

Murder by Accident

(A killer farce in two acts)

By
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STORY OF THE PLAY

Elaine has had enough. Ralph, her exasperating, risk-taking husband, has got to go. With the help of Pookie, her younger sister; Anthony "Prettyboy" Ferrari, her father; and Rudy Gambruzzo, her father's personal assistant, she sets out to stage an accident that will rid her of marital stress.

In the space of one morning, she accidentally kills the pool guy and the mailman before finally clobbering Ralph. Then she learns that Ralph must be alive that afternoon to sign a vital contract or she will be not only happily widowed, but unhappily bankrupt.

Pookie and Elaine lash Ralph's inert form into a wheelchair and frantically hide him until he is made to appear to sign the contract. Her dreams of widowhood are dashed when it is discovered that Ralph was merely passed out and her third murder victim was actually the meter reader. Full evening, one interior set.

This farce is ideal for theatres looking to expand their talent base. The weight of the play is carried by two women—one young, one middle-aged—and all other roles are small parts with several entrances but few lines. Perfect for giving beginning actors a taste of theatre without an overwhelming burden of memorization. And fun, too. .

The play was originally written for the International Mystery Writers Festival in Owensboro, KY.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

10 men ages 18-55, 6 women ages 20-55.

Ralph Winstona wealthy industrialist
Elaine Winston.....his wife
Anthony “Prettyboy” FerrariElaine’s father
Antonia “Pookie” FerrariElaine’s sister
Francis Rosen.....Ralph’s personal assistant
Chuckthe pool guy
Biff Frijole.....Elaine’s personal trainer
Martin Martin.....the mailman
Rudy Gambruzzo.....Mr. Ferrari’s personal
assistant
Brian Cadwell.....a wealthy industrialist
Cynthia Forbesthe notary next door
Louise.....the housekeeper
Gunnar.....the gardener
Lt. Sam Sargenta homicide detective
Monicaa crime scene officer
Joanne.....a crime scene officer

Doubling possible: Chuck and Martin can double as Rudy
and Gunnar.

Scene: The living room of the upper-class Winston home.

Time: The present.

SETTING

SR and up two steps is a foyer level containing the front door. One can exit US on the foyer level to the library and other areas of the house. US of the foyer, on the main level, is a staircase that curves up and out of sight to the R, over the foyer. USC is a glass wall of sliding patio doors with a view of the patio area. The doors are flanked by pull-drapes held back with tasseled satin rope loops. One of the doors stands open. SL is a double door leading to dining room, kitchen, and other areas of the house. The room is filled with designer furnishings, including a liquor cabinet, a decorative writing desk, a full-sized couch and a coffee table. Tall plants in large pots accent the decor, including several on the floor in the curve defined by the staircase. A topiary tree stands against the wall on a step partway up the staircase.

Act I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: We see the living room of a high-end house. The room remains empty for a beat or two, then ELAINE enters from the L door, leaving it open. We can see that she is not a spring chicken, but is very well-preserved and still attractive. She wears an elegant silk dressing gown. Without breaking stride or looking at anything in particular, she crosses to the patio door.)

ELAINE: That is disgusting! Have you no sense of shame?
(SHE looks out at the patio.) It's another beautiful day.
Most people are out doing healthful things.

(SHE exits up the staircase. The room remains empty for a beat or two, then LOUISE steps just inside the L door. She wears a plain dark dress and white apron, which immediately identify her as the housekeeper. She stands stiffly and speaks to the room in general.)

LOUISE: Mrs. Winston says breakfast can be cleared if no one else comes to the table in the next ten minutes. *(Beat. Looks at her watch.)* The time is 8:43. Ten minutes from now is 8:53. *(Beat. She grumbles to herself.)* I was hired to cook. Not to wait.

(SHE turns and exits back through L door, leaving it open. The room remains empty for a beat or two, then POOKIE enters through the L door, munching a piece of toast. She is young, lovely and wearing a heavily embroidered kimono for a dressing gown. Two chopsticks with dangling flowers protrude from her hair. She crosses toward the stairs, not looking at anything in particular.)

POOKIE: Louise says seven minutes and counting.

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(SHE exits up the stairs. The room remains empty for a beat or two, then ELAINE comes down the stairs, fully dressed for the day. She walks to upstage of the couch and prods something with her foot.)

ELAINE: Your yes man will be here in less than 15 minutes. You want him to see you looking like that?

(RALPH crawls up from behind the couch. We can see that he is rather more well-nourished than well-preserved. He wears an undershirt, suit pants and no shoes. Everything about him is rumpled. He has an empty lo-ball glass in his hand, which he lets slide down onto the couch cushions.)

RALPH: Sweetheart! How's my baby?

(HE sweeps HER into a bear hug, tries to give her a big smoochie on the cheek, staggers, and hangs on to her for stability.)

ELAINE: *(SHE tries to push him away.)* Stop that! I said your dancing flea---

RALPH: *(Hugging HER and snoodling his face into her neck.)* Mmmmmm. You smell good. You're some classy babe.

ELAINE: Do you want him to see you---

RALPH: *(Still nuzzling HER.)* He's called a personal assistant and I pay him to like me any way he finds me. I've got an idea. Let's go upstairs and make him wait.

ELAINE: *(Trying to get un-hugged.)* Ralph, we have to talk. You can't keep doing this every weekend; you'll make yourself sick. You need a hobby.

RALPH: Sugar, I work hard all week. My hobby is staying soused all weekend. It relaxes me.

(SFX: The doorbell chimes. LOUISE enters from L and crosses to the front door.)

End of Freeview

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