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*Dramatic Publishing*

# MURDER PLOT

A Comedy-Mystery  
by  
WILLIAM LINK



**Dramatic Publishing**  
Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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MURDER PLOT was produced by Jon Berry and the Woodland Hills Theater at the West Valley Playhouse in Canoga Park, California, on November 2, 2001 with the following:

CAST  
(in order of appearance)

David Forrester . . . . . STEVE RUGGLES  
Felix Bromley . . . . . ROBERT VAN DUSEN  
Sylvia Forrester . . . . . MARCY AUSTIN  
Kristyn Walker . . . . . VALERIE HAGER  
Abe Abromowitz . . . . . CRAIG MITCHELL

PRODUCTION STAFF

The play was directed by Jon Berry

Set Design . . . . . VICTORIA PROFITT  
Costume Design . . . . . DON NELSON  
Props . . . . . ANN BRIDGE  
Stage Manager . . . . . HOLLY MARTIN  
Lighting Design . . . . . DANNY TRUXAW

# MURDER PLOT

A Play in Two Acts  
For 3 Men and 2 Women

## CHARACTERS

DAVID FORRESTER . . . . . a best-selling mystery writer

SYLVIA FORRESTER . . . . . David's wife

FELIX BROMLEY . . . . . a publisher

KRISTYN WALKER . . . . . a ghostwriter

ABE ABROMOWITZ . . . . . a private eye

TIME and PLACE: The Forrester condo in New York City.  
The present.

# ACT ONE

## SCENE 1

SCENE: *The living room and study of David Forrester's condominium in the East Sixties. The living room occupies most of the stage on the left, the study opening on the right, connected by a door. It is decorated with a stark black and white color scheme. There is a corkscrew staircase that leads to the upper, unseen floor. The study is spare and minimal. A desk with electric typewriter is watched over by a pre-Columbian dog. There is a cliff of books with a library ladder, a TV and an ego wall featuring posters of the films that mangled Forrester's books. There is a handy liquor wagon.*

*Before curtain rises, we HEAR a typewriter clatter into action, a cacophony of surging keys that suddenly begins to lose momentum, trailing off...click...click...until it comes to a dead stop. Silence...*

AT RISE: *DAVID FORRESTER sits at the typewriter in the study, his head resting despondently against the machine. FORRESTER is an attractive, amiably arrogant man. He wears a dressing gown, pajamas. He raises his head and bellows an anguished CRY of despair.*

SYLVIA'S VOICE (*from upstairs*). David? Was that the TV? (*No response from DAVID, he pushes back wearily from the desk, gets up, goes to the liquor wagon. Fixes himself a drink, stirs it with a meditative finger. The door buzzer SOUNDS. From upstairs:*) Would you get that? I'm dressing.

(*DAVID starts from the room. Stops. Returns and punches the typewriter keyboard, which SNARLS in pain. Feeling better, he pads into the living room, carrying his drink, and opens the front door. FELIX BROMLEY abruptly enters. He is a fastidious man wearing an elegant topcoat over a Savile Row suit. He scrutinizes DAVID.*)

DAVID. Well, Felix. You just decided to drop by, unannounced?

FELIX. I never "drop by," David. I occur—much like inclement weather.

DAVID. And you decided to rain on my parade?

FELIX. *What* parade? I listened at the keyhole. No marching band, no crowds. Not even the sound of a typewriter.

DAVID. God, all you publishers are the same. Your favorite typewriter key is the dollar sign.

FELIX. Be honest, dear friend, have I nagged you? Have I demanded that four-million-dollar advance back? No. But what do I find if I go on a little reconnaissance trip—

DAVID. Reconnaissance *snoop*—

FELIX. *Trip!* What do I find? An unshaven insomniac with a glass of firewater in his fist at—what?— (*Looks at watch.*) Noon!

DAVID. Join me?



FELIX. Hell no! David, what's happening to you?

DAVID. I'm hibernating. I've decided to barricade myself behind locked doors and exist on canned beans and Johnnie Walker Black. (*FELIX, shucking his coat, is peering about.*)

FELIX. Black and white. Has some ACLU lawyer been integrating your living room?

DAVID. Sylvia's on a redecorating kick. Currently it's the summer place in East Hampton.

FELIX. Beware when a wife begins changing furniture and psychiatrists.

DAVID. She doesn't have a psychiatrist.

FELIX. Do you? I'm beginning to think you need one.

DAVID. Writers avoid shrinks, Felix. There's a theory that if you tamper with the psyche you tamper with the talent.

FELIX. I have a theory about your theory—it stinks. Look, David, I'm a bottom-line guy. It's been well over a year now. The New York Times best-seller list looks impoverished without you. We've been getting letters from your fans—

DAVID. So have I. Bushels. And some very literate death threats too!

FELIX. You've had them on a diet of one a year. They could look forward to it, like their birthday.

DAVID. You're making me sound like your friendly neighborhood pusher. If they're a bunch of literary crack addicts let them switch over to Grisham or Higgins, if they haven't already.

FELIX. There you go again—biting the hand that needs you.

DAVID. Sure I can't tempt you with a single-malt on the rocks?

FELIX. We-ell...maybe just a tiny one. (*He follows DAVID into the study. During which:*) Level with me, please. Chronic case of writer's block?

DAVID (*pouring drinks*). What did Scott Fitzgerald say—"it's about using up your emotional capital, getting overdrawn."

FELIX. All you writers are always quoting that professional crybaby. For Chris's sake, David, I'm just trying to get to the bottom of this.

DAVID. I'm sorry, Felix, I know you're worried about me. Okay, I'm blocked. Major constipation. But I don't want to stretch and strain to produce a new book with the marks of the forceps all over its poor little head. Have you any idea how painful this is for me?

FELIX. I do. You know, I've always wanted to write myself. But as a publisher I felt like the eunuch in the brothel—I see the trick performed every day, but I can't quite get the hang of it myself!

DAVID. Speaking of screwing—did your divorce come through?

FELIX. Yes, thank God! But what's that have to do with anything?

DAVID. Did you ever have a wife who just sat around all day, like your typewriter, staring at you disapprovingly?

*(SYLVIA FORRESTER begins to descend the staircase. She's svelte, exquisitely coiffed.)*

FELIX. No. Mine were either in a feeding frenzy or a shopping frenzy. One combined both. You've never lived till you've seen a bulimic spouse at Cartier's.

*(SYLVIA enters study. She carries her coat, handbag and a Polaroid camera.)*

SYLVIA. Hello, Felix.

FELIX. Good morning, Sylvia. Or is it afternoon? David's been comparing his typewriter to a wife.

SYLVIA. Yes, David's a bit confused these days. When he decides to sleep with it we'll have him committed.

FELIX. I think you've done a smashing job with the living room.

DAVID. Nothing a little arson wouldn't cure.

SYLVIA. Oh, I see we're speaking today.

FELIX. He doesn't speak?

SYLVIA. Sometimes not for a week. It's very refreshing—having a mate who's mute.

FELIX. Does he at least write you notes?

SYLVIA. I wish he would, but he's got writer's block. Some mornings he wakes up, talks a blue streak all day. Quotes things from F. Scott Fitzgerald.

FELIX *(grim)*. Yes. I've noticed. *(Looks sadly at DAVID who turns away to freshen his drink.)*

SYLVIA. Well, I'm off to the summer house. Doing a little remodeling. Have to take a few pictures for the decorator. I'd have the housekeeper fix you some lunch, but David fired her yesterday.

FELIX. That nice German woman who read Jackie Collins?

SYLVIA. Quoted her too. I think that's what got to David. *(Pecks DAVID on cheek.)* I'll be back late, darling. Why don't you catch a movie. Maybe you'll see something you can steal. *(She waves at FELIX and goes out.)*

FELIX. You're not the only one with problems. You know that conglomerate that was going to swallow my publishing house? The deal evaporated.

DAVID. You'll survive, old buddy. (*Phone RINGS. He takes it.*) Hello? Yes, he's right here. (*Hands phone to FELIX.*)

FELIX (*to phone*). Yes? Where are you? Good, come right up. Two-B. (*Hangs up, faces an angry DAVID.*)

DAVID. Who the hell gave you permission to invite somebody up here? The only people I want to see are a liquor delivery boy or a suicide prevention shrink!

FELIX. Chill out, David—isn't that the expression the kids use? What are we, in quarantine or something?

DAVID. *Who was on the phone?*

FELIX. Do you want my help or don't you?

DAVID. I didn't ask for your damn help!

FELIX. *Yes or no?*

DAVID. Screw off! Yes.

FELIX. Thank God you're finally coming to your senses. Now finish your drink and comb your hair.

DAVID. Comb my hair! Who's coming—Diane Sawyer?

FELIX. The only media you'll see is when you're touring with your new book. Now make yourself presentable.

DAVID. It's a shrink, right? He's going to wallow through my childhood.

FELIX. It is *not* a shrink. And who said it's a he?

*(The door buzzer SOUNDS. FELIX heads out of the study, through the living room, DAVID following. FELIX opens the door and a lovely, sexy YOUNG WOMAN enters.)*

DAVID. You were right, Felix. This is definitely not a he.

FELIX. Allow me to introduce Ms. Kristyn Walker...David Forrester. (*KRISTYN gives DAVID her hand.*)

KRISTYN. This is indeed a pleasure, Mr. Forrester. Not only have I read all of your books, I've read them a second time.

DAVID. You must lead a very narrow and uneventful life, Ms. Walker.

FELIX. I should have warned you, Kristyn. Mr. Forrester is immune to any compliment—especially in his current condition. (*FELIX is quick to help her off with her coat. She wears a simple cashmere sweater and skirt which do little to hide her figure.*) Kristyn is a writer herself.

DAVID. A writer? To my knowledge there are no beautiful women writers with the possible exception of Anais Nin and one of the Brontë sisters. Although I can never remember which one. I hope you won't label me a sexist pig, Ms. Walker, but why is a woman with your superior looks locking herself away in a stuffy little room with a PC?

KRISTYN. Actually, I do my work in a rather large and airy studio apartment with an ordinary old Smith-Corona. Sorry to disappoint you.

DAVID. I'm only disappointed in myself these days. Can I offer you a drink?

KRISTYN. Thank you, but I don't drink.

DAVID. Then what species of writer, are you, may I ask?

KRISTYN. I write mysteries.

DAVID. Really. With all due respect, I don't remember your name on anything.

KRISTYN. Have you read Dale Pomeroy?

DAVID. Never heard of him.

KRISTYN. Mary Louise McIntyre?

DAVID. Haven't had the pleasure.

KRISTYN. What about Gordon Lightfellow?

DAVID. I'm lost in your crowd. (*Snaps fingers.*) Wait a minute! (*Pouncing on FELIX.*) You calculating, conniving bastard. She's a ghostwriter! (*FELIX nods, sheepishly. DAVID swings back on KRISTYN.*) You fooled me. That very intoxicating perfume of yours conceals the whiff of decay.

KRISTYN. I'm very real. Touch me.

DAVID. That might come later. (*To FELIX.*) So I've finally smoked you out, you prick. She writes a book, I affix my household name, and *voilà*—we knock Tom Clancy from his perch. You make millions and David Forrester, the old whore, gets his hymen restored— (*To KRISTYN.*) How do I know you can fake my celebrated style?

KRISTYN. I've been practicing.

DAVID. Amazing. May I read one of your books?

KRISTYN. Certainly. Gail, Mary or Gordon? Or one under my own name?

DAVID. Take your best shot.

FELIX. Does that mean you're ready to go along with our—project?

DAVID. Not so fast, Cagliostro. (*Whirls on KRISTYN.*) Who's Cagliostro?

KRISTYN. Nineteenth-century Italian magician.

DAVID. Impressive. Beautiful *and* literate.

KRISTYN. I saw the movie with Orson Welles.

DAVID. Ghosts should stay out of multiplexes! (*To FELIX.*) What do phantoms charge these days?

FELIX. A hundred thousand dollars. The publisher picks up the tab.

DAVID. You are suddenly a very lovable, very generous fellow, Felix. And you have excellent taste in ghosts, if not wives. Why don't you fix me another drink while this young lady and I get acquainted.

FELIX. The same?

DAVID. A double same. (*FELIX goes into the study.*) So where do you hail from, Ms. Walker-Pomeroy-McIntyre-Lightfellow?

KRISTYN. California.

DAVID. I'm afraid that's a demerit. Were you hatched in one of those Hermosa Beach places?

KRISTYN. San Francisco, actually.

DAVID. And are you into all those jogging, Rolfing, surfing, Feng Shui, goat-cheese salad things?

KRISTYN. We moved away when I was young. My father was in the army.

DAVID. Ah. Army brat. Was your father a super-macho, abusive sergeant who beat your mother and you took refuge in Nancy Drew and later Erica Jong?

*(FELIX returns with the drink, hands it to DAVID.)*

FELIX. What is this, the third degree?

DAVID (*ignores him, to KRISTYN*). So the old drill sergeant was a brute.

KRISTYN. Not at all. He was a very sweet, supportive father. He was the one who introduced me to your books.

DAVID. God bless the military. I guess they have lots of time to read between wars. (*Beat.*) I don't notice a ring on your spectral third finger.

KRISTYN. That doesn't necessarily mean I'm not married.

You're married and you're not wearing one.

DAVID. Mine's in the shop. My wife's having it redeco-  
rated. (*FELIX snorts.*)

KRISTYN (*softly*). Sylvia...

DAVID. Yes. Sylvia. What do you know about her?

KRISTYN. She owned a bookstore in Rochester. You met  
her on a book tour.

DAVID. I've mentioned that in dozens of interviews.

KRISTYN. And she has a tiny mole on the inside of her  
ankle that resembles a little noose.

DAVID. She does! The perfect brand mark for a mystery  
writer's spouse. That's very astute of you to know that  
bit of trivia. But I seem to remember I revealed it on  
Larry King. (*Beat.*) You still haven't answered my ques-  
tion.

KRISTYN. I haven't?

DAVID. Are you—or have you ever been—married?

KRISTYN. No.

DAVID. Too busy haunting houses? Spinning out tales of  
terror? (*He ponders for a beat, recalling something  
amusing. Recites:*)

There was a young man from the coast  
Who had an affair with a ghost  
In the midst of a spasm  
The poor ectoplasm  
Said "Jesus, I felt it.  
Almost!"

(*KRISTYN and FELIX laugh—just as the phone RINGS.  
It is near KRISTYN and DAVID gestures her to take it.*)

KRISTYN (*to phone*). Hello? Yes, it is. No, you can cancel  
that. That's correct. Thank you. (*Hangs up.*)



**PROP CUES**

**PRESETS:** Living room curtains closed

Upstairs: Carafe with water, 4 glasses, linen napkin,  
silver coffee pot

Bookcase: *Great Gatsby* and Kristyn's book

Desk: Typewriter with paper on both sides, dog,  
cup of pencils, paper-clip holder,  
phone, wastebasket on left, drink

Chair: David's robe

Liquor cart: 2 carafes (one brandy and one Johnnie Walker  
Black—use tea) Carafe with JWB is almost  
empty. In addition: Pellagrino, ice bucket with  
ice and tongs, pitcher of water, 2 brandy glasses,  
8 drink glasses (one with water) and towel

Liquor cabinet: Bottle of JWB (tea) on the right and car  
blanket on left

Coffee table: Magazines

Phone table: Phone, Sylvia's briefcase

END OF SCENE 1: **SET:** Christmas tree in front of window,  
Kristyn's jacket on desk chair, Sylvia's briefcase on phone  
table. **STRIKE:** Drink glasses and robe

END OF SCENE 2: **SET:** Brandy glass with smidge of brandy  
on coffee table, canvas bag, (dress, shoes, knife) ornaments,  
briefcase wrapped (paper and small tape recorder inside) en-  
velope with ribbon

INTERMISSION: Clean up floor from dog breaking. **SET:** Bro-  
ken pieces of dog, manuscript under couch, coffee cups be-  
hind couch, preset luggage backstage by front door. **STRIKE:**  
Broken dog, wrapping paper from briefcase, both briefcases,  
ribbon from envelope

END OF SCENE 1: Help Sylvia with costume change

**PERSONAL PROPS**

ABROMOWITZ: Mugshot, papers, pen, crutches, novel, wallet with \$23 and a small slip of paper with phone numbers on it.

DAVID: Money (\$10, \$5 and 5 \$1 bills)

KRISTYN: Purse, briefcase (paper/small tape recorder with typing tape), envelope with powdered sugar. Check tape recorder for typing tape and batteries.

SYLVIA: Purse, camera, keys

**COSTUME PLOT**ACT I SCENE 1

DAVID:

Pajama top

Baggy old wool sweater

Dress pants (same throughout)

Socks, old slippers

FELIX:

Gray pinstripe Armani suit

Blue shirt, red tie

SYLVIA:

Navy blue calf-length pleated skirt and navy blue blazer

Navy blue heels

Black purse

Black coat

Gold necklace, diamond rings

KRISTYN:

Cranberry short-sleeved sweater with sweetheart neck

Long fake fur winter coat

Black a-line knee-length straight skirt with slit on each side

Beige high heels

ACT I SCENE 2

DAVID (fast change):

Same pants  
Upscale casual shirt  
Expensive loafers

SYLVIA:

Black and beige checkered shirt, suit (knee-length)  
Black heels  
Black brimmed hat  
Black purse  
Black coat  
Gold/black necklace

KRISTYN:

Black, low-cut, v-neck sweater with medium sleeves  
Fitted black skirt with medium slit in front

ABROMOWITZ:

Black Mets cap  
Olive drab army coat with usable pockets  
Worn, washed-out blue jeans  
Black T-shirt  
Old worn white sneakers  
2 forearm-support metal walking crutches

ACT I SCENE 3

DAVID:

The same as Scene 2

KRISTYN:

Red, above-the-knee, thin silk lounging gown  
Red lace bra and panties (matching)  
Cream sheath dress, mid-calf  
Zip-up boots with heels

ACT II SCENE 1

DAVID:

The same

SYLVIA:

Black pantsuit

Black heels

Gold necklace

Black coat

Black purse

FELIX:

Dark blue double-breasted suit

KRISTYN:

Same dress as last scene

ACT II SCENE 2

DAVID:

The same

FELIX:

The same

GRETCHEN the maid (Sylvia quick change):

Black pants

Black short-sleeved top

White full apron

Black shoes

Glasses

Hair clip

KRISTYN:

Same cream dress—add full-length pinstriped blue coat

ABE the chauffeur (Abromowitz change):

Chauffeur's cap

Long black overcoat

Black shoes

Black slacks

