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*Dramatic Publishing*



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ZARA  
or  
WHO KILLED THE QUEEN  
of the  
SILENT SCREEN?

A Full Length Play by  
ANGELA RANDAZZO

THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY  
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ZARA

or

Who Killed the Queen of the Silent Screen?

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(ZARA, or Who Killed the Queen of the Silent Screen?)

To my husband Wayne  
with love

ZARA  
or  
WHO KILLED THE QUEEN OF THE SILENT SCREEN?

A Play in Two Acts  
For four women and four or five men

CHARACTERS

ZARA ST. CYR.....silent screen star  
MARTIN JAMES.....a writer  
SUSAN JAMES.....Martin's wife  
BARON DASHIELL DRAGONETTE.....a financier  
MAX DRAGONETTE.....the Baron's nephew  
VILMA VIOLETTA.....Zara St. Cyr's aunt  
VERLA VIOLETTA.....Vilma's sister  
CARLO BONTIFIORRI.....a chauffeur

and

OLGA OUSPENSKAYA.....an old gypsy  
COUNT VLADIMIR COPINSKI.....actor in silent movie

PLACE:       The California beach house of Martin  
              and Susan James. (Formerly belonged  
              to Zara St. Cyr.)  
TIME:        The present and the past: 1925. All  
              the action takes place in one day.

# ACT ONE

## Scene One

It is late afternoon. SUSAN is discovered on stage dusting with a feather duster the DL wardrobe. She wears a scarf tied behind her neck and an apron. As MARTIN enters, she moves to the UC fireplace. MARTIN enters down the stairs. He wears comfortable clothes. His hair is disheveled. He is agitated and excited. Under one arm he carries a large manila folder filled with typewritten papers. In the opposite hand he holds some of the pages.

MARTIN (coming down the stairs). Susan, Susan, I'm going mad.

SUSAN (putting small ladder in front of fireplace). What is it, dear?

MARTIN. I'm going mad, stark raving mad. (He looks up at ZARA'S portrait hanging above fireplace.) It's her. It's that witch, that vixen, that vamp.

SUSAN (mimicking him, they say together):

MARTIN. That irresistible femme fatale.

SUSAN. What a pity she's dead.

MARTIN. That's it. That's exactly it. Who killed her?

SUSAN (climbing down ladder). I'm sure I don't know.

MARTIN (exasperated). Neither do I. That's the point. All these months of research. Digging into the nooks and crannies of her life. Ferreting out her innermost secrets. I practically had to dig up anyone who knew

her. All this work, pages and pages of notes and still I haven't figured out.. (He notices SUSAN dusting portrait with feather duster.)  
What are you doing there?

SUSAN. Dusting, dear.

MARTIN. Well, you don't want to hurt it.

SUSAN. Hurt it? Honey, this portrait survived a mud slide. I don't think a few goose feathers will hurt it.

MARTIN. But still...

SUSAN. All right, all right, I won't touch her. (She climbs down ladder. MARTIN climbs up to straighten portrait. He puts the manuscript on the fireplace mantel.)

SUSAN. Martin, I know we moved here so you could feel close to your work. So you could, what was it? "feel the vibrations" of the house where the great Zara St. Cyr lived.

MARTIN. And died. (He climbs off ladder.)

SUSAN. And died. But don't you think this obsession with her has gone a bit too far?

MARTIN. Too far? I don't know what you mean. She was one of the greatest silent screen stars that ever lived. No, not one of, the greatest silent screen star that ever lived. I'm just a pawn in the great mystery of her life, a mere writer, a humble historian, a poor beggar at the shrine of her immortal image.

SUSAN. I rest my case.

MARTIN. But I can't rest mine. Not until I find out who killed her. I have all the pieces to the puzzle. I merely have to put them together in the right order and voila! I'll know the killer!

SUSAN. Simple.

MARTIN. Simple.

SUSAN. You're going to solve a sixty year old murder mystery?

MARTIN. I will. I feel it in my bones.

SUSAN. Right. But Martin, I don't see how. Even the police...

MARTIN. That's just it. The police aren't writers. They deal with the facts, "just the facts ma'am." They don't get to the nitty gritty, to the twists and turns of the personalities involved, the desires, the passions, the torments of the principal players.

SUSAN. Two days ago you were going nuts trying to figure out who was on the team.

MARTIN. But now I know. At least I think I do.

SUSAN. You do?

MARTIN. Yes, I figured it out at lunch.

SUSAN. Oh, is that why you choked on your egg salad and ran up to your study?

MARTIN. Precisely.

SUSAN. Amazing, Holmes. Pray continue.

MARTIN. On the night of the murder - Oh, my goodness, it's today! Why this is the 26th of April, isn't it? Oh, yes, yes, yes, that's why the vibrations are so good.

SUSAN. Oh, do go on. Don't leave me in suspense.

MARTIN. Very well. On that dark and rainy night, because you know it was raining, in fact it had been raining for days. It was one of the worst storms in California.

SUSAN. I thought it never rained in California.

MARTIN. I'll have to leak that out. (Smiles at his wit.) Anyway, flash floods threatened. Zara had invited her entourage



to this beach house for the weekend. That would include Samantha Strauss, her private secretary; Zara's two aunts, Vilma and Verla Violetta; her chauffeur, Carlo Bontifiorri, and Gilbert Van Cleef.

SUSAN. The director.

MARTIN. Yes. But here comes the good part. During that same period, Baron Dashiell Dragonette and his nephew Max disappeared without a trace. It was never proven, but what if they were in the entourage, too! I know, I know, it's wild speculation and at the time it was believed they met with foul play in Paris, but rumors were flying that Zara was having an affair with the Baron and that she was about to leave Universal Pictures and start a film company of her own financed by the Baron. What if... What if he was there, too!

SUSAN. What if?

MARTIN. Well, that puts a whole new light on the thing.

SUSAN. It does?

MARTIN. Certainly.

SUSAN. Enlighten me.

MARTIN. Well...I've only gotten this far in the speculation. Give me time.

SUSAN. You've got all the time in the world as far as I'm concerned. But how are you going to prove it? Zara's body was the only one found.

MARTIN. All right, all right. So the bodies got washed away. I don't need any bodies.

SUSAN. Now now, don't get grumpy. So where does that leave us? We have (She counts.) one, two, three, four, five, six people who might have murdered Zara.

MARTIN. Seven. Don't forget Max.

SUSAN. Heaven forbid. So what does that prove?

MARTIN. That, my dear, narrows down the suspects. And out of those seven I will choose the killer.

SUSAN. How?

MARTIN (thunderstruck). Olga Ouspenskaya!

SUSAN. Who?

MARTIN. Madame Olga Ouspenskaya. That's it.

SUSAN. Was she there, too?

MARTIN. No, don't be silly.

SUSAN. Excuse me, I lost my head.

MARTIN. You know, it's strange but so psychic. Here I am after months and months of research, racking my brain, going insane...

SUSAN. I'll say.

MARTIN. Trying to figure this whole thing out...

SUSAN. Martin, what are you talking about?

MARTIN. Madame Ouspenskaya. There I am racking my brain and who, out of the blue, do you think I get a call from?

SUSAN. Superman.

MARTIN. No, no. Madame Ouspenskaya. She called me this morning and said she read a press release saying I was writing a book on Zara's life.

SUSAN. And death.

MARTIN. And she has valuable information for me. I think she knows who killed Zara. It all makes sense now.

SUSAN. It does?

MARTIN. Yes! I've been on a long trail of clues that's led me up to the point where I know who the suspects are and then, bingo! Up pops Madame Ouspenskaya. Oh, it was right to move here, Susan, even if it did take

every penny we had. This house is full of vibrations and old memories...

SUSAN. Martin...Martin...

MARTIN. Strange forces and...What?

SUSAN. How would this woman know anything? Who is she?

MARTIN. I don't know. That's why I invited her over tonight.

SUSAN. What? We're supposed to go to the theater with the Decembres tonight.

MARTIN. Oh, who wants to see a musty murder mystery on stage when we have one in our own living room.

SUSAN. And we might have another one tonight.

MARTIN. Oh, but darling, don't you see? This old dame calls me on the exact day Zara died. It's too good a coincidence to pass up.

SUSAN. Writers. (Puts ladder in wardrobe DL.)

MARTIN. Believe me, honey, as soon as this mystery is solved, as soon as Zara's biography is completed, we'll run off to some romantic island.

SUSAN. And leave Zara behind.

MARTIN (looking at portrait). Well...I'll admit that would be pretty hard to do.

SUSAN. I never thought I'd be jealous of a ghost.

MARTIN. Oh no, she's more than a ghost. She's a living force. A thriving, sensuous force. The perfect woman. Helen of Troy, Venus de Milo. She's the woman that every man seeks.

SUSAN. Martin, she was an actress. How do you know what she was really like?

MARTIN. I know.

SUSAN. Martin.

MARTIN. Oh, don't worry honey, I love you best.

SUSAN. Thanks. (They kiss. Doorbell rings.)

MARTIN (looking at his watch). Oh, could that be her? (SUSAN throws her scarf and apron in wardrobe, then goes to answer door.

MARTIN follows her to door.)

SUSAN. Good-bye theater tickets, hello--(She opens door.) Oh...oh my. Madame Olga...

(MADAME OLGA rushes inside. She moves excitedly around the room touching everything.)

OLGA. Oh...oh... (MARTIN and SUSAN look at each other. They aren't sure what is going on.)

SUSAN (whispering to MARTIN ). Martin, she's a gypsy.

MARTIN. Looks that way.

OLGA. Oh...oh, this room, this room is a shrine to the great Zara St. Cyr.

MARTIN. Oh, you're an admirer, too.

OLGA. Yes...yes.

SUSAN. Aren't we all.

OLGA. Oh, that portrait. The eyes...

MARTIN. Yes, they follow you wherever you go.

OLGA. But it survived the...the...

MARTIN. Mud slide.

OLGA. I thought the whole house was destroyed.

MARTIN. Yes, yes it was, or nearly was. The foundation was all that was left and a wall or two.

OLGA. It has risen like the phoenix.

MARTIN. A speculator bought it in the thirties and rebuilt it to the exact blueprints. Then he abandoned it. It laid vacant for the next thirty years. There were rumors that it was haunted. I guess that's why we got it so cheap.

OLGA. You do not believe in spirits?

MARTIN (uncertainly). Well...er...no. Ah...we  
...ah...restored the furniture from photo-  
graphs. Some of the items are taken from  
Zara's mansion in Beverly Hills. I tracked  
them down through an antique dealer I know.  
Boy, you should have seen Zara's mansion. It  
puts this place to shame. Twenty-eight rooms,  
twelve baths, marble staircases, gilt...

OLGA. You are writing a book?

MARTIN. Yes, one on her life, like the article  
said. It's a fascinating subject.

OLGA. Yes. But have there not been other  
books on her life?

MARTIN. Oh sure, there's a bunch of them  
kicking around, mostly pictorials. But where  
my book will differ, where my book will be  
called the definitive one is that I will be  
the only writer to solve the mystery of her  
death. I will prove, without a doubt, who  
killed Zara St. Cyr. (OLGA stares at the  
portrait.) You said you had some  
information?

SUSAN. May I get you a drink? Some wine or  
tea perhaps?

OLGA. No, thank you. (Looking at portrait.)  
She was a great star. The public lined the  
streets for hours just to get a glimpse of  
her as she glided by. They would throw roses  
and orchids at her feet.

MARTIN. How sad she was cut down so early in  
life.

OLGA. Only twenty-four.

MARTIN. You seem to know a lot about her.

OLGA. I know nothing, but she knows. Zara  
knows all the answers.

MARTIN. Then you don't know who killed her?

OLGA. She knows.

MARTIN (looking at SUSAN as if to say Olga's nuts). Ah...right.

OLGA. We shall ask her.

MARTIN. Ask her?

OLGA. You should believe in spirits, Mr. James.

MARTIN. I should? Oh, I should. I do...I...

OLGA. Sometimes a person can be haunted by a spirit without ever seeing it, rather you feel its presence all around you. It penetrates your mind, your thoughts, your very being, drawing you closer and closer toward it. It is a pull stronger than gravity. It is a call from the beyond. I was drawn here tonight by a force greater than the universe. Sit. (MARTIN and SUSAN immediately sit on sofa.) No, no...(OLGA gestures toward table with three chairs.) Mrs. James. (Indicates chair.) Mr. James. (Indicates chair. SUSAN and MARTIN sit cautiously. OLGA sits in center chair, SUSAN to her left, MARTIN to her right.) It had been raining that weekend. We will join hands. (SUSAN and MARTIN hesitate.) Come, Mr. James, you want to know who killed Zara, don't you?

MARTIN. Yes, yes I do, but...

OLGA. We must ask Zara to join us. She will reach out of the past and reveal the answers. It was raining that night. It had been raining for days. The road was washed out and they were trapped in this house. They were ill at ease - the weather, the isolation. Breathe deeply...Relax, let the energy flow. (Calls.) Zara, Zara St. Cyr we call you... Zara. (The lights flicker.)

SUSAN. Martin?

MARTIN. Shhhh.

OLGA. Concentrate. Let the power of the universe fill this room. We must ask Zara's spirit to join us.

SUSAN. Spirit? Martin?

OLGA. You are a doctor, are you not?

SUSAN. Yes, I am. We deal with the facts, not ghosts.

OLGA. Why are you fighting me? Why are you fighting Zara?

SUSAN. I'm not fighting.

OLGA. Don't you want the truth to be revealed?

SUSAN. Yes, of course. I just don't believe...

OLGA. Oh, I think you do. Where is the point where life begins and life ends? When is a person actually dead? When is he alive? Life and death, it is a swinging door like the past and the present. When the door opens who knows who will step into the future, who will step into the past.

(In a gust of wind the front door swings open. MARTIN and SUSAN jump.)

MARTIN. Oh, it's just the wind, (With equal force, another wind gust closes the door.) I think.

OLGA. Concentrate, concentrate in the past. Reach into the past. (Calls.) Zara... Zara... Step into the future and hear us. Come to us, Zara. (There is a moaning sound of a woman.)

SUSAN. Martin.

MARTIN. Shhhh.

(The lights flicker and dim. A colored light fills the room in ghostly aura. At the top of the stairs, the GHOST of Zara St. Cyr appears. She is luminous in shimmering white robes.)

OLGA. It is her. It is Zara. (OLGA is transfixed, unable to move. MARTIN nudges her, but she is stunned.)

MARTIN. Madame Ouspenskaya...Mad...(Zara's GHOST comes down the stairs.)

MARTIN. Ooh, Madame Ouspenskaya, say something. You called her back.

SUSAN (frightened). Martin.

MARTIN. Ah...Miss St. Cyr...Zara, if I may. (The GHOST moans.) All right, Miss St. Cyr...ah, we called you back. We wanted to ask you... Can you tell us?...

GHOST (echoing voice). Murder...murder...

MARTIN. Yes! Miss St. Cyr, who killed you? Can you tell us who killed you?

GHOST. Murder...murder.

MARTIN. Who killed you? Can you tell me? I have to know. I have to know. Answer me. Answer me. Who killed you, Miss St. Cyr. Who killed you?!

GHOST (pointing directly at occupants of table). YOU... (MARTIN and SUSAN are startled.)

BLACKOUT