORIS. The end of civilization as we have come to know it. (*EVERYONE looks at her.*) I read that somewhere.

MADDIE. Wait! I'm not a doctor. Maybe I was wrong!

(*TYROLLA enters, gently shuts the door and looks at the OTHERS.*)

TYROLIA. Honey, you weren't wrong. You ever thought of becoming a doctor?

DORIS (*fearful*). What do we do?

MADDIE. Just don't panic. Let me think a minute.

DORIS. Yeah, but there's a dead man in the next room.

KITTY. You want to bring him in here?

DORIS. NO!

TYROLIA. Oh, that's good. He seemed to like it where he was. I can't believe this. (*MADDIE crosses and picks up the coffee pot.*)

MADDIE. Okay, let's just not lose our heads. I have an idea. (*DORIS and KITTY each pick up a styrofoam cup. MADDIE then pours them a cup of coffee. Then pours herself one as well while she explains her idea.*) Now. We know what's going to happen if this gets out today. But suppose, just suppose now, for argument sake, that it doesn't get out...for awhile.

TYROLIA. Define awhile.

DORIS. You want me to get the dictionary again?

KITTY. Not you.

MADDIE. Just until tomorrow, say. After all the party and the signings are over. Now, how'd *that* be?

KITTY. What about the party itself? Isn't he, like, the host?

TYROLIA. Just like. You can't tell them apart.

MADDIE. We'll deal with that when we come to it. Now, just think about it.

DORIS. Think about it?

KITTY (*indicates DORIS*). I don't think that's on her job description.

TYROLIA. Well, think about one other thing. I think he was poisoned.

MADDIE. Poisoned? How? *(She starts to take a sip of the coffee.)*

TYROLIA. Well, you know how much coffee he drinks. *(MADDIE stops in mid-motion, the cup halfway to her lips. Slowly, she opens the lid of the coffee pot and pours her cup back into it, as do KITTY and DORIS.)*

MADDIE. Just in case.

KITTY. Yeah.

DORIS. Why do you think he was poisoned?

TYROLIA. Look, remember when I came to work here, I had just finished up down at the police department. You think *you* people are nuts?

KITTY. And that's what they look like? When they're... they're...they're...*(She indicates Door One.)*

DORIS *(now memorized)*. Devoid or deprived of life. *(KITTY glares at her.)* Have you seen the dog?

TYROLIA. That's what they look like. Not as well dressed.

MADDIE. I was afraid of that.

TYROLIA. Well, boss?

MADDIE. Hm? Me?! Oh, yeah, second in command. *(She paces.)*

TYROLIA. What's the problem?

KITTY. A little matter of bad timing. We tell everyone there's been a murder in The Wings and no more Wings.

TYROLIA. Well, we can't keep him in there. Around Christmas, if nobody gets bonuses, they're bound to get wise.

KITTY. Let's dial 911.

DORIS. It's too late for that. He's already dead.

KITTY. I mean for me. I think I'm having a coronary.

Besides, they always send up those cute guys from over at Memorial.

DORIS (*brightening*). You know, we *could* dial 911.

MADDIE. Are you out of your mind?

KITTY. Is a bear Catholic?

DORIS. No, really. They could get someone over here and then *they* tell us he's dead.

KITTY. We *know* he's dead.

TYROLIA. She's right, Maddie. Right now, it looks mighty like we're concealing the evidence. Unless, of course, we *are* concealing the evidence. (*She looks hard at the rest of the GROUP.*)

MADDIE. What?

KITTY. Wait, you don't for one minute think *we* had anything to do with this?

DORIS. Well, we didn't! (*She looks at KITTY.*) We didn't, did we?

KITTY. NO!

DORIS. Well, you were always arguing with him!

KITTY. Yeah, well, what about you? You two dated for awhile and then suddenly all that stopped. I bet there's a story there!

MADDIE. All right, stop it! Look, we have to do something and soon. Because there's going to be people knocking at that door...(*Suddenly there is a knock at the door.*)...any minute.

DORIS. They're here! They're here! We're all going to jail!

KITTY. Will you stop?! I always hated that about you. When we were kids and played cops and robbers, you always confessed! (*TYROLIA gets behind her desk and picks up a newspaper.*)

MADDIE. Look, everyone just behave naturally.

(She crosses to the door and opens it. DONALD McSHANE enters.)

MADDIE. Donald.

DONALD. And you knew I'd be the first one here, now didn't you? A good reporter always gets there before the story happens.

TYROLIA. Of course, the press, who else?

MADDIE. You're a bit early, aren't you?

DONALD. Can't I come visit my girl at work? *(He tries to hug MADDIE, who pulls away.)* Okay, okay, so maybe I have an ulterior motive or two. *(He crosses the room.)* Where's Elgarth?

MADDIE. He's out. *(DORIS is a little anxious and MADDIE moves to quiet her.)*

DONALD. Well, let me just say I've got a few surprises. Remember how you said you guys needed all the publicity you could get for tonight? Well, I pulled a few strings with some buddies of mine over at Channel 3 and they're sending a crew over to cover the whole shindig!

MADDIE. What?! *(Before anyone can stop him, DONALD opens MOON's door and looks in.)*

DONALD. Don't worry, Garth, the fourth estate has arrived! Oops, sorry. *(He shuts the door.)* Poor guy's been working too hard. He's asleep on his desk. I thought you said he was gone?

MADDIE. I said he was out.

TYROLIA. Yeah, cold.

MADDIE *(crosses to DONALD)*. What do you mean, Channel 3 is sending a crew?