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Family Plays

MURDER AT THE BALLET

Murder mystery
Jeffrey Goffin

An exciting murder mystery for a predominantly female cast.

MURDER AT THE BALLET

Murder mystery. By Jeffrey Goffin. *Cast: 3m., 7w.* Babe Archer and the killer-chasers from *My Gun Is Pink* are at it again. This time the suspect is Babe Archer's handsome secretary, Vernon. The victim is a world-famous ballerina who was a college sweetheart of Vernon's. When her troupe comes to perform, she invites Vernon backstage. During the intermission she is found dead in the green room, and Vernon is standing over her holding the murder weapon. It's an open-and-shut case until Babe Archer comes to his defense. Can she prove that Vernon is innocent? *Murder at the Ballet* is sort of a sequel to Jeffrey Goffin's popular *My Gun Is Pink*. In both, the traditional murder-mystery roles have been reversed. Although similar in every other way to the world of detective mysteries of the 1940s, in this world women are in charge. The detective, the police inspector and other authority figures are women. In contrast, the roles usually played by women, such as the detective's secretary, are men. The result is a satire on the detective genre and on gender stereotypes. Babe Archer is a Mike Hammer-type—a tough, no-nonsense private investigator. Vernon Hopkins is her good-looking private secretary. The police inspector and the rookie cop are women. It all adds up to fun for the performers and their audiences—with a good dose of suspense and fast action blended in. It works for actors and viewers of all ages from junior high to adults. *Set: theatre green room. Time: 1940s. Approximate running time: 60 minutes. Code: MN2.*

Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098-3308
Phone: (800) 448-7469 / (815) 338-7170
Fax: (800) 334-5302 / (815) 338-8981

www.FamilyPlays.com

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Murder at the Ballet

MURDER AT THE BALLET

(My Gun Is Pink—Chapter II)

A Murder Mystery in One Act

by

JEFFREY GOFFIN

Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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MURDER AT THE BALLET

Cast of Characters

Babe Archer, private investigator

Liz King, inspector, New York City Police Department

Vernon Hopkins, Babe Archer's secretary

Flaherty, a young rookie policewoman

Teddy Windermere, custodian at the Royal Sherman Theatre

Nadya Kalishnakov, stage manager for the Grand National Ballet

Karen McCain, director of the Grand National Ballet

Lucinda Rash, producer of the Grand National Ballet

Roewena Champagne, sister of the ballet star, Theresa Champagne

Ned Brigantine, a dancer with the Grand National Ballet

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Place: The Green Room of the Royal Sherman Theatre

Time: The 1940's

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First presented by the Acting Class of Storybook Theatre, Calgary, Alberta, Canada in November, 1989.

ABOUT THE PLAY

Murder at the Ballet is sort of a sequel to Jeffrey Goffin's popular *My Gun Is Pink*. In both, the traditional murder-mystery roles have been reversed. Although similar in every other way to the world of detective mysteries of the Forties, in this world women are in charge. The detective, the police inspector, and other authority figures are women. In contrast, the roles usually played by women, such as the detective's secretary, are men. The result is a satire on the detective genre and on gender-typing.

Babe Archer is a Mike Hammer-type of tough, no-nonsense private investigator. Vernon Hopkins is her good-looking private secretary. The police inspector and the rookie cop are women. It all adds up to fun for the performers and their audiences—with a good dose of suspense and fast action blended in. It works for actors and viewers of all ages from junior high to adults.

The author is a member of the drama faculty at the University of Calgary in Canada.

PRODUCTION NOTES

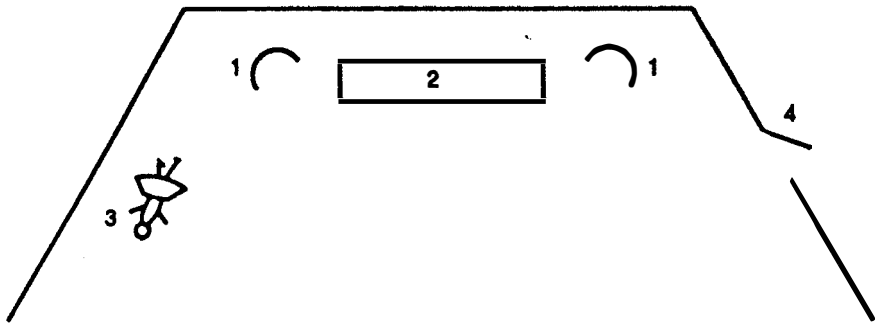
Properties

Framed posters of famous people—on the walls
 Gifts, messages—scattered around the room
 Coffee urn, party snacks, champagne bottles, glass of water—on the counter
 Note pad—Flaherty
 Large knife in a clear plastic bag—Flaherty
 Handkerchief—Archer
 File of papers—McCain
 Handkerchief—Ned
 Handcuffs, guns—King, Flaherty

Costumes

Clothing of the 1940's is recommended: slouch hat and trenchcoat over plain suit dress for Babe Archer; bow tie, loud sports jacket and slacks for Vernon; "plain clothes" dress for Inspector King; dressing gown over ballet costume for Ned; overalls for Teddy; dark slacks and blouse for Kallishnakov; policewoman's dress and cap for Flaherty; dresses for the other women.

The Set



- 1—Chairs
- 2—Counter
- 3—Chalk outline of body
- 4—Door

MURDER AT THE BALLET

[The Green Room of the Royal Sherman Theatre. This is an old and well-furnished theatre. Its long past is reflected in the framed posters displaying famous names. The Green Room is decorated with opening-night gifts and messages. Everything is prepared for an opening-night party that will never take place. Cards and flowers are piled around the room. A coffee urn, party snacks, and champagne bottles sit on the counter at the back of the room. There is one entrance. On the carpet there is a chalk outline of a body complete with tutu.]

VERNON sits in a chair looking distraught. INSPECTOR KING confers with him. OFFICER FLAHERTY stands at the open door. BABE ARCHER enters]

FLAHERTY. Hold it right there, sister.

ARCHER. What's going on, Vernon?

VERNON. Babe!

FLAHERTY. *[Grabbing Archer's shoulder]* No one allowed in. Crime scene.

ARCHER. If you don't take your mitts off me pretty quick, there's gonna be another crime . . .

FLAHERTY. Oh, yeah? Try me, hot shot . . .

KING. That's okay, Flaherty. You can let Miss Archer in.

FLAHERTY. Archer? Babe Archer? The private eye?

ARCHER. What about it?

FLAHERTY. Sorry, I didn't recognize you. Everyone down at the station knows you . . .

ARCHER. Sure, kid. *[She crosses to Vernon]*

KING. That's enough, Flaherty. Close the door on your way out. *[FLAHERTY exits]*

ARCHER. Are you all right, Vernon?

VERNON. I'm fine, Babe, but . . .

ARCHER. Have these jerks been pushing you around? Liz, what have your flatfoots been doing to Vernon?

VERNON. I'm fine, Babe, now that you're here.

KING. Settle down, Babe. Nobody's laid a glove on Vernon. What do you think I am? I'm not gonna get tough with your secretary.

ARCHER. Then what are you holding him for?

VERNON. Inspector King thinks I did it!

ARCHER. C'mon, Liz, what's this guff you're feeding me? You know Vernon's no killer.

KING. Vernon was found standing over the body with the murder weapon in his hand.

VERNON. But I didn't do it. Why would I kill Theresa? You believe me, don't you, Inspector? Surely *you* believe me, don't you, Babe?

ARCHER. Theresa Champagne? The ballerina? She's the murder victim?

KING. You heard of her?

ARCHER. Star of the Grand National Ballet. I read the papers. *[To Vernon]* Give me a few minutes to straighten out the lady here, sweetheart, and then we'll get out of this joint. *[She moves away from Vernon with KING in tow]* Tell me what you've got, Liz. Start at the beginning.

KING. Babe, we're friends but this is police business . . .

ARCHER. Liz, this is Babe you're talking to. Don't give me that "police business" line. Tell me what you've got.

KING. I can't.

ARCHER. You owe me, Liz. What about the Walker case last year? Or the Reiley caper?

KING. I know, I know. We never would've cracked those without you but if the girls upstairs ever heard about me passing evidence to a private investigator . . .

ARCHER. Vernon's been my secretary for years. He's a suspect. Whether you'll help me or not I'm on the case. Now, what's going on?

KING. *[Sighs. She crosses to the door]* Flaherty, get in here.

FLAHERTY. *[Rushing in and snapping to attention]* Yes, ma'am!

KING. *[To Archer]* Flaherty was the first officer on the scene. *[To Flaherty]* Knock off the parade-ground stuff and give us the lowdown.

FLAHERTY. *[She consults her notes]* Deceased is Theresa Champagne, prima ballerina for the Grand National Ballet. Cause of death—a single stab wound in the chest—probably through the heart.

KING. *[To Archer]* We'll know for sure after the autopsy.

FLAHERTY. The crime was called in by the stage manager of the ballet, Nadya Kalishnakov. She found the body here. *[Points to the outline on the floor]* The company was in the middle of their opening night performance.

KING. *[To Archer]* That's why they got out all the party favours and the food here. Gonna be a big party after the show. *[She proceeds to help herself to the goodies]*

FLAHERTY. Champagne, the deceased, was late for the second act. Kalishnakov, the stage manager, checked Champagne's dressing room. Then she checked here. She found Mr. Hopkins standing over the body with this in his hands. *[She holds up a large knife in a clear plastic bag]*

ARCHER. Cute little toy. Is that all?

KING. The girls from the lab went over the room but we didn't find much. The whole company uses this place as a backstage lounge—"Green Room," they call it—so the fingerprints won't be much help. Can't say what else might be relevant.

ARCHER. That's it? That took you over two hours? I could've got you that much in ten minutes. I've been waiting in that lobby since the intermission?

KING. The intermission?

FLAHERTY. Babe Archer was here for the ballet?

ARCHER. That's right. I was at the ballet. You want to make something of it?

FLAHERTY. No, no. Not me, Miss Archer.

ARCHER. Keep it that way. *[To King]* Vernon got free tickets from his ballerina friend so he dragged me down here to get some "culture."

KING. Sheesh, Babe Archer at the ballet. I wondered why you were all dressed up. Wait 'til the girls downtown hear about this.

ARCHER. Don't change the subject. What else have you got? Are there any other suspects? Any *real* ones? Did you question the company, Flaherty? How about this Kalishnakov character?

FLAHERTY. No, but I have a theory. I was talking to . . .

ARCHER. A theory?

FLAHERTY. A theory about who killed Miss Champagne.

KING. Amazing. A theory about who killed Miss Champagne.

FLAHERTY. Yes, I was talking to . . .

KING. You're new to this, aren't you, Flaherty?

FLAHERTY. It's my first murder, Inspector.

KING. I don't know what they're teaching these days at the police academy, but usually we finish the investigation before we make an accusation. Saves the department a lot of legal bother—unlawful arrest

and the like. Can you tell me who had access to this —this here “green room”? Why do they call it green—it looks brown [*or whatever color fits*] to me.

FLAHERTY. Here’s the list, Inspector. Only the ballet company and the backstage crew.

KING. [*Taking the list*] Good. Now get out of here and let me take a look at this.

FLAHERTY. Yes, ma’am. [*Exits*]

ARCHER. Let’s get to it, then.

KING. Babe, I can’t . . .

ARCHER. Do me this one favour. It’s the last time I’ll ever ask.

KING. I doubt that.

ARCHER. It means a lot to me. It’s for Vernon.

KING. I can’t do it, Babe. [*BABE stares at King*] I just can’t! [*BABE stares at King*] It’s against regulations. [*BABE stares at King*] Okay. But let me do the talking, okay?

ARCHER. Right.

KING. Vernon, you’ve got to leave for a while. I . . . we got to question the rest of the company.

ARCHER. It’ll just be a little while longer and then I’ll take you home, doll.

VERNON. Or they’ll take me to prison.

ARCHER. Now, Vernon, get a hold of yourself.

VERNON. They’ll take me to prison and I didn’t even do anything.

[*He cries*]

ARCHER. You sound like you don’t have any faith in me. Look at me. C’mon, look at me, sweetheart. You didn’t do it, did you?

VERNON. Oh, Babe, how can you even . . .

ARCHER. Did you?

VERNON. No, no, I didn’t.

ARCHER. That’s good enough for me. [*She hands him her handkerchief*] Dry your eyes and stop worrying.

KING. [*Opens the door*] Flaherty, I want you to keep an eye on Mr. Hopkins.

FLAHERTY. With pleasure, Inspector. This way, gorgeous.

ARCHER. You let me know if the flatfoot here misbehaves, Vernon.

FLAHERTY. I didn’t mean anything, Miss Archer. Honest, I was . . .

KING. And send in the dame that found the body.

FLAHERTY. The Stage Manager, Nadya Kalishnakov. But Inspector, I think you could save some time if you . . .

KING. Flaherty! *[FLAHERTY exits]*

VERNON. Thanks, Babe. *[He exits]*

KING. You relax, Babe. I want this to run smooth.

ARCHER. I'll just sit and watch.

KING. I bet. You get out of line once and you're out the door, sister.

[FLAHERTY enters with NADYA KALISHNAKOV]

FLAHERTY. Miss Kalishnakov, Inspector.

KING. Miss Kalishnakov, I'm Inspector King. I'd like to ask you a few questions. That's all, Flaherty. *[FLAHERTY exits]*

KALISHNAKOV. *[With a Russian accent]* Good. I am tired of waiting.

KING. Sorry, but you can't be too hasty with a murder investigation.

KALISHNAKOV. Da. Is good.

KING. What is your job with the ballet?

KALISHNAKOV. I am stage manager of Grand National Ballet. *[She pronounces it "bally" to rhyme with "rally"]* Is greatest ballet company in world.

KING. Swell. You found the body, right?

KALISHNAKOV. Yes. Here. *[Indicates the chalk outline]* And man is standing over her with knife. He kill her.

ARCHER. You didn't actually see him do it, did you?

KALISHNAKOV. Theresa is here—dead—and he is here with knife in hand. Is obvious.

ARCHER. But you didn't actually see him stab her.

KALISHNAKOV. No . . . did not see stabbing, but . . .

ARCHER. Then there's a big difference, sister.

KING. Cool off, Babe. Let me do the talking.

KALISHNAKOV. Who is this person, Inspector?

KING. This is Babe Archer. She's assisting with the investigation.

KALISHNAKOV. I am unimpressed.

ARCHER. Swell. *[She crosses to face Kalishnakov]* You know, I'd just as soon smack you one as look at you.

KING. Babe!