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Dramatic Publishing

If It's Monday, This Must Be Christmas!

By
PAT COOK



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If It's Monday, This Must Be Christmas!

A Play in Two Acts

CHARACTERS:

HARRY MONDAY wise-cracking private eye

TITUS HARRIGAN over-excitabile store owner

LORETTA MONDELLO level-headed store manager

SCARLET KLOONTZ very friendly gift wrapper

TRIXIE O'BRIEN stressed-out Santa's helper

LOUIE GRANDVILLE gentlemanly con artist

CARSON PAGE naïve young clerk

PENNY HARRIGAN naïve young lady, in love with
Carson

MILDRED WOLENSKY pompous rival store owner

HAROLD Harry at age 9

OPALINE LAMPBERT Titus's mousey secretary

POLLY BROGAN talkative 9-year-old

Lieutenant BROGAN cynical police inspector

TIME: Christmas Eve.

PLACE: The courtesy and gift-wrapping counter of Har-
rigan's department store.

ACT ONE

Scene One

(The setting for this Christmas intrigue is the courtesy department of Harrigan's department store. Now festooned with holly wreaths and red ribbon the area is in full swing for the yuletide season. There are two doors utilized in the area. The first door, located UC, leads off to the present wrapping area/storage room and the second, located UL, leads to a back hall and access to other departments in the store. The area gives the impression of opening into the rest of the store as people may enter and leave from R and L. There is also an old wooden school desk DL.

The main piece of furniture is a counter, which sports the sign "Customer Service" on its front. This counter runs parallel to the upstage wall between the doors. Behind the counter on the wall are various colorfully wrapped packages, samples of their wares. There are occasional chairs located L facing the counter at an outward angle.

As the LIGHTS come up SCARLET is busy digging around behind the counter, while TITUS and LORETTA stand in front.)

TITUS (*frantically*). I'm telling you it's not there!

SCARLET. I can see that. You SURE you put it under here?

LORETTA. I'm sure it'll turn up, sir.

TITUS. I can't believe this didn't work! (*He paces in short laps.*)

LORETTA. Sir, we've been through all this before...

SCARLET (*straightens up*). I can't find any green present under here, Mr. Harrigan.

TITUS. It HAS to be there!

SCARLET. No, sir.

TITUS (*pacing again*). This is impossible, I just PUT it there not ten minutes ago!

LORETTA. Maybe that Santa Claus knows something.

SCARLET. Oh, he's probably busy. You know, making a list, checking it twice.

LORETTA. I mean OUR Santa Claus.

SCARLET. What's the big deal? Whatever it was we can always order another one.

TITUS. THIS we canNOT do!

SCARLET. Why not? What was in the box?

TITUS (*stops and glares at SCARLET*). What was in it? (*Stuttering.*) The co...the com... the...the...

SCARLET. What? (*She turns to LORETTA.*) Mrs. Mondello, what is so important about a missing present?

LORETTA. It's important because that particular present contained the company payroll.

TITUS. DON'T tell her THAT!

LORETTA. She WORKS here. If ANYone would know about gifts it would be her.

TITUS. This will ruin me! What ELSE can go wrong?

LORETTA. Don't SAY that!

TITUS. Why not?

(At that moment, TRIXIE, dressed as a large elf, rushes in through the UC door.)

TRIXIE. We got real problems!

TITUS. What NOW?!

TRIXIE. It's Santa Claus! *(She looks out.)* He's gone!

LORETTA. I told you not to say it.

(LIGHTS black out. A solo LIGHT comes up DR on HARRY.)

HARRY *(hard-boiled voice)*. 'Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house. Apparently somebody had been stirring. Something of a louse. You see all sorts in my racket. Sticky-fingered secretaries who have a grudge on their boss. Blackmailing photographers with a negative outlook on life. Whining ex-wives who need their alimony to give to their boyfriend who also has a whining ex-wife. It's a roller coaster, sweetheart, and I'm always along for the ride. Name's Monday, Harry Monday. I'm a private eye. Big holiday coming up and business had been slow. And so were all the horses I had backed. Shoulda told me something when I found out that the last horse I bet on had a twin. Even when he was born he came in second. Anyway, let's just say I had a hole in my budget big enough to drive a sleigh and eight tiny reindeer through. So when I get a call from Harrigan's department store I found I had the time. You get me?

(The solo LIGHT blacks out on HARRY. LIGHTS come up in the rest of the area. SCARLET is still standing behind the counter while LORETTA assures TITUS.)

LORETTA. Sir, we'll get to the bottom of this.

SCARLET. You put the payroll in a box wrapped as a present?

LORETTA. A security measure. I was informed by a professional that this would be an excellent way to hide all our currency, in case of robbery.

TITUS. Well, it worked. We did it and had a robbery! This is all your fault.

LORETTA. Sir, I've put in a call to someone I feel sure can clear this up, and—

TITUS. Well, they better be quick. If we don't have that payroll by the end of today's business it'll be all over town! This'll ruin me!

LORETTA. Let's go back to my office and wait for him there. There's nothing more we can do here.

TITUS. Oh! Very well! *(He moves L.)* Oh dear! *(He exits off.)*

LORETTA *(to SCARLET)*. Call me if this gentleman shows up here. *(She pulls out a business card and hands it to SCARLET.)* Sometimes he likes to visit the scene of the crime first.

SCARLET *(reads the card)*. "Harry Monday—Private Investigator. On-site security. Notary Public. Blackjack dealer. Dogs walked—"

LORETTA. Just call me if he shows up. And not a word about this to anyone.

SCARLET. My lips are sealed.

TITUS *(offstage)*. Mondello!

LORETTA. I'm coming, Mr. Harrigan. *(She exits L.)*

SCARLET. A private investigator. *(She runs the card under her chin and smiles.)* I wonder if what they say about private eyes is true?

(TRIXIE enters through the UC door.)

TRIXIE. No sign of Jimmy.

SCARLET. Who?

TRIXIE. Jimmy. Jimmy Palmeroy, he was playing our Santa. He must've gone out the back door.

SCARLET. Yeah, carrying a bag of his own.

TRIXIE. Huh?

SCARLET. Nothing.

TRIXIE *(moves to the counter)*. Wow, I can't wait for my bonus this year. You know, sometimes you get it and then it just flies away.

SCARLET. Sometimes before you get it.

TRIXIE. Huh?

SCARLET. Listen, go back there and see if that guy, that Jimmy what's-his-name, took his clothes with him.

TRIXIE. Ooh, good idea. *(She exits through the UC door.)*

SCARLET *(looks at her watch)*. We're just about to open and no money and no Santa Claus. Talk about a blue Christmas.

(Just then HARRY enters from R. He looks around the area. SCARLET sees him. HARRY looks over at the counter and smiles. She smiles back.)

SCARLET. Say, do you like kids?

HARRY. Oh, honey, not so fast. We just met. (*He moves to the counter.*)

SCARLET. Nah, I thought you might be looking for a job as Santa Claus, that's all I meant.

HARRY. Oh? I thought maybe you were looking for a sugar daddy.

SCARLET. Wow, snappy banter, it's going to be one of those days.

HARRY (*eyeing her*). Getting better all the time. What's a dish like you doing in a place like this?

SCARLET. Okay, the banter isn't too snappy. Does that line work?

HARRY. You tell me. (*He leans in.*)

SCARLET. I bet you're that private eye, aren't you?

HARRY. My rep has preceded me. Name's Monday. Harry Monday. Whatever you heard, believe me, they couldn't prove in court.

(*TRIXIE enters from the UC door.*)

TRIXIE. All his clothes are still here. He must've left in a hurry.

HARRY. Somebody is running around the store naked?

TRIXIE. Who's he?

HARRY. I'm a private eye, kiddo. Got called in on a case here. So! (*He slaps his hands together and rubs them.*) Okay, let's get down to the big skinny. How many people have been murdered?

TRIXIE. What?!

HARRY (*takes out a pad*). Just the facts, kid, just the facts. (*He pulls out a pen and is ready to write.*) How many are dead?

SCARLET. How many are DEAD?

HARRY. Don't blush, sweetie, I want to remember you just the way you are.

SCARLET. No, you don't understand—

HARRY. That's what they all say, until people start tripping over a few ex-persons. Three people got snuffed, right? That's how most of my cases start.

TRIXIE. He scares me.

SCARLET (*smiles wickedly*). Me too. I think I like it. (*She moves from behind the counter.*) Mr. Monday—

HARRY. Harry. You can call me Harry.

SCARLET. And you can call me after six.

HARRY. And before then?

SCARLET. Name's Scarlet. Scarlet Kloontz. This is Trixie O'Brien.

TRIXIE. S'happening?

SCARLET. And, I'm afraid you've been misinformed. Nobody has been murdered.

HARRY. What?

SCARLET. No. No murders.

HARRY (*fighting disappointment*). But...I got called in... there HAS to be a murder.

SCARLET. I'm telling you there haven't been any murders.

HARRY (*after a beat*). No one?

SCARLET. No, sir.

HARRY (*crestfallen*). Nothing? Nothing at all?

TRIXIE (*after a slight pause*). We've had a rash of paper cuts up on two.

HARRY. It's...just not the same.

TRIXIE. You're disappointed?

HARRY. Well, you know how it is, you have your mouth set for something—

(HARRY sighs deeply and lowers his head. SCARLET and TRIXIE look at him, then at each other, then they both also lower their heads.)

TRIXIE *(after a medium pause)*. Sir, would you—?

HARRY *(waves her off)*. No, I...just...I need a minute.
(He stares off and shakes his head.)

(After another medium pause, SCARLET taps his shoulder.)

SCARLET. We have a missing person, if that's anything.

HARRY *(brightening)*. Really? Who?

SCARLET. Santa Claus.

HARRY *(edgy)*. Okay, now this isn't funny anymore!

TRIXIE. Is that a problem?

HARRY. Look, I know I may not step out of no limousines nor wear Robert Hall. My shoes get dirty and my trench coat hasn't been cleaned since Moses was a pup but I got that way from working the streets, you get me? Sorry if I seem a little rough around the edges but I spend most of my life working the edges so Mr. and Mrs. Swank can keep their dirty laundry out of the public eye. People clam up when I come to town and I'm used to being on a "You don't need to know" basis. I may be down and out but that's neither here nor there so I ain't got time to go back and forth just to get the up and up.

TRIXIE *(to SCARLET)*. I forgot what I asked.

SCARLET. Go get Mrs. Mondello.

TRIXIE. Why don't you just call her? *(She points to the counter.)*

SCARLET (*irritated*). Hey, I work here from nine to five, I live in a walk-up with loud neighbors and sneaky handy-men. And when I'm here I have to put up with complaining customers, handsy lingerie salesmen and whining brats, so I don't have time to curtsy every time I ask a favor, nor do I—

TRIXIE. Sorry! I'm going! No more speeches, okay? Yeesh! (*She exits off L.*)

(*HARRY looks at SCARLET with admiration.*)

HARRY. Say, sweets, you got a lip on you.

SCARLET (*smiles*). Two of them. (*She moves to him.*) I'll get closer so you can see for yourself.

HARRY. Nice arrangement. (*SCARLET puts her arms around him.*) Oh, this is a contact sport?

SCARLET. Only if it's done right. Now. What would you like to know?

HARRY. Just what you know. Why was I called in?

SCARLET. Something about a missing payroll. And also the guy who's standing in for Santa Claus has taken a powder.

HARRY. Uh-huh. Maybe...maybe he has another job, you ever think of that? (*He is having a hard time trying to concentrate.*)

SCARLET. Oh I know. (*She blows in his ear.*) Having to deliver all those presents in one night.

HARRY. Right. I don't know how he does it.

SCARLET. Now, admit it, Harry. I'm the most beautiful woman you've ever seen.

HARRY. That's not exactly an endorsement, honey duck. (*She leans in to his face.*) Just the fact that your eyes

match...and there's two of them... (*He looks down at her legs.*) And you don't have a wooden—

SCARLET. Anybody ever tell you you talk too much?

HARRY. I got a line of people waiting to get on that list.

(The phone rings on the counter.)

SCARLET. I better get that.

HARRY. I'll hold your place.

SCARLET. I thought you would. (*She crosses to the counter.*)

HARRY (*moves to the UC door*). What's this?

SCARLET. Storage. Also, where Santa changes. (*She picks up the receiver.*)

HARRY. I'll just give it the once-over. (*He exits out the door.*)

SCARLET (*into the receiver*). Courtesy counter, Scarlet Kloontz speaking, may I help you? What? Sir, I can't understand you. What? No, he's not in yet. May I give him a message? Hello? (*She looks at the receiver and then hangs up.*)

(LOUIE enters from L and walks up to the counter.)

LOUIE. Good morning, my dear.

SCARLET. Merry Christmas, sir, may I help you?

LOUIE. Oh, I'm quite sure you can, my dear. Just by your lovely countenance you illuminate this whole establishment.

SCARLET. Wow, I bet you went to high school.

LOUIE. And with wit, there IS civility left in this hard-hearted world of ours. (*He pulls a tag from his vest.*) I

End of excerpt, following is a table of clues.

Table of Clues

If the audience-participation segment is used the following items should be placed on the “Clue Table”:

James’ clothes:

- A well-worn shirt
- A well-worn pair of pants with belt
- A well-worn pair of shoes
- A wallet
- Some paperclips
- A pocket handkerchief

Also:

A pink memo slip with the message written in all capital letters:

TO JAMES. “GO TO HARRIGAN’S DEPARTMENT STORE, CORNER OF MIRACLE AND 34th STREET. CHECK IN WITH OWL.

A piece of paper on which is typed:

“I’m still waiting for the money. Don’t think you can get away from me. After all, I know when you’ve been sleeping, I know when you’re awake.”

And Harry’s notes, all handwritten on pages ripped from a small, spiral-backed pad, as follows:

“Scarlet Kloontz – VERY friendly, trying to throw me off.”

“Titus Harrigan – loud! Last one with money. Why in the parking lot?”

“Trixie O’Brien – only one to see James/Santa today she says.”

“Carson Page – young, DID know about payroll box. Late for work.”

“Penny Harrigan – too innocent. Adopted. Where was she during theft?”

“Opaline Lambert – quiet, knows more/found black-mail note.”

“Mildred Wolensky – showed up/how’d she find out? Contract Clauses.”

“Loretta Mondello – Ma! Called me in/knew about the green box.”

“Louie Grandville – showed up today/why? Known grifter. Phony claim tag.”