

PHANTOM OF THE SOAP OPERA

A Two-Act Comedy
By Craig Sodaro

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SYNOPSIS

When soap opera star Teddy Burnett is shot to death during the taping of "As the Heart Burns," ghost stories told about Studio 13 suddenly seem true. The fact that a Phantom takes credit for the murder frightens the cast even more — as does the Phantom's eventual appearance and threats that the entire show will grind to a halt as each member of the cast is picked off.

Detective Digby Wright, shabby and seemingly inept, does little to allay the fears of the troupers. When Regina Brooks, the heroine of the soap, is snatched away during a rehearsal right before Wright's eyes, all faith in police procedure disappears. A missing maid who has sent the police a cryptic message adds fuel to the fear. Regina's boyfriend, Harlan Gaspar, who stars on another soap, becomes the number one suspect, and is quickly arrested for her kidnapping and the murder of Teddy Burnett.

The Phantom, however, continues to make life miserable on the set. Obsessed with his love for the beautiful Regina, he keeps her locked up in the boiler room and late at night brings her to the set where they "dine" together in splendor.

Wright quickly catches on that Gaspar is not the killer when the body of the maid is found on the set. She was killed AFTER Gaspar was arrested. The Phantom is amused, but finds himself jeopardized when Wright sets a trap. By allowing Gaspar to escape, Wright is sure the actor will lead the police right to Regina because Gaspar knows how to sneak about the building so well. Gaspar indeed leads Wright to Regina and the Phantom, but the capture is foiled when a nosey reporter botches the plan.

Although Regina is saved from the Phantom's clutches, no one is safe on the set until the culprit can be found. So Wright engineers a scheme that he hopes will unmask the killer. The final segment of the soap opera is a masquerade ball featuring all the stars — to which the Phantom has been invited. A switch of costumes almost allows the Phantom to escape a second time, but in the end he is caught and unmasked...and, of course, the show must go on!

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(8M, 9W, 2 Extras)

REGINA BROOKS, about 22, a glamorous star of the daytime drama, “As the Heart Burns.” While well aware of her importance, she is a realist who has a good sense of humor and more than her share of courage.

TEDDY BURNETT, about 30, a villain on the soap opera, a professional actor who works hard at realism — too hard.

DAPHNE DAVIS, about 50, a haughty actress who has reached the pinnacle of her career and is ready to begin the slide downward even though she refuses to admit it.

BLYTHE EVANS, about 20, a silly actress chosen more for her looks than her abilities. Too bad she aspires to greatness!

QUENTIN HARRIS, about 25, a former football player who is now trying to carve a career on television. Unfortunately, he doesn’t have the necessary tools!

NOAH CAINE, about 60, a gentlemanly actor who is a father figure on the set of “As the Heart Burns.”

SAM, about 75, a gentleman who makes his living selling sandwiches in the studios and offices in the building. Although he moves slowly, he’s a sharp observer.

ADDISON MERIWETHER, about 40, a nervous, irritable director who strives for order in his life and never gets it. He never seems happy about anything, a true pessimist.

EMILY PARRISH, about 30, a long-suffering writer who has to concoct a different scenario every time she turns around.

LILY PONDS, about 20, a scatterbrained secretary and script girl who’s got a comment for everything.

THEODORA OSBORN, about 45, a precise, efficient producer who knows exactly what she wants and how to get the job done. She is one cool lady under pressure.

HARLAN GASPAR, about 25, a true Southern gentleman, who holds his own ideals highly. He is chivalrous to a fault, and quite resourceful.

THE PHANTOM, a mysterious, mask-covered figure who wears a long black robe, cape, and hat. His voice sends shivers through the rest of the cast!

MILLICENT CRUMP, about 30, a caustic costumer who would rather work in front of the camera than behind it.

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NELLIE STARR, about 20, a budding reporter for the *NATIONAL SNOOP* who stops at nothing to get a story.

DIGBY WRIGHT, about 40, a shabby, seemingly inept police officer whose rough exterior conceals a very cunning mind. He has little patience with this group of "artists."

EVE POTTER, about 30, his hard-boiled partner on the case who's got more heart than she lets on.

EXTRAS—camera people.

NOTE

During the segments of "As the Heart Burns," one of America's most popular soap operas, several of the above characters play a different role that may tend to contrast with their "real life" role in the play. Here are these characters and the roles they play:

REGINA BROOKS...plays *Desiree Carstairs*, the beautiful daughter of a wealthy family. She believes in love before money.

DAPHNE DAVIS...plays *Leona Carstairs*, her conceited mother who believes in money before everything else.

TEDDY BURNETT...plays *Byron Grimshaw*, a villainous cad who stoops low enough to steal from children in his pursuit of ill-gotten gains.

QUENTIN HARRIS...plays the heroic gardener, *Todd Dillon*, who believes in love, honesty, faithfulness, respect, cleanliness and everything positive.

NOAH CAINE...plays the kindly *Dr. Murdoch*, everybody's friend and convenient medical examiner.

BLYTHE EVANS...plays *Mimi*, the cheerful maid.

MILLICENT CRUMP...by the end of the show plays *Angela*, a Southern belle turned maid.

Scene 1

(AT RISE: Morning on the set of "As the Heart Burns." A prominent red light is brightly lit. Two EXTRAS operate the cameras, R and L, aimed on the set of the Carstairs mansion. THEODORA OSBORN stands at left by camera, clipboard in hand. ADDISON MERRIWETHER is nearby. BLYTHE EVANS, QUENTIN HARRIS, and NOAH CAINE are standing, ready to go on. Within the set we see REGINA BROOKS, SC, flanked by TEDDY BURNETT and DAPHNE DAVIS. THEY are playing their soap opera parts, Desiree, Leona, and Byron.)

REGINA: *(Dramatically)* I don't know what you're talking about, Mr. Grimshaw.

TEDDY: *(Viciously)* It's simple, my dear fiance...you're lying!

REGINA: Mother, are you going to let this...this...charlatan stand here and call me a liar?!

DAPHNE: *(Coolly)* Oh, dear, Desiree...what exactly IS a charlatan?

REGINA: *(Pressing)* This man has swindled three hundred thousand dollars from our family!

DAPHNE: *(Pleased)* He's ambitious, that's all.

TEDDY: I only want what's best for us, Desiree.

REGINA: You think I'll marry you, you fiend? I'd never wed anyone who took the money we were going to donate to the Children's Hospital and bought a race horse!

TEDDY: She's the fastest filly in town!

REGINA: *(Dramatically)* You can fiddle with your filly someplace else from now on! *(BLYTHE EVANS, playing the maid, Mimi, enters set.)* Mimi, *(Relieved)* you can show Mr. Grimshaw out.

BLYTHE: Yes, Miss Carstairs.

DAPHNE: But Desiree! The invitations have been sent, gifts have arrived, the wedding cake is in the oven!

REGINA: You'd have me throw myself before this beast to save face?

DAPHNE: Of course...you're a Carstairs!

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REGINA: *(Recoiling)* Never!

TEDDY: You know, Mrs. Carstairs, I have the feeling Desiree has an ulterior motive for refusing to marry me and unite our families in a financial dalliance.

DAPHNE: *(Shocked)* Is this true, Desiree?

REGINA: *(Turning from her mother)* I...I don't know what he's talking about.

(QUENTIN HARRIS, playing Todd Dillon, the gardener, enters the set. HE holds a flower in his hand.)

QUENTIN: *(Weakly)* Where should I plant this dalilah, Miss Carstairs.

REGINA: *(Sheepishly)* Oh, Mr. Dillon...I want to introduce you to my mother, Mrs. Carstairs...and *(With distaste)* Mr. Byron Grimshaw.

QUENTIN: I'm the new handyman, ma'am.

DAPHNE: I don't remember hiring a handyman.

TEDDY: *(Viciously)* YOU didn't, Mrs. Carstairs.

REGINA: Mr. Grimshaw's right, Mother. I hired Todd. I mean, Mr. Dillon. He's working his way through medical school. He's going to be a brain surgeon. *(To TEDDY)* Which is more than I can say for SOME people!

TEDDY: *(Circling QUENTIN)* So...you've come between Desiree and me?

QUENTIN: I don't know what you're talking about, Mr. Grimshaw.

TEDDY: Regina's going to marry ME, do you understand that?

REGINA: Never! All you want is my money!

QUENTIN: *(Shocked)* Is this true, Miss Carstairs?

DAPHNE: *(Coldly, to QUENTIN)* Take that plant and bug off, buddy! These are private family matters being discussed here!

REGINA: No, Todd...stay!

DAPHNE: *(Horried)* Desiree! You are NOT to defy my orders! As a member of this family, you'll do as I say...and that includes marrying this charlatan—I mean Mr. Grimshaw!

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