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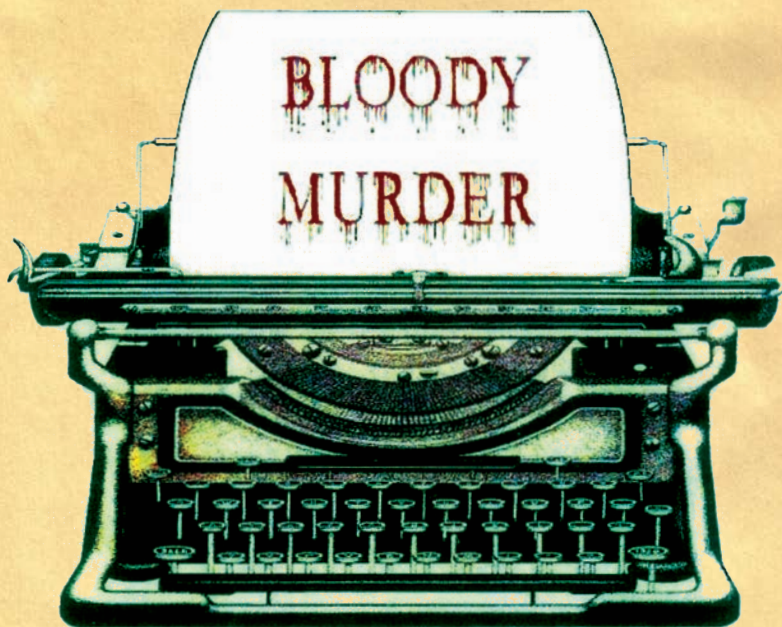
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“It’s a sign of fresh, intelligent writing when a playwright succeeds in totally messing with his audience’s minds.”

—Akron Beacon Journal

# Bloody Murder



Mystery/Comedy  
By  
Ed Sala

Agatha Christie meets Pirandello.

“It’s the most refreshing murder mystery  
you’ll see this year.” —*Cleveland.com*

# Bloody Murder

**Mystery/Comedy. By Ed Sala. Cast: 3m., 3w. play 12 roles. No doubling.** A group of the usual British murder-mystery types gather for a weekend retreat at the sumptuous country estate of the esteemed Lady Somerset. There’s the major who served in India; the inebriated, fading actor; the innocent ingénue; the exotic lady in red; the mysterious Chinese gentleman; the rich dowager aunt; and her faithful maid and worthless nephew. Suddenly, one of them dies of poison! Well, of course. Oh, what fun! But wait ... Her Ladyship refuses to summon the police! She says she won’t go through all this, again. All *what*, again? And why were they all invited here in the first place? Is this actually just another formulaic, all-too-predictable mystery story? Or is it something diabolically ... *different*? Agatha Christie meets Pirandello, as characters rebel against their author. It’s bloody murder. “Delightfully warped.” (*The Twinsburg Bulletin*) “It’s the most refreshing murder mystery you’ll see this year.” (*Cleveland.com*) “It’s a sign of fresh, intelligent writing when a playwright succeeds in totally messing with his audience’s minds.” (*Akron Beacon Journal*) An Appalachian Playwriting Festival and the Theatre Resources Unlimited Playwriting Festival award winner. *One int. set. Approximate running time: 1 hour, 45 minutes. Code: BG7.*

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# **BLOODY MURDER**

By  
ED SALA



**Dramatic Publishing**

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ED SALA

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(BLOODY MURDER)

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Dedicated to the memory of the late Bill Pitts,  
a wonderful friend and great comic actor,  
for whom the role of the Major was written.

## IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

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*Bloody Murder* was first produced at the University of Idaho. Its legitimate theatrical premier was at Ocala Civic Theatre in Ocala, Florida, Nov. 13-21, 2008, with the following artists:

#### CAST (in order of appearance)

Major Quimby . . . . .	Randall Moring
Tremaine . . . . .	Fred Due
Charles Pomeroy . . . . .	J. Charles Bartosic
Emma Reese . . . . .	Dani Moreno-Fuentes
Lady Somerset . . . . .	Susan Moring
Jane . . . . .	Gail Baumann

#### PRODUCTION TEAM

Producer . . . . .	Mary Britt
Director. . . . .	Ed Sala
Scenic Designer . . . . .	Carlos Francisco Asse & Timothy J. Dygert
Lighting Designer . . . . .	Robert P. Robins
Sound Designer . . . . .	Timothy J. Dygert
Costume Designer . . . . .	Bridget Bartlett
Production Stage Manager.. . . .	Stretch Tucker



# **BLOODY MURDER**

The play requires one set: an elaborate drawing room in an English country estate, 1930s or 1940s. The cast is comprised of six actors—three women and three men—but has alternate versions for eight actors and for 12 actors. Each version requires an equal number of women and men. In the six- and eight- actor versions, several actors play more than one role. The most prominent characters are:

- 1) Lady SOMERSET - In her 70s. A woman of great wealth and social standing.
- 2) JANE - In her 60s. Lady Somerset's maid and head of staff.
- 3) EMMA Reese - Late 20s. The far-too-innocent ingenue.
- 4) The COUNTESS - Late 30s, quite strikingly well preserved. The mystery woman.
- 5) The MAJOR - Late 60s. Served with the military in India and constantly reminds everyone of it.

- 6) Devon TREMAINE - Late 40s to early 50s. Formerly great tragic actor, now declining because of his fondness for single-malt Scotch.
- 7) CHARLES - Late 30s to early 40s. Her Ladyship's worthless nephew.
- 8) Chief Inspector PHELPS - Forties or 50s. The dim-witted policeman.

They are all stereotypes and meant to be so.

In the six-actor version, the actress who plays EMMA also plays the COUNTESS. The actress who plays JANE also plays the stranded MOTORIST and the NUN. The actor who plays TREMAINE also plays Mr. WOO and EL GATO. And the actor who plays CHARLES also plays Inspector PHELPS.

In the eight-actor version, the actress who plays the COUNTESS also plays the stranded MOTORIST and the NUN. The actor who plays PHELPS also plays Mr. WOO and EL GATO.

In the 12-actor version, there are no doubling of roles.

The show needs very few light cues and special effects. Including a 15-minute intermission, its running time is slightly less than two hours.

# ACT ONE

## SCENE ONE

SCENE: *The very lavish drawing room of an English country estate.*

AT RISE: *Two men, carrying drinks, enter through an elaborate archway, UR. One is MAJOR QUIMBY, dressed in a military uniform. The other is DEVON TREMAINE, with once-chiseled features now going to seed. He's a bit tipsy and not at all interested in his companion's conversation.*

MAJOR. Delightful! Absolutely delightful! Never enjoyed a more succulent dinner, I must say! Have you?

TREMAINE. Well, actually, Major, I—

MAJOR. ...Unless, of course, it was at that royal banquet they threw for me when I was in the Punjab with the Bengal Lancers. Did I tell you I was with the Lancers?

TREMAINE (*bored*). Several times.

MAJOR. I haven't the foggiest why Her Ladyship invited me here, though. I've never met her before. Have you?

TREMAINE. I don't believe I—

MAJOR. And good God, this estate! Bloody breathtaking, don't you think? Used to be a feudal fortress, at one time! (*Hushed.*) Probably haunted. Just think of the things these walls must have seen...wars, intrigues,

murders... (*With pleasure.*) Oh, do you think? Do you think they've seen *murders*?

TREMAINE. Well, I—

MAJOR. But then, I suppose you've seen a lot more of them than I have.

TREMAINE. Pardon?

MAJOR. On the stage, dear boy! I saw you commit them in *Richard III* and *Julius Caesar*! "Murder most foul," as they say. You were riveting! Truly remarkable.

TREMAINE (*bored*). You're too kind.

MAJOR. Of course, you played practically every tragic role, all over the country, didn't you? Back when you were, uh...

TREMAINE. When I was what?

MAJOR. Well, uh...

TREMAINE. Sober? Back when people would actually hire me, without fear that I'd fall down onstage and froth at the mouth, like some pathetic, slobbering animal?

MAJOR. Oh, no, please, I didn't mean that, at all. I have the utmost regard for you. (*Looking about furtively, speaking in hushed tones.*) But you know who has been bothering me? That Mr. Woo character. Quite inscrutable and all that. Gives me a touch of the willies. Seems like he's studying everything, all the time. Doesn't say a bloody word to anyone, does he? A bit rude, if you ask me.

TREMAINE (*meaningfully*). Perhaps he finds some of the party guests rather...tedious.

MAJOR. I mean, why was he invited? He's not even British! Well, of course, that Countess woman isn't, either, but at least she's, uh...royalty of some kind,

from...somewhere. Do you recall her saying where she's from?

TREMAINE. Well, no, I—

MAJOR. I just have a feeling about this Woo fellow—there's something not quite right—and I've got a sense for these things, always have, helped me a great deal in the Lancers. There was that time near Raipur, when I just knew, somehow, that we were heading into an ambush. Don't know how I knew it, I just knew it.

TREMAINE. Uncanny.

MAJOR (*pulling a pistol from his jacket*). So I pulled out my revolver and fired a warning shot to—

TREMAINE (*grabbing his arm*). Here, good God, man, is that thing loaded?

MAJOR. Well, yes, it is, but—

TREMAINE. Well, damn it, put it away! Someone could get killed!

MAJOR. Oh, uh... (*Stuffing it back in his coat.*) ...yes, of course, if you say so, but I assure you, I—

*(CHARLES POMEROY, a rather spoiled, decadent type, and EMMA REESE, a perky blonde, enter through French doors from the garden, UL. He is dressed in the latest mode, and EMMA is wearing a simple frock.)*

CHARLES. Well, yes, Lady Somerset is my aunt, and I blush to say I'm her favorite nephew... (*Hushed.*) ...and stand to come into a rather enormous inheritance when she passes away, but this is the first time I've been invited to one of her little weekend soirees.

EMMA. You mean she's had others?

CHARLES. Oh, yes, every year. And always with an oddly assorted bunch of characters, I must say. I've seen the guest lists.

EMMA. Well, I can't guess why *I'm* on this one. I'm hardly on this level of society.

CHARLES. You'd best beware. She always, somehow, knows some sort of dark secret about everyone at these affairs. I have no idea how she finds it out. But she gets them all together, here, without letting anyone know what she's up to, and then, suddenly, she just *springs* it on them...tells them all the ghastly truths about themselves, just to watch them squirm. It's her sick little game.

EMMA. Oh, dear, how awful! I mean, I, uh...can't think of any dark secrets she could know about me, of course, but—

CHARLES. Oh, I hope she has something really incriminating about me. I *am* the embarrassment of the family, I'm quite proud to say. And I'm sure she must know by now that I'm plotting to murder her for my inheritance. I'm getting so tired of waiting.

EMMA. Oh, please, don't joke about such things.

CHARLES. What makes you think I'm joking? (*Putting his arm around her.*) Of course, the last thing I'd want to do is make you uncomfortable. You are quite remarkably attractive, you know, and I—

EMMA (*pulling away*). Oh, Mr. Tremaine! I simply must tell you how much I adore your work! Ever since I was a small girl and saw you in *Romeo and Juliet*. I'd never seen Shakespeare done with such feeling, such...such knowledge of the heartfelt emotions of a young woman! I felt as if you were speaking directly to *me*.

TREMAINE. Well, perhaps I *was*. You never know.

EMMA. And I especially liked your *Merchant of Venice*, when you came to Manchester. You were sensational!

TREMAINE. Yes, a pity the critics didn't agree with you. But at that point, I'm afraid my vaunted career was already "on the rocks," as they say. Which is, coincidentally, how I like my Scotch. Ironic, don't you think?

MAJOR. Shenlaggan, isn't it?

TREMAINE. Beg pardon?

MAJOR. Your Scotch. I noticed it's "Shenlaggan." Lovely single-malt. I'm drinking the same myself.

TREMAINE. The world is ever so small.

MAJOR. You know, I had a friend in the Lancers who drank the same thing. We were always...—

TREMAINE (*intentionally cutting him off*). I wonder what could be keeping the Countess. Has anyone seen her?

*(Two women enter through the archway. LADY SOMERSET is accompanied by JANE, the maid.)*

SOMERSET (*announcing*). I'm very sorry to say that the Countess will not be joining us presently.

TREMAINE (*interested*). No?

SOMERSET. No. She said she felt a bit queasy. Most curious. It happened right after I asked her if I'd seen her once in Cairo. Then she suddenly said she was ill.

TREMAINE. Well, uh...if you'll excuse me, I believe I'll just go and check on her...make sure she's all right. There are things going around, you know.

SOMERSET. Well, if you feel you must...

*(TREMACHINE exits through a door, L, which squeaks ominously.)*

CHARLES. Auntie, please come with me and talk with dear Emma here. I can't find out much about her on my own.

SOMERSET. Well, I hope that's because she has the good taste to stay away from you.

EMMA. Thank you so much, again, Your Ladyship, for having me here.

SOMERSET. Of course. I apologize if my nephew has been annoying you.

CHARLES. I was just telling her of my great love for you, Auntie.

SOMERSET. Nonsense. You were probably telling her how much you'd like to see me dead.

CHARLES. Well, I'll admit, the thought does have a certain...cachet.

EMMA. Oh, for heaven's sake!

CHARLES. Not that I don't adore you, of course, but if you live much longer, you'll deprive me of the joy of mispending your money while I'm still somewhat young.

SOMERSET. And that's why you keep plotting my premature death.

CHARLES. Well, at this point, it can hardly be considered "premature."

EMMA. You mean that's true? He's actually plotting against you, and you know about it?

SOMERSET. Of course he is. I encourage it. It's the only thing that gives him any ambition, at all. I don't know



what he'd do if...if he didn't... *(A hand to her head.)*

No, no...I can't go on...

CHARLES. Auntie...

JANE. Your Ladyship...

SOMERSET. I cannot go through all this, again. I...simply...cannot...

EMMA. Oh, dear.

MAJOR. Good heavens.

*(All become silent and stare at her, as JANE seats her in a chair.)*

JANE. Here...here, Madam. Might I get you a drink?

SOMERSET. "Might" you? Of course you might. *(Looking dazedly about at the assembled guests.)* My apologies, everyone. Please go on with...whatever you were doing.

JANE *(to all)*. I'm so sorry. She's been under a strain. No need for concern. *(She exits through the archway.)*

CHARLES. Yes, yes, exactly. Let's not worry our pretty heads. Here, I'll put on some music! That's what we need to get this party going. Just the ticket. *(He looks through a stack of records.)*

EMMA. "A strain," she said?

CHARLES. Yes, just one of her little spells.

EMMA. "Spells"? You mean she has some sort of condition?

CHARLES. No, just..."spells."

*(Mr. WOO enters. He's wearing a long, traditional Chinese robe, a tiny pair of thick glasses, a Fu-Manchu mustache and is smoking a small pipe.)*

MAJOR (*hushed, to CHARLES and EMMA*). Oh, dear God, it's him. That Mr. Woo character. I must say, he's rather odd, don't you think? Up to no good, if you ask me.

CHARLES (*putting a record on the phonograph*). Well, I certainly hope so. Might liven up the party a bit. (*He starts the phonograph. Upbeat music of the period. He grabs EMMA's hand.*) Here, now, Emma, you must come and dance with me.

EMMA. No, I don't believe so.

CHARLES. Oh, come on, I won't bite you. Well, I mean, I won't do it *again*. That once was an accident, really and truly. And if you won't give me just one dance, I shall run upstairs and throw myself out of a tower!

EMMA (*giving in*). Oh, for heaven's sake. (*She dances with him.*)

(*JANE enters, carrying a drink for SOMERSET.*)

JANE. Your drink, Madam.

SOMERSET. Well, I hope it's a very stiff one.

CHARLES (*under his breath*). Laced with a little cyanide, perhaps.

EMMA. Stop it! You mustn't keep making light of these things! It's quite ugly!

JANE. Would anyone else like his or her drink freshened?

MAJOR. Yes, thank you so much. Another Shenlaggan, please.

JANE. Of course.

MAJOR. And you may as well just leave the bottle here, then, Jane. For Mr. Tremaine. We both prefer the same poison.

JANE. Very well, sir. *(She exits through the archway.)*

MAJOR *(idly, to whomever is listening)*. I wonder why they call it that. "Poison." Sounds a bit ominous, doesn't it?

SOMERSET *(an outburst)*. No, no! I cannot do this all again! I am quite serious! I cannot!

EMMA *(stopping dancing)*. Good heavens.

CHARLES. Oh, here we go again.

SOMERSET. And for God's sake, stop that annoying music!

CHARLES. Yes, of course, Auntie. *(He turns off the phonograph.)*

EMMA. Are you all right, Your Ladyship?

MAJOR. Yes, uh...anything we can do?

SOMERSET. Oh, don't act as though you don't know what's happening.

MAJOR. Beg pardon?

SOMERSET *(ominously)*. You all know exactly what's going on.

CHARLES. Oh, very good, Auntie! *(Mysteriously.)* We "all know." Very dramatic. I think this is your best spell to date! I'm so proud.

*(JANE reenters, carrying the bottle of Shenlaggan and placing it on a table.)*

JANE. Your Ladyship, I thought I heard a commotion out here. Are you all right?

SOMERSET. No, of course I'm not.

EMMA. She's quite upset.

SOMERSET. But not as upset as the rest of you, am I? That I might actually say it out loud. Well, I am going

to say it, and there's nothing you can do to stop me, because I will no longer play this...this mindless little game, this ridiculous—

MAJOR (*raising his glass*). A, uh...toast! To Lady Somerset!

EMMA. Oh...yes, everyone, a toast!

CHARLES. Of course! (*Raising his glass*.) To my auntie!

MAJOR. Yes, uh...for a quite wonderful dinner...

CHARLES. Hear, hear!

EMMA. Yes, it was so lovely.

MAJOR. And to a delightful weekend in the country!

Here's to our most generous hostess, the very much esteemed...Lady Somerset!

CHARLES. To you, Auntie!

EMMA. To Lady Somerset!

*(They all drink.)*

MAJOR. Well, that hit the spot, I must say. This all reminds me of a little affair I attended when I was in the Punjab—

*(Mr. WOO suddenly grabs his throat and makes loud choking sounds.)*

MAJOR (*cont'd*). What?

*(WOO staggers and falls.)*

EMMA. Oh, no! Oh, Mr. Woo!

MAJOR. Oh, good heavens! What's going on?

*(They all go to WOO. JANE kneels and cradles his head in her arms.)*

JANE. Here, give him air!

WOO *(barely able to speak)*. The...the laughing... *(More choking, coughing)*.

MAJOR. Oh, my God, he's actually speaking!

JANE *(to WOO)*. What is it?

WOO. The...laughing...monkey...

MAJOR. Did he say, "laughing monkey"?

EMMA *(to WOO)*. What about the laughing monkey?

WOO. ...Should not be...blue. *(His body goes limp.)*

EMMA. Oh, dear!

MAJOR. "Shouldn't be blue"? Was that it? The monkey shouldn't be blue?

EMMA *(looking at WOO)*. Is he...is he...

JANE. Is there a physician in the house? *(No one volunteers.)* Anyone with any training?

*(SOMERSET looks oddly at the MAJOR.)*

MAJOR *(uncomfortably)*. Well, uh...perhaps Mr. Tremaine.

JANE. He's a doctor?

MAJOR. Well, no, but he's performed as one, upon the stage. I saw him in Cornwall.

SOMERSET. No one else? No real doctor?

MAJOR. Oh...I suppose I might be of some assistance. Here... *(He looks into WOO's eyes and checks his pulse.)* Oh, my, how astounding! This man is...I'm afraid he's quite...dead!

EMMA. Oh...oh, no! (*Covering her mouth with her hanky.*) I'm sorry...I believe I'm going to be ill. (*She runs from the room.*)

MAJOR. Here, we must ring up the police.

SOMERSET (*cooly*). No.

MAJOR. I...beg your pardon?

SOMERSET. We are not going to summon the police.

MAJOR. Why, don't be silly, of course we are. Only thing to do, under the circumstances. Here, I'll take care of it. (*He starts for the telephone.*)

SOMERSET. No, you are not going to call them.

MAJOR. Well, I'd certainly like to know what's going to stop me.

SOMERSET. *This*, Major! (*She rips the cord from its connection.*)

CHARLES. Oh!

MAJOR. Oh, good heavens!

SOMERSET (*holding the separated cord in her hand*). *This*...is what's going to stop you.

MAJOR. You've pulled it out of the wall!

SOMERSET. Yes...and it's the only telephone on the premises. You will not be ringing up the police or anyone else.

MAJOR. Well, then, I...I'll go and get them. Anyone want to come with me?

SOMERSET. You'll have quite a walk. The nearest civilization is more than forty kilometers away. And I've given the chauffeur who drove all of you here the weekend off and full use of the automobile. I'm sure he's in another county, by now, with someone's scullery maid and a bottle of cheap whiskey. We won't be seeing him until Monday morning.

MAJOR. But this is...bloody insane! Why don't you want us to notify the police?

SOMERSET. Because the local constable would come and we'd go through the same inane ritual we always go through.

CHARLES. We..."always go through"?

MAJOR (*to SOMERSET*). What do you mean? Do you feel you've done this before? Like *deja vu*, is that it?

SOMERSET (*shouting*). Oh, for God's sake, will you all please stop acting as though I've gone insane and you have no idea of what I'm saying? (*They all become quiet and stare at her.*) We are characters in a story. We all know we are. We're in yet another mindless piece of tawdry detective fiction by this atrocious writer I'm sure you all despise as much as I do. He uses hackneyed storylines, cheap melodrama and any phraseology he can steal from anyone who's ever used the English language. Any child of six could do better with a crayon. And he puts *us* into everything he writes. He just changes our names and uses us all, over and over again. And I am quite tired of it. His work is uninspired, it is insulting to human intelligence, and it is... *lowbrow*...quite obviously written for the very basest elements of our society, the type who hang about at... (*Shuddering.*) ...the *theatre*, and the music halls. Well, I am a woman of breeding and sensibility, and I will be a part of this no longer!

*(An awkward silence, as they all exchange glances and clear their throats.)*