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Burn

By

JOHN MUGGLETON

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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“Produced by special arrangement with
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Burn premiered professionally at The Gladstone (Ottawa, Ontario) on Aug. 19, 2017.

CAST:

ROBERT..... *Chris Torti*
EVE..... *Zoe Georgaras*
DAVID *Michael Thompson*
SAMIRA..... *Tahera Mufti*
TARA..... *Dana Truelove*
PAUL..... *Dave Webster*

PRODUCTION:

Director..... *Venetia Lawless*
Set Design *Geoff Gruson*

Burn

CHARACTERS

ROBERT: 50s, Tara's husband.

EVE: 20s, Paul's daughter.

DAVID: 50s, former literary agent, Robert's good friend.

SAMIRA: 50s, lawyer, Robert's long-time friend.

TARA: Robert's wife, famed writer who disappeared mysteriously five years ago. Voice only.

PAUL: Deceased famed horror writer who was friends with Robert, Samira and David. Voice only.

Place: Robert's loft condo.

Time: Now.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

Geographical locations referred to in *Burn* may be changed to suit the city or area in which the play is being produced. Likewise, the director has permission to tone down or remove any or all of the profanity in this play. This play is about high stakes, and the tension really starts upon Eve's arrival on page 23. Whether or not the director and/or actor feels that Samira may be part of Eve's story, it cannot be played as such. Samira is caught off-guard and is distressed as much as the others. Enjoy.

This play is dedicated to the memory of
Geoff Gruson,
Friend and Mentor.

Burn

(A blue special comes up on a man, ROBERT, as he sits sorting through a box of papers, folders and scripts. The papers he looks at bring back memories. We hear a recorded voice-over of a fun get-together with the sounds of glasses clinking, wine pouring and lots of laughter. The voice-over grows louder and covers the following lines through the indicated stage direction on page 9.

Laughter.)

ROBERT *(to DAVID)*. Oh come on! You read ten books a week!

DAVID. I read ten *manuscripts* a week! All bad. Now if I could steal Tara away from Pilken, I wouldn't have to—

TARA. You had your chance!

ROBERT. You couldn't afford her now.

(Group laughter.)

DAVID. Ouch.

SAMIRA. OK OK, no more shoptalk.

ROBERT. Who's next? I'm just warming up!

SAMIRA. Paul and ... ooh Tara!

DAVID. Clash of the Titans!

PAUL. Go for it.

TARA. I'm good to go!

SAMIRA. OK ... let's see ... a pen, an icicle ... and ... a slipper!

TARA & ROBERT. A slipper!

SAMIRA. A pen, an icicle and a slipper!

TARA. Oh this one has affair written all over it.

PAUL. How so?

TARA. The icicle.

DAVID. The icicle?

TARA. Cold and sharp like the stab of betrayal.

DAVID. Ah.

TARA. The pen ... represents communication, notes back and forth ... messages ... and the slipper is quiet footsteps in the dark ... sneaking around behind someone's back.

(They all react with laughter and admiration.)

SAMIRA. Shit, you're good!

TARA. Thank you, Sam.

ROBERT. That's why I married her.

PAUL. I think it's something to do with family; slippers are comfort and so is the icicle.

ROBERT. How is an icicle comfort?

PAUL. Christmas lights ... family ... but melting.

DAVID. Melting?

PAUL. One drip at a time.

TARA. So we have an affair happening at the same time as—

PAUL. A family member is murdered.

SAMIRA. And the name?

ROBERT & SAMIRA. C'mon ... c'mon!

TARA. *Cold Secrets!*

(Laughter and clapping.)

DAVID. That was the name of my band in high school.

ROBERT. *Cold Secrets*, not bad. Paul?

ALL. C'mon, Paul!! C'mon.

PAUL. Um ... *Life* ... no ... *Death by the Drop!*

(They all laugh and groan.)

PAUL (*cont'd*). What?? That's gold! *Death by the Drop!*

(Audio begins to fade.)

SAMIRA. All right ... David and Robert.

ROBERT. Don't be intimidated, Dave.

DAVID. I'm not, I read your book, remember?

ROBERT. *Ah*, so you're the one!

(Group groan.)

DAVID. How long are you going to use that joke?

TARA & SAMIRA. Until someone else buys a copy!

SAMIRA. OK come on, David and Robert ... let's see ... OK
a needle, a chair and ... a rock!

ROBERT. A chair? Really?

SAMIRA. What's wrong with a chair?

(Voice-over continues to fade. As it does, ROBERT stands and places the box on a shelf.)

TARA. Oh I like it, the chair is obvious—

SAMIRA. No no no ... no helping!

ROBERT. Oh come on!

(End of voice-over. Slow blackout.)

Lights up to reveal ROBERT, DAVID and SAMIRA onstage in mid-conversation.)

SAMIRA. No no no!

DAVID. I'm telling you—

SAMIRA. David, that doesn't make sense!

DAVID. Sam, it's the only thing that *does* make sense!

SAMIRA. Why would she fly all—

DAVID. I'll bet you—

SAMIRA. Fly ... I'm not betting ... fly all the way here for that?

DAVID. OK, so what then?

SAMIRA. I don't know but—

DAVID. I bet Paul wanted us to take his ashes down south
and asked his daughter to get them to us.

ROBERT. I can see that.

DAVID. Right?

ROBERT. He always talked about taking one more trip.

SAMIRA. Robert!

ROBERT. I know I know, too soon.

SAMIRA. OK, Paul died here.

DAVID. So?

SAMIRA. The crematorium is twenty minutes from here!

Why would he have his daughter fly halfway across the
country ... a daughter he just recently met, I might add ...
pick up his ashes and deliver them to us?

ROBERT. Maybe she has to come anyway, deal with the
house and stuff.

DAVID. There was no funeral or anything, maybe it was his
way of making her feel part of it or something.

SAMIRA. He barely knew her!

DAVID. I dunno ... guilt.

SAMIRA. Why wouldn't she have said something about it on
the phone when she called?

ROBERT. I didn't talk to her, I just got an email.

SAMIRA. And she didn't mention ashes or anything?

ROBERT. Nope, nothing.

DAVID. Is she the executor?

SAMIRA. Executrix.

DAVID. Executrix ... whatever.

SAMIRA. I doubt very much Paul would make her the executrix; maybe his ex?

ROBERT. Emma ... yeah maybe.

DAVID. Executrix ... doesn't sound like a legal term, sounds more fun.

SAMIRA. Paul would *never* have someone we've never met just show up at the door with his ashes ... "Here's Dad."

ROBERT. Well I think they generally come in an urn, Sam.

SAMIRA. Paul would have given us the heads up.

ROBERT. Yeah, he would.

SAMIRA (*to ROBERT*). Especially to you.

DAVID. I dunno, he did have a pretty twisted sense of humor.

ROBERT (*chuckle*). That he did.

SAMIRA. You don't just assume people are going to take care of stuff like that. Scattering ashes is a big thing, right? It's very personal—it has to be done right.

DAVID. When my grandmother died, they scattered the ashes at the end of the dock at the cottage because that's where she liked to sit and look out onto the lake.

SAMIRA. See? That's what I'm talking about.

DAVID. Yeah except the grandkids were terrified to swim in the lake after that because Grandma's buried there.

(*ROBERT laughs.*)

SAMIRA. I would totally think that too ... hey what about Ben?

DAVID. How the hell did that story make you think of Ben?

SAMIRA. Cottage. I've been to Ben's cottage.

DAVID. And let me guess, he has a very nice ... dock

SAMIRA (*smiling*). Actually he does. In fact he has a very big—

ROBERT. OK OK, what about Ben?

SAMIRA. Maybe he's looking after Paul's things, being his agent and friend, maybe—

ROBERT. He's not, at least if he is he didn't mention it.

SAMIRA. When did you speak to Ben?

ROBERT. He called after Paul died; he knew Paul and I grew up together. We had a good talk. We had a few laughs about Paul ... he also asked about Tara, if anything new had come up, where the investigation was at, stuff like that.

DAVID. Ben's a good guy.

SAMIRA. And has anything new come up? With the investigation?

ROBERT. Not that I know of.

SAMIRA. I'm sure if there was, that detective ... uh ...

ROBERT. Rankin.

SAMIRA. Right Rankin, he would have contacted you.

ROBERT. I would think so yes, and, as Ben and I were chatting about Tara, I mentioned that I had started sorting through her things, her office.

SAMIRA. You have?

(*Beat.*)

ROBERT. Yeah it's time.

SAMIRA. Oh.

ROBERT (*getting up*). And in doing so, came across a lot of stuff she was working on, stories that were never published, I mentioned this to George and a couple of days later—

DAVID. You get a call from Pilken—

ROBERT. I get a call from Pilken *and* they were very interested—

ROBERT & DAVID. In putting out a book.

DAVID. Uh huh.

SAMIRA. Of course they are.

DAVID. The five-year anniversary cash grab.

SAMIRA. Five years.

DAVID. All business.

ROBERT. Of course.

DAVID. I bet Ben got his way in for a cut.

ROBERT. I would imagine. Anyway, they made an offer and I accepted.

SAMIRA. Really?

ROBERT. Yep.

SAMIRA. Why didn't you say something sooner? That's huge, Robert!

ROBERT. I know, I was ... it feels weird.

SAMIRA. Tara would say take the money and run.

ROBERT. Which is why I said yes.

SAMIRA. Wow.

ROBERT. So crazy.

SAMIRA. Sure is.

ROBERT. But, I was thinking ... maybe the book coming out will start something. Someone might say something, know something ... right? I mean it's worth a shot.

SAMIRA. You never know, Robert.

ROBERT. It's worth trying right?

SAMIRA. Absolutely!

DAVID. Uh huh ... now in regard to the offer ...

ROBERT. Uh huh?

DAVID. Is it money or monies we're talking about?

SAMIRA. Monies?

DAVID. Monies.

SAMIRA. Monies.

ROBERT. Monies is more than money.

SAMIRA. Yes, thank you, I know what monies *means*, I just think you sound like a pretentious ass saying it.

DAVID. I am a pretentious ass.

ROBERT. Money with the possibility of monies. But ... it's not mine right?

(Pause.)

DAVID. Speaking of which, and "which" being money, come on we've all been wondering ... you know ...

ROBERT. What?

DAVID. You know ... how much Paul was worth.

SAMIRA. How long did that take?

ROBERT. A little over an hour—you owe me dinner.

SAMIRA. What can I say?

DAVID. Hilarious. So how much? Couple of million?

ROBERT. Easily.

(SAMIRA gestures "more.")

ROBERT. Twelve books!

DAVID. And he was writing when you could actually make money.

ROBERT. Exactly! I'd say ... five million.

SAMIRA (*laughs*). Oh it's five now

ROBERT. Plus his TV stuff, *Dark Watch*, *Temptation*, he did a shit load of episodes for that *After Dark* show.

DAVID. That was such a shit show.

SAMIRA. I liked it.

DAVID. You would.

ROBERT. Yeah, but stupid money. Tara did six episodes of *Five Down*, and we spent the summer in Europe.

SAMIRA. Plus investments.

ROBERT. He was good with his money.

DAVID (*laughs*). Good with their money. I love how cheap people are called that after they die.

SAMIRA. He wasn't cheap.

ROBERT. He was *good with his money*.

DAVID. He still owes me eighty bucks.

ROBERT. I'm not sure you're going to get it, Dave, just sayin'.

SAMIRA. Maybe he left it in his will for you.

DAVID. Which brings us back to that—

SAMIRA. Here we go—

DAVID. And as *executrix*, if not his ashes ... his daughter is coming here tonight to carry out our dearly departed friend's wishes in the form of a nice big fat check.

SAMIRA. You'll have more luck with the ashes.

DAVID. OK, so it's not his ashes, it's not money, then what? What is she bringing that is so important she has to bring it in person?

SAMIRA. It could be anything ... a book, picture ... who knows.

DAVID. A picture? You can email a frigging picture.

SAMIRA. Framed?

DAVID. It's money.

ROBERT. I don't care if it is or not, to be honest.

DAVID. That's the kind of thing people *with* money say.

ROBERT. Actually I have monies!

(Pause.)

SAMIRA *(thinking)*. A new Tara Waters book coming out ...
wow.

ROBERT. Yeah, weird huh.

(They let it sink in.)

SAMIRA. They're going to start up again.

ROBERT. I know.

SAMIRA. Just be ready.

ROBERT. I will be.

DAVID. You just know they're going to say you're cashing
in.

ROBERT. I am.

SAMIRA. Well, interviews should be interesting.

ROBERT. I'm not doing publicity, no interviews ... I already
told them I'm handing over the material and that's it.

DAVID. And they agreed to that? Great. *(Holding up his
drink.)* Screw 'em!

ROBERT *(holds up glass)*. Take the money and run.

SAMIRA & DAVID. Take the money and run!

DAVID *(laughs)*. That's what you should call the book! *(No
one laughs; he catches himself.)* Sorry.

SAMIRA. I miss them.

ROBERT. Yeah.

DAVID. Yeah.

SAMIRA. I miss you guys! We never hang out anymore, that's sad.

ROBERT. Yeah, everything just ... you know.

SAMIRA. We had so much fun together, drinking wine ...

DAVID. Good times.

SAMIRA. What was the name of that little bar in St. Kitts ... the place with the—

ROBERT & DAVID. *C'est la Vie*—

SAMIRA. *C'est la Vie*, we had so much fun there.

DAVID. Great place.

ROBERT. Yeah it was.

SAMIRA. Let's plan a trip! I'm serious. Besides we might have to if she shows up with his ashes.

DAVID. Oh for—

SAMIRA. Honestly, I think those were the best times of my life, talking all night, laughing our asses off and that game and the stories ...

ROBERT. Oh shit, speaking of which ... (*Crosses to a desk and picks up the box filled with scripts, short stories and notes; the same one from the opening memory sequence.*) Some of these stories I was going through for the book ... are ours.

DAVID. Ours?

ROBERT. Yeah, well the stories we came up with together. She wrote them down, or at least a lot of them.

DAVID. Seriously?

ROBERT. Yeah, I don't know when, but she did.

SAMIRA. That's crazy.

ROBERT. Right? I came across a box of them. A lot were total crap ... some unfinished ... but there's some good stuff here! (*Drops the box on the coffee table.*)

DAVID. Holy shit. You weren't kidding!

(They begin to pull out papers, examining them.)

SAMIRA. Looks like those drunken nights might actually pay off!

ROBERT. Crazy right?

SAMIRA *(holds up some papers)*. *Dead Eyes*.

DAVID. The creepy doll ... wow ... look at all these!

SAMIRA. Too much wine.

DAVID. And weed.

SAMIRA. And weed. *(To ROBERT.)* You still smoke?

ROBERT. Nope.

DAVID. Last time I smoked, I worried about my phone bill for two hours. I think I paid it twice that night just to be sure.

ROBERT. She kept so many. *(Flipping through files, reading titles.)* *Cold Comfort, Black Water* ...

DAVID *(holds a story up)*. Ah *Dead End* ... great story but published under *West of Dead*.

ROBERT. Ah, yeah of course. *(He takes it and puts it aside.)*

DAVID. Wow.

SAMIRA *(flipping through)*. *The Need, Blood of Our Family* ...

DAVID *(comes across another)*. *Kill 4 A.M.* ... I remember this one.

SAMIRA. Lot of memories ... oh my God.

ROBERT. What?

SAMIRA. This one just has one sentence ... *(Reading.)*
“Don't tell anyone, but I'm dead.”

(Awkward pause.)