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Dramatic Publishing

REHEARSAL FOR MURDER

A Full-Length Play

Adapted by **D.D. BROOKE**
from the teleplay by
RICHARD LEVINSON
& **WILLIAM LINK**



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

Rehearsal for Murder

Murder mystery. Adapted for the stage by D.D. Brooke. From the television play by Richard Levinson and William Link.

Cast: 7 to 9m., 6w. This is a thrilling “theatrical” mystery in which your theatre becomes the set for the play. The playwright turns on the stage work light and prepares for the first reading of his new play. The actors, producer, director and others connected with the show come onto the stage, and under their humorous (and utterly real) theatrical talk, tension grows. We discover that everyone connected with this play was involved with another play by the same playwright. At its opening night, exactly a year ago and in this same theatre, the beautiful leading lady, who was also the playwright's fiancée, was murdered! As these people start with the new play, startling connections to the murder begin to unfold. The growing tension reaches the boiling point with surprising revelations, countered by others even more surprising. The dazzling, yet basically logical twists build to a climax and solution that are theatrically stunning! The authors of this thriller have all had direct Broadway experience, and their dialogue has a special sting of wit and reality. For the best mystery in years, post a notice on your theatre callboard, “Rehearsal for Murder.” *One simple set.*

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A Full-Length Play

Adapted By
D.D. BROOKE

From The Teleplay
By
LEVINSON & LINK



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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D.D. BROOKE

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RICHARD LEVINSON AND WILLIAM LINK

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(REHEARSAL FOR MURDER)

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REHEARSAL FOR MURDER

A Full-Length Play

for Seven to Nine Men, Six Women

CHARACTERS

ALEX DENNISON	a playwright
ERNIE	the stage doorman
SALLY BEAN	Alex's secretary
MONICA WELLES	a star
LORETTA	the stage manager
LLOYD ANDREWS	the director
BELLA LAMB	the producer
KAREN DANIELS	an actress
DAVID MATHEWS	an actor
LEO GIBBS	an actor
MALE POLICE OFFICER	
FEMALE POLICE OFFICER	
MAN IN THE AUDITORIUM	
MR. SANTORO	
SECOND MAN IN THE AUDITORIUM	

Time: The present.

PLACE: The stage of a Broadway theatre.

Note: The parts of Ernie, the Second Man, the Male Police Officer, and Santoro may easily be doubled.

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING about *Rehearsal for Murder*...

"This was a very entertaining thriller that left the audiences guessing until the very last minute! We loved it."

Linda Klepac, Village of Libertyville, Libertyville, Ill.

"Very interesting mystery with minimum set design. Our audiences really enjoyed it, especially being kept in the dark as to who the culprit was. Good ending!"

*Elva Hansen,
Pocket Theatre Inc., Hot Springs, Ark.*

"A fun and fun-to-watch mystery that is very easy to stage and costume. You need a strong male lead who is able to learn a lot of lines. Our cast did a wonderful job and kept the audience's attention. NO ONE knew until the end who done it!"

Laurie Kirk, Shelby High School, Shelby, Ohio

"The cast loved performing this show. Our high school had never done a murder mystery before and there was a lot of interest. It was great having such an easy set as we had to put it up in the afternoon and then perform that evening."

*Kathy Jo Bohlke,
Union Grove High School, McDonough, Ga.*

"Suspenseful. Clear writing. Accessible and appropriate for high school theatre."

*School Play Director,
Oakwood High School, Dayton, Ohio*

"Fabulous! Captivated the audience. The student audience was really looking forward to finding out who did it!"

*Meegan Gliner,
Academy of the Pacific Rim, Hyde Park, Mass.*

ACT ONE

SCENE: When the audience enters the theatre, the curtain is up. The stage is bare except for a work light RC, which is lit, and an old stool DL. When it is time for the play to begin, the houselights and the work light dim out together. After a few seconds of darkness, the work light blares on again, full force. ALEX DENNISON enters from the back of the auditorium. He is an attractive man, intelligent, forceful, charming, witty and sophisticated. Beautifully dressed in a sports jacket, slacks, shirt and tie, he carries a smart attaché case. He walks briskly down the aisle and up a few steps to the stage. He places his attache case on the stool DL and looks speculatively out into the theatre. Satisfied that he is alone, he looks at his watch, opens his attache case, removes a pistol and opens it, checking that it is loaded. He puts the pistol in his jacket pocket and looks at the work light.

ALEX (muttering). Lights . . . (He looks off R and L. He sees the light board and exits L. We hear the sound of switches being pulled on. The houselights come on.)

(ALEX looks on from L.)

ALEX. That's not it. (He disappears again. The stage lights come on, the houselights go off and the work light goes off.)

(ALEX returns.)

ALEX (self-satisfied). Pretty good. And I don't even have a union card.

ERNIE (offstage R). Who's there? Who's out there?

(ERNIE, in work clothes, enters R and squints into the glare.)

ERNIE. That you, Mr. Dennison?

ALEX. Hello, Ernie. How have you been?

ERNIE. Fine, sir. Just fine. Any trouble getting in?

ALEX. No problem.

ERNIE. Gotta be careful when the theatre's closed. Some of those junkies and winos from Broadway . . . they try to bed down in the lobby overnight.

ALEX. Encourage them, Ernie. The theatre was meant for the common man.

ERNIE. It's nice to see you, Mr. Dennison. Been a while. Nobody seemed to know where you were.

ALEX. I've been in Maine. To a little house in the woods. Took a little time to think things out. (He changes the subject.)

Do you think you could find me a table and some chairs?

ERNIE. Sure. What are you having? A rehearsal?

ALEX. Only a reading. I started writing a new play.

ERNIE. That's where it all begins, right? With the words?

ALEX. Yes. With the words.

(SALLY BEAN, a very young, bright but naive girl, enters from the rear of the auditorium. She seems very innocent among the sophisticated theatre people who will come. At the moment, she is rather nervous. She carries a large manilla envelope.)

SALLY (calling). Mr. Dennison! Mr. Dennison?

ALEX. Yes, Sally.

SALLY (running down the aisle). Oh, thank heaven it's the right place. It was all so dark and spooky out there. I thought a real, legitimate theatre would be all lit up.

ALEX. Not when it's closed, dear.

SALLY. Oh, yes. Well. I suppose that's right.

ALEX. This is my new secretary, Ernie. Sally Bean, all the way from Maine.

SALLY (climbing onto the stage). I've never been in New York before. I mean, doesn't it make you nervous?

ERNIE. No.

ALEX. You got the scripts?

SALLY. Yes. I went to the duplicating place and I told them to put it on your bill and then I walked left to Broadway, then right for seven blocks, then right again and I'm here.

ALEX. No trouble?

SALLY. Well, a funny-looking man in a big hat and high-heel shoes asked me to have breakfast with him but I just said it's after one o'clock and I've eaten lunch and then I walked very fast.

ALEX. Terrific, Sally. You have proved you can handle the big city. Now, will you take the scripts out of that envelope and put them on my attaché case . . . (He points to the stool DL.) . . . over there?

SALLY. Yes, sir. (She takes the scripts and places them on the attaché case.)

ALEX. The chairs, Ernie.

ERNIE. Oh, yeah. (He starts off L, then turns back.) Mr. Dennison, I . . . I never got to talk to you at the funeral . . . but I wanted you to know how sorry I was.

ALEX. That's very kind of you.

ERNIE. Seems like such a long time ago. But it's only a year, isn't it?

ALEX. Yes. A year. Exactly. One year. (A pause.)

ERNIE (not knowing what else to say). I'll get the chairs. (He goes off L. ALEX stands looking out at the theatre, then he speaks to SALLY.)

ALEX. You know, you're right. There is something spooky about an empty theatre.

SALLY (nodding after ERNIE). What he said . . . he meant about Miss Welles, didn't he?

ALEX (surprised). You knew about Monica?

SALLY. She was a big movie star, Mr. Dennison. The last few years we've had movies *and* newspapers in Maine.

ALEX. I didn't mean that the way it sounded. I meant, you knew about Monica and me?

SALLY (nodding affirmatively as she moves DL). Was this the theatre?

ALEX. Yes. (As ALEX speaks the stage lights dim and he is picked up in a follow spot.) This theatre. A year ago tonight. It was all brightly lit . . . the marquee lights twinkling . . . you could feel the electricity of a Broadway opening night in the air.

LORETTA (offstage, over the intercom). Ladies and gentlemen, the call is half hour to curtain . . . half hour.

ALEX (walking slowly DR, the spot following). Half hour to curtain. The theatre isn't open yet but the first few audience members are waiting in the lobby . . . the people that sit in the balcony . . . they get in early to watch the celebrities come in. Backstage is a mass of flowers . . . telegrams . . . little gifts the cast exchanges with clammy hands. I got out of my cab in the fifties. I was too nervous to sit still. I walked the rest of the way. I went down the little alley and into the stage door. (He exits DR.)

(The spot holds. ERNIE appears in it from DR.)

ERNIE. Good luck, Mr. Dennison. Hope it's another one like *Laughter in the Dark*. (He exits. SALLY exits with the stool and attaché case.)

(ALEX reappears in the spot. He has exchanged his sports jacket for a dark jacket that matches his pants. A rolled-up newspaper sticks out of his jacket pocket. He stands DR.)

ALEX. I came through the wings to the stage heading for Monica's dressing room to wish her good luck. I was surprised to see her standing on the stage. (The spot goes out as the stage lights come up. The curtain now covers roughly two-thirds of the stage.)

(MONICA WELLES stands LC looking out front. A beautiful woman in a smart dressing gown, her makeup is on but she still has a few curlers in her hair. ALEX moves to her.)

ALEX. Monica! Why aren't you in your dressing room?

MONICA (nervously). I'm almost ready. I just couldn't stand it in there alone anymore.

ALEX (amused, but sympathetic). My poor darling.

MONICA. I just thought if I could come out here and get the feel of the theatre . . . before there was anyone in it . . . that maybe I could cope with it later when it was full.

ALEX. It's just opening night jitters.

MONICA (with amused sarcasm). Oh, is that what it is? I thought maybe it was just garden-variety sea sickness . . . like the people on the Titanic had when the band played *Nearer My God to Thee*. (ALEX laughs.) Alex! What if I don't remember the lines? I know I won't remember the lines. I'll go blank the second I walk onstage.

ALEX (amused). You'll be marvelous.

MONICA. They'll laugh at me.

ALEX. They're supposed to. It's a comedy.

MONICA. Who invented opening nights? This is barbaric. (She extends her hand.) Look at that! I'm actually trembling. I never get this way when I'm doing a film.

ALEX. I've told you. Movies are for children. The theatre's a different animal.

MONICA. As long as it doesn't bite. Oh, Alex, I want to be good. I want to make you proud of me.

ALEX (embracing MONICA). You will. (He prepares to kiss MONICA.)

MONICA. Don't! I love you, but it took me half an hour to get my lips on right. (She hugs ALEX. Her hand touches the newspaper and she pulls it out of the pocket.) Oh, you saw this.

ALEX (nodding). I'm sure everyone did. Nobody dares miss Meg Jones' column.

MONICA. At least we don't have to keep secrets anymore. (She reads from the paper.) "Cat out of the bag department. Actress Monica Welles and playwright Alex Dennison have a major announcement to make tonight."

ALEX. She makes it sound like we're taking back the Panama Canal.

MONICA. "The couple's hush-hush romance during rehearsals for the new Broadway comedy *Chamber Music* finales in a quiet wedding tomorrow whether the play is a hit or a flop tonight. Congratulations, fellas, and sorry to spoil the surprise."

ALEX. Has a certain way with words, doesn't she?

MONICA. I'd like to wring her neck. How did she know?

ALEX. We took out a license and we got ourselves a judge. Somebody has a big mouth.

MONICA. And Meg Jones has two big ears. If I ever run into

her . . .

ALEX. You'll be perfectly charming. Gossips gossip. That's their job.

(LORETTA, an efficient-looking woman, comes on DR carrying some telegrams.)

LORETTA. There's some more wires, Miss Welles. (She hands the telegrams to MONICA.)

MONICA. Thanks, Loretta. (She hands LORETTA the newspaper.) Here. Put this in the kitty box, will you?

LORETTA. Shouldn't you be combing out? It's fifteen minutes to curtain. (She exits L.)

MONICA (aghast). Oh, Lord! I'm still in my curlers. When I was a little girl, I was going to be a nurse. Where did I go wrong?

ALEX. I think I'll leave before you break out in hives. (He starts to exit L.)

MONICA. Alex? (ALEX stops and turns around.) I'm scared to death.

ALEX (moving back to MONICA and taking her hand). If it helps, I love you.

MONICA. That helps. Oh, the hell with my lipstick! (She kisses ALEX.) That's it. No more butterflies. I'm going to be wonderful.

ALEX. I never doubted it.

MONICA (taking a step L, then turning back). Alex . . . foolish question . . .

ALEX. Mmm?

MONICA. You have a lot of . . . power. I mean, people in the theatre will do pretty much what you say. Isn't that right?

ALEX. So I keep telling them. But if you're asking me to bribe the critics . . .

MONICA. Nothing like that. But I suppose you could keep

someone from working if you wanted to.

ALEX. Probably. If I was vindictive instead of the tender-hearted creature you've come to adore. What's this all about? Someone put pepper in your face powder?

MONICA. Just wondering.

ALEX. Monica, you're serious. Why?

MONICA (touching her hair and feeling the curlers). Oh, Lord. The curlers! Did I tell my dresser to iron the second act costume? Alex, I've got to go. (She runs DL, pauses, then turns.) I love you . . . and . . . what do you say in the legitimate theatre? Break a leg! (She runs off. ALEX looks after her, puzzled.)

(LLOYD ANDREWS enters DR. A good-looking young man with a brisk, capable manner, he is dressed in a dark suit, with shirt and tie, and carries a clipboard.)

LLOYD. Ten minutes to blast off. I've given my last note. How's Monica?

ALEX. Traditional response. She's terrified.

LLOYD. I just talked to our leading man. David's making room on his shelf for a Tony.

ALEX. Good. Let him keep thinking he's the star.

LLOYD. Well, I hope they all do justice to the words.

ALEX. Lloyd, it's a nice little commercial comedy. Nothing cosmic. If we're a hit, fine. If not, we'll survive.

LLOYD. Either way, I'm grateful for the shot at directing it.

ALEX. Don't get maudlin on me. You did a good job.

LORETTA (offstage, over the intercom). Ladies and gentlemen, two minutes. The call is two minutes. Places, please.

LLOYD. Well, that's it. (He starts off R, then turns back.) Where are you going to watch? Back of the house or from the wings?

ALEX. Watch? You've got to be kidding. That's cruel and unusual punishment. (LLOYD exits R. The stage lights black out as ALEX is caught in a spotlight.) You see, Sally, I can't sit still and watch my own opening nights. It's too nerve-racking. Those months . . . sometimes years of work . . . and if the critic has a stomach ache . . . or a fight with his wife before the show . . . if he doesn't find it funny, or dramatic, or whatever . . . all that work is gone. So I wander. Backstage. Outside. Front of the house. Gentlemen's lounge. That night, I waited backstage till the house was dark, then I sneaked up the stairs and, when the curtain went up, I peeked through the curtain of the front box. The set looked nice. The actors knew the first ten lines of dialogue. I went down to the lobby . . . talked to the doorman . . . then, when I couldn't stand it anymore, I went inside. Bella Lamb, the producer, was standing in the back.

(BELLA comes into Alex's spotlight, looking straight ahead at the show. Elegant and expensively dressed in furs, jewels and a long gown, she is a stew of nerves.)

BELLA. Women should never be producers.

ALEX. Is it your nerves?

BELLA. My feet. Men producers can stand in the back and they don't have to wear high heels. (BELLA exits.)

ALEX. I went out again . . . down the street to a little coffee shop called Nora's. The coffee's rotten but you can always get a table. I talked to Nora. I had coffee. It tasted like Swiss cheese. I came back. I sat in the men's lounge where I could hear the dialogue, whatever laughs there were. Suddenly, I saw Lloyd.

(LLOYD comes into Alex's spotlight, looking green.)

ALEX. How's it going? (LLOYD signals his inability to speak. About to be sick, he rushes off.) Lloyd was in no condition to tell me. I went back outside. I was in front of the stage door when the first act broke and Loretta, the stage manager, came out for some air.

(LORETTA comes into Alex's spotlight.)

LORETTA. Alex! How can you be out here when everyone else is in there watching your baby being delivered?

ALEX. I'm trying to forget. How did the first act go? Don't tell me.

LORETTA. Went very well. A lot of laughs.

ALEX. I didn't hear that. (LORETTA exits.) I walked around the block. When I got back, most of the audience had gone back in for the second act but Bella was still in the lobby.

(BELLA comes into Alex's spotlight.)

BELLA. Come and watch, Alex. I'm gambling six hundred thousand dollars on this show and the least you could do is watch the opening.

ALEX. I gambled two years' work, Bella. I'm taking the night off.

BELLA. Speaking of gambling, what's this I read about you and Monica in Meg Jones' column. Is it true?

ALEX. Would Meg Jones lie?

BELLA. Amazing. I've been at every rehearsal but I never knew you two were even . . . even . . .

ALEX. Keeping company? We were discreet. Didn't want to upset any apple carts. We were going to announce it at the party tonight.

BELLA. Then that's why Monica wanted to give the party at her

apartment?

ALEX. Right. You'll be there?

BELLA. Of course. (A buzzer sounds.) Oh! Oh! It's act two. (She raises her eyes to heaven.) Oh, God, let them laugh at that business with the champagne bucket. (She rushes off.)

ALEX. I walked around the block again. And again. Eight times. Maybe twelve. I don't know. Even the panhandlers stopped asking me for money. The last time, when I got back, the critics were just rushing out to make their deadlines. I tried, as usual, to read their expressions. Pleased? Annoyed? They all looked like they had nothing on their minds but getting a cab. Inside the theatre, the cast were taking their bows.

(A special light comes up DL where KAREN DANIELS, a pretty young girl wearing a coat and carrying a purse, is bowing. We hear applause.)

ALEX. Karen Daniels . . . she had a small part in the second act and understudied Monica . . .

(LEO GIBBS, a chunky, balding, character comedian wearing a raincoat, joins KAREN in the light.)

ALEX. Leo Gibbs, the comic, and then . . . our leading man . . .

(DAVID MATHEWS, tall, handsome and a little smug, joins KAREN and LEO. Dressed in a host jacket, he bows grandly.)

ALEX. The ever-popular David Mathews . . .

(BELLA comes into Alex's spotlight and applauds madly.)

BELLA. Nice of you to drop by.

(MONICA joins the OTHERS in the bow light. The applause becomes louder. ALEX applauds.)

BELLA (to ALEX). Now you applaud! Where were you when we needed laughs in the scene with Karen? (She exits. ALL but MONICA leave the bow light. MONICA bows again. The applause becomes louder.)

ALEX. The audience loved Monica. I could tell that. Whether or not they liked the play, I didn't know. But they loved her. And she was radiant. (The bow light goes out. The applause stops. MONICA exits.) Monica didn't even change. She left the theatre immediately. She was giving the party and she wanted to get out before those hordes of phony well-wishers stormed backstage. In five minutes, backstage was a zoo, a jungle. The publicity man had a national magazine he insisted I talk to, so by the time I got to Monica's the party was in full swing. (The sounds of a tinkling piano and party conversation come up and play behind the following.) It looked like the zoo had been moved from the theatre to Monica's living room. I didn't see Monica. The actors were by the food. Naturally.

(KAREN, in a pretty party dress and carrying a plate of food, comes into Alex's spotlight. She appears rather innocent and very excited.)

KAREN. Isn't this wonderful? I keep bumping into famous people.

ALEX. They're rented for the evening. And they'll all disappear if the reviews are negative.

KAREN. Oh, but we're going to be a hit. The audience loved it.

ALEX. You're new to the theatre, Karen. First lesson is never