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Dramatic Publishing



ABRA-CADAVER

A One-Act Play

By
JOHN MATTERA



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY



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SCENE ONE

SCENE: The Marsh's nicely furnished living room.

AS LIGHTS COME UP: CHRISTINE is sitting on a plush-looking couch. JACK is pacing the floor, drink in hand.

CHRISTINE. Relax, Jack. You know that worrying isn't good for your heart. Remember what the doctor said. You've got to take it easy – relax more.

JACK. It's murder we're talking about, [God damn it] Christine! Murder! (He takes a pill case from his shirt pocket, removes a pill and washes it down with his drink.)

CHRISTINE. Murder, smurder. Look at it as if it were all a big game. That's all life is, isn't it? You play it the best you can, passing "go" and collecting two hundred dollars each time. (She laughs.) Honey, you really shouldn't drink with your medication. (She gets up, takes his glass and drinks it herself.)

JACK. Christine, I'm not sure if I can go through with this. I . . . I just don't have the stomach for it. If you really cared about me . . .

CHRISTINE. Look, Jackie Boy, you're not gonna back out on me now. We've talked about it for months, and there's just no way I'm gonna let you back out now, sweet pie, no way at all.

JACK. But surely there's another way we could get Marie's money without killing her. Maybe we could – (He stops.)

CHRISTINE. Maybe we could what? Blackmail her?

JACK. Yeah, why not?

CHRISTINE. Don't be a fool! What could we hold for ransom? The children she never had? Or how about you, Jack? You, her dear husband. How much do you think she'd pay for your safe return, Jack?

JACK. I don't know.

CHRISTINE. You don't know! Well, I do. Nothing, that's what. Your death wouldn't interrupt that woman's dinner plans, and you know it.

JACK. That's not true.

CHRISTINE. Face it, Jackie. You provided her with some temporary amusement which momentarily eased her incurable boredom. She married you either because she wanted to add your money to her already overweight bank account, or she felt you made a good pet. I tend to lean toward the latter. And now she's grown tired of her little monkey. If she could, she'd probably have the Humane Society come and take you away – put you to sleep.

JACK. Shut up! You don't have to convince me of what a viper Marie is! I know it. I know she's unfaithful to me at every opportunity. I know. I know. I know.

CHRISTINE. And do you also know about Charlie Vine?

JACK. The mailman! You can't be serious.

CHRISTINE. This morning, Jack. Special delivery.

JACK. How do you know? You're making it up to get me mad.

CHRISTINE. Jack, think for a minute, will you? Jack, what's today?

JACK. Tuesday, but what does that . . . ?

CHRISTINE. And what have Marie and I done together on every

Tuesday for as long as you can remember?

JACK. Philippe's, the hairdresser.

CHRISTINE. Good boy, Jack. But this morning when I came to pick Marie up, she was nowhere in sight. Charlie's mail bag was propped up against a kitchen chair though.

JACK. So what. Maybe he . . . maybe he was in the bathroom.

CHRISTINE. I had a cup of coffee and waited. After about fifteen minutes they emerged together. When Charlie saw me, he high-tailed it back up the hallway. Maybe he just forgot something . . . in the bathroom . . . like his pants.

JACK. What did Marie say?

CHRISTINE. Now there's one cool lady. She put some sweet rolls in the oven and poured me some coffee. She said Charlie had spilled a cup of coffee on his pants, and she washed them for him. Then she went up the hallway in the same direction Charlie had gone. I could hear a muffled conversation and Marie laughing, but I couldn't make out what they were saying. Charlie was absolutely beet red when he came back out into the kitchen. He headed for the door so fast I had to remind him not to forget his mail bag.

JACK (incredulously). Charlie Vine.

CHRISTINE. So you'd better not decide to pull out now. You inherited your money legitimately — Marie extorted hers from men. Now she's got more connections than Con Edison. If she decides to divorce you for a Charlie Doll, her high-priced lawyers will see that you're left out in the cold without a dime.

JACK. I don't care. What if the worst does happen? I'd *have* to get *something* out of the settlement. We could make it on that. After all, we love each other. Isn't that enough?

CHRISTINE (laughing). Not on your life. If you blow this one, you blow it all — including me. I do love you, Jack, but

I . . . we deserve more. There's no reason why you should lose even one penny of your money – and we should have hers, too. Then we could lead the comfortable lives we deserve . . . together.

JACK. I love you.

CHRISTINE. Even when we were kids, Marie had everything. All she'd have to do was turn on her sickeningly sweet little pout, and mother's heart would melt. (Getting worked up.) And what good did it do mom?

JACK. Chris, don't.

CHRISTINE. When Marie married money the first time, did she help our mother out? No. The second time? No. The third and fourth times? No. (Pause.) Any of the other times? No, no, no, no, no . . . no and no. (JACK looks bewildered. He is obviously in the dark about Marie's other marriages.)

JACK. I didn't know . . .

CHRISTINE (milking it for all it's worth). Help our mother! Ha! She doesn't know the meaning of the word charity. And what could I do to stop her from committing mom to that nursing home to die? (Tears building.)

JACK. You can't blame yourself for . . .

CHRISTINE (in tears). I didn't have any money. I would have let mom move in with me, but I couldn't give her the attention she needed . . . I had to work . . . I would have though – I would have. (Calming down.) And when mom died, what did Marie do? Obligatory flowers and a cameo appearance at the wake. [(Under her breath:) The bitch.]

JACK. I'm sorry, Chris. I'm so sorry.

CHRISTINE. Think of it, Jack. Our own home. Some hired help. A maid maybe. A cook. Plush carpet to sink our toes into. A roaring fire in the fireplace. A big, heart-shaped

bathtub.

JACK. But murder?

CHRISTINE (snuggling up to him). Then after a nice, long, hot bath we could cuddle up in our satin sheets. Mmmmmm. Luxury.

JACK. It all sounds so wonderful, but could we ever be free, really free and happy?

CHRISTINE. Oh, Jack. Get off your highhorse and be realistic. Honey, money and power do not come easily. If you want them, you have to be willing to make some sacrifices.

JACK. Okay, sure, that's easy for you to say, but what happens if we get caught?

CHRISTINE. Jackie. Jackie. Jackie. Rich people don't get caught, even if they do get caught. Money buys anything, including innocence. All you have to do is leave everything to me. And anyway, you come out of this whole thing smelling like roses. I'm the one who's actually going to kill my dear sister. Besides, how can we get caught when the whole thing will happen in front of all those witnesses? All aboveboard and clean. Too obvious to be premeditated. A mistake. People will call it a horrible accident. And you — you'll be the shocked husband-in-mourning for an appropriate time. Then we'll move far away.

JACK. Some of Marie's close friends are sure to be suspicious though.

CHRISTINE. Close friends! Really, Jack — like who? Charlie Vine or her other lovers? Do you think they're going to say anything and take the chance of implicating themselves? No way. They'll silently grieve for awhile — not over the death of dear Marie though, but rather over their shattered hopes of sinking their teeth into some of Marie's wealth. (Sarcastically.) And as far as Marie's other friends, they'll

probably figure she had it coming, and if they don't . . .
(The doorbell rings.)

JACK. Who could that be? I'm not expecting anybody. Maybe you'd better go into the bedroom so you won't be seen.

CHRISTINE. Relax, Jack. I have a right to be seen with my brother-in-law, don't I? Now just go and answer the door.

(JACK goes to the door offstage.)

JACK (from offstage L). Charlie.

CHARLIE (from offstage L). I have a special delivery package from . . . (Pause.) . . . Chilton Novelty. You've gotta sign for it.

JACK (from offstage L). Come in, Charlie.

(JACK and CHARLIE enter the living room.)

JACK (to himself). Two special deliveries in one day.

CHARLIE. Excuse me, Mr. Marsh?

JACK. I said, do you have a pen?

CHARLIE. Yes, sir. Right here, sir. (Looking for the pen.)
I know I had one when I left the house this morning.

JACK. Perhaps you dropped it . . . somewhere.

CHARLIE. No, sir, I . . . here it is. (He hands Jack a pen.)

JACK. Now where'd you say this package was from?

CHARLIE. Chilton Novelty, I believe it is, sir. Yep, there it is, right on the box. Chilton Novelty, Cincinnati, Ohio.

JACK. Hmm, I don't remember ordering anything from a novelty company. Maybe they've made a mistake.

CHRISTINE. It's probably the costumes, Jack. For the masquerade party. Remember . . . the ones you ordered *especially* for the occasion. Are you coming to the party next Friday, night, Mr. Vine?

CHARLIE. Uh, how do, Christine, uh . . . Miss Thorpe, ma'am.