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Dramatic Publishing

THE DEATH AND SALE OF ALEXANDER GOLAND

An Absurdist Comedy in Two Acts

by

NIKKI HARMON



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • London, England • Melbourne, Australia

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(THE DEATH AND SALE OF ALEXANDER GOLAND)

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For: Allen Stewart-Coates
who introduced me to a mythical country
somewhere north of Detroit

The Playwright wishes to acknowledge the contribution in the development of the play through Staged Readings by: Fullerton College, Fullerton, California, Tom Blank, Director; The Village Theatre Company, NYC, Marge Fenece, Artistic Director; and the South Carolina Playwrights Conference & New Play Festival. And to Carolyn French and Playwrights First Plays-In-Progress, for their encouragement.

THE DEATH AND SALE OF ALEXANDER GOLAND was first performed on March 23, 1995, at the Tibbits Opera House, Coldwater, Michigan, by The Coldwater Community Theatre under the direction of J. Richard Colbeck. Lighting Design by Tom Harmon, Costume Design by Mary McIndoe. The Stage Manager was Marisue Taylor. The cast was as follows:

MINISTER OF SOCIAL SERVICES Erl Gleason
MRS. GOLAND Irene Grimes-Butdorf
WINDOW WASHER Tim McCauley
SUSU WEBERHOUSER Kelly Finney
ALEXANDER GOLAND Roger Blansit
NELLIE BROWVILLE Deborah S. Jersey
BLOCK / WALTER Bill Shoop
WEALTHY WOMAN Martha E. Craig

THE DEATH AND SALE OF ALEXANDER GOLAND
was the 1995 winner of the Robert J. Pickering Award.

Director's note: It is important that the play be directed at the pace and speed of a farce, and that the dialogue be delivered staccato. The actors need to make their entrances and exits at a dead run, and when on stage, be "in movement" even when they're standing still, giving the play the intensity of a farce throughout.

THE DEATH AND SALE OF ALEXANDER GOLAND

A Play in Two Acts
For 4 Men and 4 Women, doubling

CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

MINISTER the Minister of Social Services
WINDOW WASHER a man of no certain occupation
BLOCK / WALTER Block is the Minister's assistant
 Walter is Block's twin brother
MRS. GOLAND a woman who can't seem to get her
 husband buried
SUSU WEBERHOUSER a college student
 who killed a man...maybe
NELLIE BROWVILLE satirist-at-large
ALEXANDER an ice cream seller
WEALTHY WOMAN a wealthy woman

SETTING: The office of the Minister of Social Services in a
 mythical country somewhere north of Detroit.

TIME: Present day.

Set requirements: Box set with glass door leading out to a balcony.
Prop requirements: Coffin required.

three hours to complete. M-605 is almost impossible to understand now that it's been translated from one official language into the other by a department full of people who don't speak either one. And H slash 403...

MINISTER. Block.

BLOCK. Yes, Minister?

MINISTER. Call maintenance and get a new fan.

BLOCK. But what about your suicide?

MINISTER. Now, Block, before I requisition S slash 306.

BLOCK. But that's for homicide...Ahhh, yes. I see what you mean. (*BLOCK exits quickly as there's a knock at the DL door.*)

MINISTER (*straightening his tie*). Just a minute. (*The knocking continues.*) Come in.

(*MRS. GOLAND runs in and stops short, awed by the grandeur of the office.*)

MINISTER. May I help you, madam?...Madam! (*She snaps to attention.*) What is it I can do for you, madam?

MRS. GOLAND. No one wants my husband. Not his mother, his sisters or his brother, so you can see why I had to come here. I have nowhere else to turn. You have to take him.

MINISTER. If it's a government job you're looking for he'll have to apply in person at the Ministry of Employment between nine and five, Monday through Friday, except on holidays, when he can mail in Form A-55, which is obtainable at the Bureau of Written Requests, third floor, Tuesdays and Thursdays from noon to four. Is that clear, madam?

MRS. GOLAND. He's dead.

MINISTER. Who's dead?

MRS. GOLAND. My husband.

MINISTER. Then why is he applying for a job?

MRS. GOLAND. He's not applying for a job.

MINISTER. Then why are you here?

MRS. GOLAND. I want him buried.

MINISTER. Have you had him examined?

MRS. GOLAND. No.

MINISTER. No?! Your husband is dead and you haven't had him examined?

MRS. GOLAND. I didn't know I had to.

MINISTER. It's the law.

MRS. GOLAND. I don't want to break the law.

MINISTER. Then have him examined and when that's done come back here and I'll issue a permit to have him buried.

MRS. GOLAND. What should I have him examined for?

MINISTER. To see if he's dead.

MRS. GOLAND. But I know he's dead.

MINISTER. Are you a doctor?

MRS. GOLAND. No.

MINISTER. Then you can't know if your husband is dead.

MRS. GOLAND. He hasn't eaten in two months. He's white as a sheet and doesn't move a muscle.

MINISTER. That may well be, but the law states that all persons suspected of being deceased must be examined by a qualified doctor before interment.

MRS. GOLAND. He's not breathing.

MINISTER. That may well be, but he must be examined first.

MRS. GOLAND. I don't have the money for a doctor.

MINISTER. All doctors are paid by the government.

MRS. GOLAND. They always ask for more. I don't have any more.

MINISTER. By not having him examined you deprive someone of their livelihood and the government of the taxes on that livelihood.

MRS. GOLAND. I could save a little out of my husband's monthly death benefit paycheck.

MINISTER. You can't get that until he's buried, and for that you need a permit and I can't give you that until he's examined.

MRS. GOLAND. But he's starting to smell.

MINISTER. Badly?

MRS. GOLAND. No, not too badly, but it's only a matter of time.

MINISTER (*ushering her out of the office*). Then I suggest you start saving your money now.

MRS. GOLAND. I'm not leaving until you help me!

MINISTER. Madam, believe me, I would give you the permit this minute if for nothing else just to get you out of my office, but I can't. (*MRS. GOLAND doesn't budge.*) It's no secret that the government wants all the money it can get its hands on and that it's ready and willing to tax anything, alive or dead to get it, but even the government stops short of issuing permits to bury people who are still living. (*MRS. GOLAND doesn't budge.*) Madam, if you don't leave my office now I'll be forced to call someone. (*MRS. GOLAND doesn't budge.*) BLOCK!!! GET IN HERE!!!

(*BLOCK runs in from UR.*)

BLOCK. Yes, Minister?

MINISTER. Remove this woman! (*BLOCK starts for MRS. GOLAND.*) Gently, Block, she may be a conservative. (*To MRS. GOLAND.*) What party do you vote, dear lady?

MRS. GOLAND. Liberal, or course.

MINISTER. Remove her, Block. Quickly.

BLOCK. This way, madam.

WINDOW WASHER (*knocking on the glass door*). HELLO!
HELLO IN THERE!

MINISTER. Who's that?

BLOCK. A window washer.

MINISTER. I can see that. I mean *who* is that?

BLOCK (*crossing to the glass door*). Who are you?

(*WINDOW WASHER enters.*)

WINDOW WASHER. A humble window washer, but I sense a problem here, and I think I have a solution. You see, before I took up window washing I was a qualified doctor who specialized in examining people thought to be dead. This included a president of a foreign country who slept through cabinet meetings and a queen who hasn't changed her expression in 40 years.

MRS. GOLAND. My husband is dead.

MINISTER. Not without a certificate.

WINDOW WASHER. I can rectify that.

MINISTER. Are you qualified to certify?

WINDOW WASHER. Yes.

MRS. GOLAND. And you can examine my husband?

WINDOW WASHER. Yes, and what's more, I'll do it for what the government pays me, making it, therefore, an act of charity and tax deductible.

MRS. GOLAND. Thank you, Doctor.

MINISTER. And if you find that he's actually dead you can register him as such?

WINDOW WASHER. No.

MRS. GOLAND. No?

WINDOW WASHER. No.

MINISTER. No, what?

WINDOW WASHER. No, I can't register him. I'm outside my province.

MRS. GOLAND. What am I going to do?

BLOCK (*taking hold of her arm*). This way, madam.

MRS. GOLAND. NO!

BLOCK. If you don't leave this minute I'll be forced to call in outside help.

MRS. GOLAND (*defiantly folding her arms*). I'm not leaving until you give me a permit!

BLOCK (*exiting DL in a huff*). You'll regret this, madam, I assure you. (*MINISTER starts for MRS. GOLAND.*)

WINDOW WASHER (*coming between them*). Do you know for certain that this woman isn't wired with an explosive device?

MINISTER. WHAT?!

WINDOW WASHER. Have you ever seen her before today?

MINISTER. Of course not.

WINDOW WASHER. Then how do you know she doesn't have sufficient nitro to blow this entire Ministry to kingdom come?

MINISTER. I don't. (*To MRS. GOLAND.*) Do you, madam?

WINDOW WASHER. Don't answer that. (*To MINISTER.*) Any statement forcefully extracted from a suspect...

MRS. GOLAND. Suspect?

MINISTER. I never laid a hand on her.

WINDOW WASHER. ...without benefit of counsel will never hold up in court. But then, all that might be moot if the story about her husband being dead is merely a ruse to get in here and plant a bomb.

(*BLOCK enters running and reacts to "bomb."*)

BLOCK. BOMB???! (*Ducking under the desk.*) TAKE COVER!!!

MINISTER. Have you a bomb, madam?

WINDOW WASHER. Do you think she'd tell you if she did?

MINISTER. She is a liberal.

WINDOW WASHER. There it is, then.

MINISTER (*backing away from MRS. GOLAND with great caution*). Dear, good madam, the government is ready to come to the aid of every citizen, no matter what their voting persuasion, and help them in their hour of greatest need to the best of its ability. Block, get up and help this woman.

BLOCK. Are you sure, Minister? Maybe we should wait until after lunch when there'll be *more* help available.

MINISTER (*to MRS. GOLAND*). My assistant will give the good doctor a pre-approved application to practice in the province, thus allowing him to examine your husband and giving you leave to bury him without further delay. Would that be satisfactory?

MRS. GOLAND. I guess so.

MINISTER. Block, give this man a form so this kind woman can be about her business and gone.

BLOCK (*crawling out from under the desk*). That'll be TR slash 431.

WINDOW WASHER. I'm afraid I can't fill out form TR slash 431.

MINISTER. Why not? (*A loud banging on the DL door before the WINDOW WASHER can answer. To BLOCK.*) See what that is. (*BLOCK carefully skirts MRS. GOLAND and heads for the door as the banging continues. Shouting over the noise.*) YOU WERE TELLING ME WHY YOU CAN'T FILL OUT FORM TR SLASH 431.

WINDOW WASHER. WHAT DID YOU SAY?

MINISTER. THE FORM! WHY CAN'T YOU FILL OUT THE FORM?

BLOCK (*through the closed door*). WHO'S THERE?

WINDOW WASHER. YES, IT IS WARM.

BLOCK. YOU MUST STOP THAT POUNDING.

MINISTER. NOT WARM. FORM. FILL OUT THE FORM.

(*To BLOCK.*) WHAT'S GOING ON OUT THERE?

BLOCK. THEY WON'T STOP POUNDING ON THE DOOR LONG ENOUGH FOR ME TO HEAR WHO IT IS.

MINISTER. THEN OPEN IT AND FIND OUT.

BLOCK. I'M NOT ALL THAT SURE THAT'S SUCH A GOOD IDEA, MINISTER. IT MIGHT BE SOMEONE WE DON'T WANT IN HERE.

MINISTER. I ALREADY HAVE PEOPLE I DON'T WANT IN HERE.

(*BLOCK opens the door and SUSU runs in, falling at BLOCK's feet.*)

SUSU. You must help me! It's a matter of life and death!

BLOCK. Get up, woman.

MINISTER. Get that woman to her feet.

BLOCK (*struggling with her*). I'm trying, but she doesn't want to move.

SUSU. I want to stay at your feet, Minister, until Doomsday if necessary.

BLOCK. That's the Minister.

SUSU (*crosses rapidly to the MINISTER on her knees*). At your feet, Minister, until Doomsday.

MINISTER. Get up, woman!

SUSU. Not until I'm forgiven.

MINISTER. I forgive you. Get up.

SUSU. I need clerical forgiveness.

MINISTER. I can't give that.

WINDOW WASHER. I can.

SUSU (*crosses rapidly to WINDOW WASHER, still on her knees*). Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned.

MINISTER. I thought you were a doctor.

BLOCK. He's a window washer.

SUSU. You're not a cleric?

WINDOW WASHER. I was a cleric before I was a doctor.

MRS. GOLAND. I'm confused.

MINISTER. What have you done that you need to repent?

SUSU. I killed a man.

WINDOW WASHER. Are you sure?

SUSU. Of course I'm sure.

MRS. GOLAND. Have you had him examined?

SUSU. It didn't come to mind.

MINISTER. Who did you kill?

SUSU. I don't know.

WINDOW WASHER. Do you usually go around killing people you don't know or was this a spur of the moment thing?

BLOCK. The point here is that that woman killed someone.

WINDOW WASHER. But is she absolutely sure? Evidence must be gathered before guilt is assumed.

SUSU. I was driving home from class when I heard a thump, and when I stopped and looked back he was lying in the middle of the street.

BLOCK. Sounds proven to me. (*Reaching for the phone.*) I'll call Metro.

WINDOW WASHER. Wait!

MINISTER. Why?

WINDOW WASHER. You need facts.

MINISTER. The woman admitted to hitting a man with her car. That's enough fact. Block, call Metro. (*BLOCK reaches for the phone again.*)

WINDOW WASHER. Wait!

MINISTER. What?

WINDOW WASHER. They're going to want details. How it happened...

MINISTER. We know how it happened.

WINDOW WASHER. ...where it happened. Where did it happen?

SUSU. Right out front.

MINISTER. There are police out front. Didn't they fill out a report?

SUSU. They thought since this was a government building and that was probably a government person I mowed down...

WINDOW WASHER. Allegedly mowed down.

SUSU. ...allegedly mowed down, that something would be arranged.

BLOCK. Are you offering a bribe?

SUSU. Not necessarily.

BLOCK. Bribes are not accepted.

MINISTER. But donations are. How much do you have?
(*SUSU opens her wallet.*)

WINDOW WASHER. Wait a minute. Did you actually see yourself hit the man?

SUSU. No.

WINDOW WASHER. Ahhh hah!

MINISTER. What do you mean "Ahhh hah"?

WINDOW WASHER. And do you know for a fact that the man is actually dead?

SUSU. He wasn't moving.

MRS. GOLAND. That doesn't seem to matter.