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*Dramatic Publishing*

# Whodunnit, Darling?



**Mystery/Comedy by**  
**Charles Edward Pogue and Larry Drake**

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**“This comedy/mystery moves along smartly.  
A clever little plot with some clever little lines.”**

—Pentagram

**“Bright, fast-paced and eminently entertaining.”**

—Potomac News

# Whodunnit, Darling?

*Cast: 5m., 2w.* “A matter of life and death!” reads the telegram that summons Damocles Cole, gentleman sleuth, to a dude ranch. It was death ... Dam’s client, Horace Crenshaw, has been murdered. But Dam notices the telegram was sent after Crenshaw was already dead. Dam’s ex-wife, Daphne, sent it. They’re divorced because Daph wrote a lurid murder mystery based on one of Dam’s exploits and even fashioned her detective hero on him. Daph has lured him to the scene of the crime because she desperately needs inspiration for a sequel ... and there’s another reason—she’s still in love with him. But Dam plays it close to the chest, both with Daph and an eccentric array of suspects. Dam wades through clues, alibis and a meddling country sheriff with his own theories. But without ruffling his tuxedo, Dam finally gathers all the suspects in a room for the solution to both the mystery and his oddball romance with his ex-wife. If you love the wisecracks and witty repartee of *The Thin Man* films, you’ll love *Whodunnit, Darling?*. The play is set in the 1930s, the era of the sophisticated sleuth. *One int. set. Approximate running time: 120 minutes. Code: WH9.*

*Artwork: Eric Johnson. Cover design: Molly Germanotta.*

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# Whodunnit, Darling?

By

CHARLES EDWARD POGUE

and

LARRY DRAKE



**Dramatic Publishing Company**

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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## IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

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The world premiere production of *Whodunnit, Darling?* opened on May 6, 1983, at Studio Players in Lexington, Ky., directed by Roger Lee Leasor, with the following cast:

DAMOCLES COLE .....	Eric Johnson
TEX MCKINNEY .....	Joe Gatton
DAPHNE COLE .....	Julie Anne Stephens
MOOSE LODGE .....	David Darst
MARTIN LOMAX .....	Kyran J. (Jack) Lynch
VERA LOMAX .....	Trish Clark
TOMMY DELBERT .....	Matthew Regan
MAX .....	Morgan

A slightly revised version of *Whodunnit, Darling?* opened on June 6, 2014, at the Pioneer Playhouse, Danville, Ky., directed by Robby Henson with the following cast:

DAMOCLES COLE .....	J. Richey Nash
TEX MCKINNEY .....	Eben French Mastin
DAPHNE COLE .....	Synge Maher
MOOSE LODGE .....	Chris Kateff
VERA LOMAX .....	Erika S. Lee
MARTIN LOMAX .....	Eric Hedlund
TOMMY DELBERT .....	Dylan Crow
MAX .....	Tater

# Whodunnit, Darling?

## CHARACTERS

Damocles Cole

Tex McKinney

Daphne Cole

Moose Lodge

Tommy Delbert

Martin Lomax

Vera Lomax

## SETTING

The entire play takes place during one day at Tex McKinney's dude ranch on the California/Nevada border. It is sometime in the 1930s.



DAM. I don't even want to set eyes on her.

*(He turns. DAPHNE COLE [DAPH] is in the doorway.)*

DAPH. Well, you can't have everything.

*(DAM reaches for his drink on the bar and grabs the gin bottle instead, taking a healthy swig.)*

DAPH *(cont'd)*. That's straight gin.

DAM. I like a dry martini. Well, if it isn't my own personal Dr. Watson?

DAPH. Hello, Dammy. Don't I get a hug? See you got my telegram.

DAM. Ah, you sent it ... Of course.

DAPH. Made good time too. But aren't you a little overdressed for a country murder?

DAM. Didn't have time to change. Just packed a bag and hired a plane ...

DAPH. Drooling over the big fee you thought you'd get, no doubt.

DAM. Just trying to stay one step ahead of your alimony payments.

DAPH *(sniffing DAM's tux)*. Scheherazade's Kiss ... Potent ... You've been to the opera with Majorie Blaine.

DAM. Very observant.

DAPH. How is dear “Midge”?

DAM. A bit livelier than *Aida*. Verdi always puts me to sleep.

DAPH. Guess my telegram arrived before Midge had time to tuck you in. You never dressed like that when I wanted to go out.

DAM. Well, this is a bit gaudy for the wrestling matches.

DAPH (*plucks a hair off his lapel*). Didn’t stop you from wrestling with Midge, I see ... (*Examines hair.*) Her roots are showing.

DAM. Your claws are ... How’s Maxwell?

DAPH. Misses his daddy.

DAM. Well, I hope you explained to the little ragamuffin that’s it’s very difficult for Daddy to get in his visiting rights when Mommy is perpetually gallivanting about the country.

DAPH. Sorry, Dammy, but best-selling authors need a lot of publicity. Autograph parties, radio shows, lectures ...

DAM. Fine life for Max! Poor little tyke. You’re a rotten mother, Daph. I don’t know why the judge ever gave you custody of him.

DAPH. Could’ve been your lawyer.

DAM. What did you do with him while you jaunted up here? Stick him in a kennel?

TEX. Whoaa there! You corralled your kid in a kennel?

*(DAPH steers TEX toward the door. He takes her book with him.)*

DAPH. No ... Max is the little dog I brought with me.

TEX. Oh ... Whew! Had me going there for a minute.

*(DAPH waves goodbye, and TEX exits.)*

DAM. So you brought him up here to be trampled by a bunch of horses.

DAPH. I suppose I could have left him with you, but I'd much rather have him put up with horses' hooves than a horse's ... "patootie."

DAM. Look, why did you send for me?

DAPH. And you call yourself a detective. You read the telegram.

DAM. Yes, I should have known by its sleazy, sensationalistic style, it was a forgery.

DAPH. Well, at least I didn't lie. Crenshaw does need your services desperately.

DAM. Horace Crenshaw is beyond needing anything at all, much less desperately.

DAPH. But someone's got to solve his murder.

DAM. Not me. I came to see Crenshaw. Since he's dead, I'll see my dog instead, then I'm leaving.

DAPH. Oh, but, Dammy, you've got to do it. You're the only one who can. Besides, you'll love it. This one's a real pip!

DAM. Well ... Pip, pip, cheerio! Even if I could solve it, I have no desire to see it serialized six months from now in *Spicy Detective Magazine*.

DAPH. I write for the slicks, not the pulps.

DAM. You're slick all right. Toodle-oo.

DAPH. So that's it, eh? Still jealous of your fictional counterpart?

DAM. Hardly jealous, merely scandalized.

DAPH. You should be delighted with all the fame he's brought you.

DAM. The word's notoriety, but I know nuance is not your style.

DAPH. I don't know why you object to him so much. The only difference between you and Dartmouth Cain is that I happened to give him a little more charm.

DAM. Impossible! I really must be off. Where's Max?

*(DAPH crosses to the door, blocking DAM's exit.)*

DAPH. Dammy, you can't leave!

DAM. I suppose I should flatter myself that you just can't bear to be parted from me.

DAPH. If that will make you stay, then flatter yourself.

DAM. One might almost suspect you of committing murder to get me up here.

DAPH. Flattering yourself is one thing; absurd vanity another.

DAM. Why do you want me up here?

DAPH. Why ... uh ... it's a wonderful opportunity.

DAM. No doubt ... but for whom?

DAPH. For you, of course. It's a titillating mystery.

DAM. Make a great book.

DAPH *(all innocent)*. Why, whatever do you mean?

DAM. I mean the way your bloodthirsty public of semi-illiterates is clamouring after your first tawdry melodrama, your greedy publishers must be pressuring for another.

DAPH *(guilty)*. Now, Dam ...

DAM. Aha! You're as obvious as your plots.

DAPH. Dammy!

DAM. I can see the dollar signs in your mercenary little eyes.

DAPH. They're not dollar signs. They're daggers!

DAM. Come on, fess up! That's it, isn't it?

DAPH. Well ... yes!

DAM. Goodbye!

*(He heads for the door: DAPH grabs him.)*

DAPH. But what about Crenshaw?

DAM. I'm sure your lurid prose will catapult him to heights of literary immortality without my help.

DAPH. But someone's got to solve the murder?

DAM. Yes, wouldn't be much of a detective novel, if ol' Dartmouth Cain got stumped and didn't figure out whodunnit. But that's what the police get paid for. I'm sure they'll muddle through without me.

DAPH. Well, I'm sure Moose Lodge will muddle ... but as for that "through" part ...

DAM. Moose Lodge? What's that?

DAPH. He's the local constabulary in these parts.

DAM. Moose Lodge ... Sounds like a summer camp for wayward youth.

DAPH. He probably has a brother named Knights of Pythias.

DAM. Moose Lodge, eh?

DAPH. Yes, and, if things are left to him, he'll gum up the works but good. He hasn't got a clue, so he's been running around all night, screaming, "If I had my way, you'd all be in the pokey tonight!" Tommy's getting it the worst.

DAM. Tommy?

DAPH. Tommy Delbert. He's the darling boy who invited me up here.

DAM (*a hint of jealousy*). Oh ... don't think I know him ...

DAPH. I do have a few friends of my own, you know.

DAM. Must be your oodles of money; it always works in lieu of charm.

DAPH. Tommy, the dear lad, finds me very charming.

DAM. Do tell.

DAPH. Yes ... He's a very sweet boy.

DAM. Sweet boy, dear boy, darling boy. You make him sound so ... lavender.

DAPH. Ha! Don't you wish! If he was, I'm sure Max wouldn't be so protective. He doesn't like him at all. It's like he's looking out for Daddy's interests.

DAM. Like Cereberus guarding the gate to hell. Tell Max Daddy isn't interested anymore.

DAPH. He'll be heartbroken. He yearns for the good old days when Daddy locked him out of the bedroom.

DAM. Divorce is always hardest on the children.

DAPH. He'll probably develop some deep-seated, Freudian pécadillo. He's already begun piddling on the living-room rug.

DAM. My 3,000 dollar oriental rug?

DAPH. My oriental rug.

DAM. Forgive me. I forget. Part of your spoils. Well, mustn't dredge up the hazy halcyon past.

DAPH. Hardly hazy to me. I remember everything vividly—

DAM. Long memory—

DAPH. Clear back to the honeymoon.

DAM. Very long memory.

DAPH. Doesn't conjure up any fond recollections for you?

DAM (*pauses, thinks*). Ned Morelli ... (*To DAPH's inquiring glance.*) The hotel bartender. The man was a veritable artist with a swizzle-stick.

DAPH. You incurable romantic, you. Wanna know what I remember most about our honeymoon?

DAM. Only if it's flattering.

DAPH. It's got Ned Morelli beat.

DAM. Really? Must be something. What do you remember most?

DAPH. The ceiling of the Fountainbleau Bridal Suite ...

*(DAM smiles warmly.)*

DAPH *(cont'd)*. Especially those little Rococo cupids ...  
Remember?

DAM *(shakes his head no)*. I only had eyes for you.

*(Something nice and cozy is stirring, but the moment's denied as TEX enters, reading DAPH's book aloud to himself.)*

TEX. "His eyes followed every undulating sway of her hips ... "

*(He does his little boot kick again. DAM regards it, cocking a questioning eyebrow at DAPH, who shrugs.)*

TEX. "As if mesmerized by a Cobra." Whoaa, lady, can you write!

*(DAM straightens up, all business.)*

DAM. Just why does Moose suspect this Delbert?

TEX. I found him in the room, leaning over the corpse right after the murder ... sorta smiling ...

DAPH. Purely circumstantial evidence! We heard the shots, we all came rushing in. Tommy was the closest and got here first, that's all.

DAM. Explains everything, except the smile ... You found Delbert here, Tex?

TEX. Yup. I was out on the grounds, coming back from the bunkhouse.

DAM. What were you doing out there?

TEX. Getting my tail whupped in a poker game.

DAM. This your office?

TEX. Yup.

DAM. What was Crenshaw doing in it at that late hour?

TEX. Oh, he used it every night from about 10 to 11:30 or so for business.

DAM. Very accommodating of you to let your guests use your private office.

TEX. Yeah ... well ... It's got the only telephone. Crenshaw always made a lot of calls. Something about some theatres he owned.

DAPH. The Starrett chain in the Midwest.

DAM. Oh, yes. Why was Crenshaw up here anyway?

TEX. Oh ... ah ... well..

DAPH. He and his partner Lomax hold the mortgage on this place. They were thinking of foreclosing.

TEX. Now don't go getting the wrong idea! I didn't kill nobody!

DAM. Relax, Tex. You don't have to plead your case to me. I'm not even interested.

DAPH. Not much you're not.

DAM. Just why are you here?

DAPH. I told you. Tommy invited me.

DAM. Why is he here?

DAPH. He's Horace's nephew.

DAM. Oh, so this is all Crenshaw's private party?

TEX. Yup. Him and the rest of his crowd are the only ones here. He was eye-balling the place, licking his lips ... like a buzzard with a napkin around his neck.

DAM. Do buzzards have lips? Who is the rest of the crowd.

DAPH. Just his partner, Martin Lomax, and Lomax's wife, Vera.

DAM. Just five people?

TEX. Well, it's only March. Usually all you get up here in the off-season are a few would-be divorcees trying to establish Nevada residency, and maybe a stray dog.



DAPH. If only I had known you were here in my time of need.

TEX. For the first time in three years, folks do know I'm here.

Come summer, I'm booked solid with a whole mess of slickers who wanna play cowboy. I'm finally gonna make a profit and get back some of the dough I've sunk into this hole in the wall, but I missed a couple of payments and those two skunks, Crenshaw and Lomax, threatened to foreclose. I asked for an extension, but they saw my bookings and smelled a killing.

DAM (*glances at corpse outline*). Well, they were right about that.

TEX (*uneasily*). I meant a financial killing.

DAM. Maybe this is a financial killing. (*To DAPH.*) Wouldn't you just "kill" for another best-seller?

DAPH. I'll consult my publisher.

(*DAM crosses to the window.*)

DAM. The gun and the knife both belong to you, Tex?

TEX. Now, come on, if I'm gonna murder somebody, I sure as hell ain't gonna use my own tools.

DAM. They are yours then?

TEX. Well, sure ... but like I said, Mr. Cain ...

DAM. Cole ... please, Tex ... Cole ...

TEX. Sorry ... but anyway ...

DAM. Easy, Tex, easy. Remember I'm not on this case. (*He crosses to the chalk outline.*) Stabbed and shot both, huh?

DAPH. Hard to resist, huh?

DAM. Merely intriguing, hardly irresistible.

DAPH. Come on, Dam, take the case.

DAM. Am I given to understand you are offering me employment?

DAPH. Huh?

DAM. You summoned me up here.

DAPH. Under Crenshaw's name!

DAM. And he's in no position to pay me. You didn't expect me to work for nothing, did you?

DAPH. Then you're going to do it? (*Hugs him.*) Oh, Dammy darling, you're wonderful.

DAM (*escaping her embrace*). I'm merely considering. There is still the matter of my fee.

DAPH. All right. In return for your services, I'll waive one month's alimony.

DAM. Crenshaw would have paid me at least two month's alimony.

DAPH. All right, two month's alimony.

DAM. But I want three ...

DAPH. What? But you just said ...

DAM. My fee's gone up since you made me famous.

DAPH. All right! Three!

DAM (*tabulating*). Then there's the plane I hired, the emotional duress of seeing you again ...

DAPH. All right! All right! I'll pick up the tab for everything except your bar bills.

DAM (*smiles*). Your publishers must really want that new book.

DAPH. They paid me a sizable advance and I just spent it hiring you. But every writer needs his inspiration. Poe had his drugs, Byron his club foot. I have you.

DAM. Well, let's get our agreement all down on paper, shall we?

DAPH. Paper?

DAM. I want a binding contract, my dear.

DAPH. Dammy, you know I wouldn't go back on my word. Honor bright.

DAM. This is strictly business.

DAPH. Business before pleasure?

DAM. Business before business. Is there some paper around here?

*(DAPH pulls a piece of shocking green stationary from her pocket and unfolds it.)*

DAPH. Here.

DAM *(aghast at the color)*. My! How ... bilious!

DAPH. My stationary ... I always carry some for notes.

DAM. Doesn't it clash with your purple prose? *(Pulls a pen from his breast-pocket and writes.)* Tex, I'll need you to witness this.

TEX. If you say so, Mr. Cain ...

DAM. Cole, Tex, Cole, as in Porter ...

DAPH. Or Old King ... *(Reciting.)*

Old King Cole was a snooping old soul,  
And a snooping old soul was he.  
He'd dig for those clues, dig like a mole,  
All for a cut-throat fee!

DAM. And I thought your prose was the abyss of literary achievement.

DAPH. Just hurry it up, will you?

DAM *(continuing to write)*. Patience, lady. I want this to be well-constructed. Not all of us are hack writers.

DAPH. *The New York Times* said I had a taut, driving style.

DAM. It drove me from the house ... The ravenous, clacking teeth of your savage typewriter tearing at the bloody carcass of my reputation as I went ...

DAPH *(admiring this turn of phrase)*. Mind if I use that sometime?

DAM. Why are you bothering to ask my permission now?

*(As he writes, DAPH leans over his shoulder, watching. DAM looks up at her, nose-to-nose.)*

DAPH *(backing away)*. Your handwriting is illegible. You should have been a doctor.

DAM. “Darmouth Cain, Private Doc.” It’d never sell. *(Finishes writing.)* There we are ... Sign where it says contractor. *(Gives her the pen.)*

DAPH. Is this legal?

DAM. Of course. I’m a lawyer.

DAPH *(trying to decipher his handwriting)*. There’s one heretofore and two whereas in the first sentence ... It must be legal ... OK ... *(She signs.)* There.

DAM *(hands pen to TEX)*. Now, Tex, if you’ll John Hancock this ...

TEX *(signing)*. There you go ...

DAM. Thank you. *(Reads silently and then aloud.)* “And, furthermore, in exchange for the investigative services of the contractee, the contractor agrees not to record, recount or fictionalize in any published form whatever the events surrounding the murder of Horace Crenshaw that took place at the Sierra Pines Dude Ranch ...”

DAPH. What?!

DAM. Third paragraph down. You should always read the fine print, darling.

DAPH. You shyster! Give me that!

DAM *(folding the paper)*. Oh no! I shall keep it in a safe place ... *(Sticks it in his inner coat pocket.)* close to my heart.

DAPH. You have no heart.