

OH, MURDER!

A comedy in one act  
by  
Bradley Hayward

**PREVIEW ONLY!**

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### SYNOPSIS

When a billionaire is found dead, a deeply unhinged detective with a waffle iron injury tries to solve the case. Naturally, the suspects include a gorgeous protégé who doesn't understand the concept of pants, a traumatized secretary who eats vital evidence to cope with stress, and a Diet Coke swilling spouse who openly prefers yodelling to her dead husband. It's sheer bedlam, where neither the "who" nor the "dunnit" matters in the slightest, and the corpse keeps dying again and again and again.

### SETTING

An opulent drawing room that's overflowing with ridiculous decor, including a taxidermied owl and a plush velvet chaise.

### RUNNING TIME

25-30 minutes

CHARACTERS

DETECTIVE  
CORPSE  
SPOUSE  
SECRETARY  
PROTÉGÉ

PRODUCTION NOTES

The characters can be any gender.

The characters can be played in drag.

The characters can be whatever you want them to be, really.

The whole play is silly, so lean into it.

Then lean in a little bit more.

More, still.

Even more.

Perfect.

(LIGHTS UP on an opulent drawing room that's overflowing with ridiculous decor, including a taxidermied owl and a plush velvet chaise. CORPSE is sprawled face down on the chaise, with a shiny letter opener protruding from his back. SECRETARY paces frantically, clutching a clipboard. PROTÉGÉ is draped over an armchair, combing her hair. SPOUSE stands over the dead body as she cracks open a can of Diet Coke.)

SPOUSE

He's been murdered.

SECRETARY

I know! I can see that! There's a giant silver letter opener sticking straight out of his spine, which is highly inconvenient because that's my favorite letter opener and now it's evidence!

PROTÉGÉ

Can we move him? The way his dead foot is pointed like a ballerina is giving me the creeps.

SPOUSE

No, we can't move him. We have to wait for the police. Though honestly, I'm thrilled. He snored like a jackhammer and his breath smelled like boiled cabbage. I was going to poison his oatmeal tomorrow anyway, so whoever did this really saved me the trouble.

SECRETARY

Don't say that out loud! The detective is right outside!

(The door bursts open. DETECTIVE enters, wearing a trench coat. He holds a massive magnifying glass up to his eye.)

DETECTIVE

Aha! Don't move a muscle. Nobody leaves this room. Except me, if I get hungry, because I forgot to eat breakfast and I'm incredibly cranky without my McMuffin.

SPOUSE

We aren't moving. We've been standing here for twenty minutes waiting for you to make an entrance.

DETECTIVE

Silence, suspect! I can smell the stench of foul play in the air.

(He sniffs, walks right past CORPSE, and points dramatically at the taxidermied owl on the mantle.)

My God, they turned him into a bird. The savagery!

SECRETARY

That's a stuffed owl. The victim is on the chaise.

DETECTIVE

(Completely unfazed)

I knew that. I was testing your observational skills. You passed. Barely.

(He approaches CORPSE and peers through the magnifying glass at his shoe.)

Aha. Just as I suspected. The victim is wearing shoes. A classic sign of death.

SPOUSE

Yes, well, he was wearing them when he was alive, too. He was actually quite fond of shoes. It was his only personality trait, other than being fabulously wealthy and refusing to give me any money for my yodelling lessons.

DETECTIVE

(Whirls around dramatically)

A motive! You wanted his wealth to fund your singing career. I can relate. I wanted a career in puppetry, but destiny is a cruel mistress. I could have been the world's greatest ventriloquist, until my dominant hand got stuck in a waffle iron. I can no longer pass by a dummy without tasting maple syrup. It's a curse!

SPOUSE

Your hand looks fine.

DETECTIVE

The scars are psychological. Now, back to the footwear. A juicy motive!

SPOUSE

Oh, absolutely. I hated him with the passion of a thousand burning suns. If I could have murdered him twice, I would have. But I

didn't do it, not even once. I was in the kitchen eating a block of cheddar cheese like an apple.

DETECTIVE

An airtight alibi. Nobody eats cheese like an apple unless they're deeply secure in their innocence.

(He turns to PROTÉGÉ.)

And what about you, beautiful stranger? Who are you, and why is your face so symmetrical?

(PROTÉGÉ extends a hand for DETECTIVE to kiss, but he mistakes it for a high five and slaps it.)

PROTÉGÉ

I'm the protégé. The deceased was funding my performance art. I don't know what "murder" means, but I'm incredibly sad because he promised to buy me a puppy tomorrow, and now I don't get a puppy. Unless you want to buy me a puppy.

DETECTIVE

I'm an officer of the law! I can't buy you a puppy. Unless the puppy is a state witness. Is the puppy a witness?

SECRETARY

(Screams, pulling her hair out)

There is no puppy! Can we please focus?! A man is dead! I had to cancel his 3:00pm haircut, and the barber has a strict 24 hour cancellation fee! Who's going to pay the twenty dollars, Detective? Who?!

(DETECTIVE slaps SECRETARY clear across the face.)

DETECTIVE

Calm your hysterics!

SECRETARY

(Immediately calm)

Thank you. I needed that. My mother used to pelt me with paper clips, so this was very nostalgic.

DETECTIVE

Now. Let us examine the body.

(He approaches the chaise. He grabs CORPSE'S limp hand, lifting it up. He lets go and the arm flops heavily, smacking DETECTIVE directly in the crotch.)

Ouch! Assault! The corpse assaulted me!

SPOUSE

He's dead, you imbecile.

DETECTIVE

That's what he wants us to think. It's a classic misdirection.

(He grabs the shiny letter opener sticking out of CORPSE'S back and yanks it out. A cartoonish "pop" sound happens. DETECTIVE examines the bloody blade.)

DETECTIVE

Look at this. Shiny. Elegant. Sharp. It's the perfect weapon for a killer who receives a lot of mail.

(He points the letter opener directly at SECRETARY.)

You, Secretary! You handle the correspondence. You have the upper body strength of a person who opens envelopes.

SECRETARY

I did want to kill him! I wrote it in my diary every single day! I even made a vision board with magazine cutouts of his face and X's over the eyes! But I didn't do it today because today is Friday, and on Fridays, I suffer from debilitating migraines. I was in the closet crying.

SPOUSE

I haven't had a migraine since puberty. I no longer feel a thing because my blood type is Aspartame.

(She guzzles her Diet Coke until the can is empty and squeals with glee.)

DETECTIVE

The Friday migraine. A judge would never convict you. Case dismissed for the secretary.

SPOUSE

Wait. If the secretary didn't do it, and I didn't do it, and the beautiful nitwit who doesn't even know what murder is didn't do it, then who killed him?

(Suddenly, CORPSE rolls completely off the chaise. He lands face first on the floor with a heavy thud. Everyone stares at the body.)

PROTÉGÉ

Ugh. Now he's blocking the path to the bar. This party is terrible.

DETECTIVE

Quick, block the door! The victim is attempting a daring escape!

SPOUSE

He didn't escape, he fell. Gravity is the only force in this house I respect.

(She steps over CORPSE to grab a new can of Diet Coke from the bar cart.)

But since we're narrowing down suspects, I think it's time we look closer at the beautiful nitwit. Where were you, Protégé?

PROTÉGÉ

(Innocently)

Me? Oh, I have an unshakable alibi. At the exact moment of the so-called murder, I was in the library reading a very thick book without pictures.

SECRETARY

You can't read. Yesterday you stared at a Campbell's soup can for two hours and cried because you thought it was your cat's ashes.

PROTÉGÉ

Exactly! So I wasn't reading. I was actually outside in the garden, riding a majestic white horse in the pouring rain. I remember the rain because it was completely dry and sunny out, and the horse was actually a bicycle with a basket.

(DETECTIVE produces a notepad from his coat pocket and takes notes with a green Crayola marker.)

DETECTIVE

Go on. A sunny rainstorm on a bicycle horse. This is textbook espionage.

PROTÉGÉ

Yes. And while I was riding my bicycle horse in the dry rain, I was simultaneously upstairs in my bedroom taking a long nap. I know I was asleep because I was wide awake the entire time, practising my scales on the tuba.

SECRETARY

That makes absolutely no sense! You just named four different locations, two different weather patterns, and an impossible state of consciousness!

PROTÉGÉ

(Completely unbothered)

Well, of course it doesn't make sense to you, Secretary. You have the mind of an accountant and the skin of a dirty napkin. But to an artist, time is a circle and I was everywhere at once. Except near the dead guy. I've never seen that dead guy before in my life.

SPOUSE

He was paying your rent. He bought you those silk pants you're wearing right now.

PROTÉGÉ

(Looks down at her pants in genuine shock)

Oh my god, I'm wearing pants? Since when?!

SECRETARY

Garments are so confusing. When I was seven, I thought lingerie was a fancy Italian word for lasagna. I told my first grade teacher that my mom made the best lingerie in the city and we had it every Sunday.

SPOUSE

Well, that certainly explains why your garlic bread is always served inside a push-up bra.

DETECTIVE

Eureka! The pieces are falling into place! Protégé, your story is so full of contradictions that it can only mean one thing...

PROTÉGÉ

(Hopeful)

That you're going to buy me a puppy?

DETECTIVE

No! It means you're a ghost. A horse riding phantom who doesn't know what pants are!

SECRETARY

She's not a ghost! She's just a pathological liar with a beautiful face!

DETECTIVE

(To PROTÉGÉ)

Tell me, spirit... from which century do you hail? And do they have those little butter tarts in the future? Because I'd kill for a butter tart right now.

SPOUSE

Speaking of killing...

(She nudges CORPSE with her foot. CORPSE groans, then sneezes. Terrified, DETECTIVE clutches onto PROTÉGÉ and leans all his weight on her body.)

DETECTIVE

Gah! The ghost has possessed the victim! He sneezes from beyond the grave!

PROTÉGÉ

Oh, Detective, you're so heavy. Like a sack of handsome potatoes.

DETECTIVE

Am I? I've been told my bone density is that of a much larger mammal.

PROTÉGÉ

It's a bewitching surplus of density.

(She twirls DETECTIVE'S hair seductively as she speaks.)

Forget the ghost. Forget the dead billionaire whose wallet I'm slipping out of his back pocket with my toes. Look at me. Do you like what you see?

DETECTIVE

I see a person obstructing justice. But I don't care because your hair smells like peaches.

PROTÉGÉ

(Flutters her eyelashes)

It's the smell of innocence, Detective. How could a creature as breathtakingly gorgeous as me commit a murder? Look at my collarbones. Do these look like the collarbones of a killer?

DETECTIVE

They're very prominent. One could easily chip a tooth on them.

PROTÉGÉ

Exactly. Let's run away together. To Paris. Or New Jersey. Wherever they have those butter tarts you crave. I'll feed them to you while you whisper legal jargon into my ear.

SECRETARY

(Rolls her eyes)

Please stop. I'm literally going to vomit my breakfast, which was just black coffee and a Bufferin. Detective, she's clearly trying to manipulate you.

SPOUSE

No, no, let them carry on. If the beautiful nitwit marries the detective, they both leave, and I get to spend the inheritance on a trip to Nashville. Yodel-ay-hee-who cares if they run away together? Go on, Protégé!

PROTÉGÉ

Kiss me, Lawman! Tongue punch my tonsils!

DETECTIVE

No! I must resist! My heart belongs to the blind lady of justice! Also, your breath smells faintly of cat food.

PROTÉGÉ

(Deeply offended)

It was salmon pâté. And it was imported, dummy. You've completely ruined the mood.

DETECTIVE

Aha! A breakthrough! Your seduction was a clever ruse to distract me from the truth! You flirted badly because you're guilty!

PROTÉGÉ

I did NOT flirt badly! I'm a seductive mastermind! Tell him, Spouse!

SPOUSE

Honestly, it was painful to watch. You looked like a golden retriever trying to swallow a bee.

DETECTIVE

(To PROTÉGÉ)

I demand to know your true whereabouts. No more bicycle horses and no more dry rain. Where were you?

PROTÉGÉ

(Stamps her foot)

Fine! You want the truth? I wasn't in the library, and I wasn't in New Jersey, I was right here. In this very room. Hideously trapped behind that velvet curtain for six hours. For my art!

SECRETARY

Behind the curtain? But that's where we keep the spare folding chairs and the damp mop.

PROTÉGÉ

Exactly! I was hiding in the dark, suffocating among the cleaning supplies, because I was playing a high stakes game of solo hide-and-seek. And nobody came to find me. I was winning so hard I started to weep uncontrollably.

SPOUSE

If you were behind the curtain the entire time, you must have seen who stabbed my dreadful husband.

PROTÉGÉ

I couldn't see anything. I had a mop in my face and a bucket on my head. But I heard everything.

DETECTIVE

Aha! An ear witness! Tell us, spirit of the mop, what did your ears behold in the dark?

PROTÉGÉ

I heard a violent scuffle. A gasp! And then, a voice whispered the most chilling words I've ever heard in my entire life.

(Everyone leans in, breathless. Even CORPSE tilt his head to listen.)

SECRETARY

What did the voice say?

PROTÉGÉ

(In a spooky whisper)

The voice said... "Ouch, stop stabbing me." And then the other voice said... "Shut up and die, I have a pilates class at four."

(Everyone immediately turns and stares directly at SPOUSE. Completely unfazed, she takes a slow sip of Diet Coke.)

SPOUSE

Well. It was a very tight schedule. And my core has never looked better.

DETECTIVE

Pilates! The most murderous of all the low impact aerobics! It all clicks together! You stabbed your spouse to use his spine as a foam roller!

SPOUSE

(Shrugs)

I agree the timeline fits. But I still didn't do it. My pilates class was cancelled because the instructor got food poisoning from a bad shrimp cocktail. I spent the entire afternoon screaming at the manager. I have twenty witnesses and a voucher for a free mud bath.

SECRETARY

(Looks at her notes)

It's true, I processed the voucher. The alibi is legally binding and incredibly soothing.

DETECTIVE

Curse it! Back to square one! The trail has gone colder than a brass toilet seat.

(Suddenly, CORPSE'S left leg begins to violently twitch. It lifts straight up into the air, perfectly rigid, and stays there. SECRETARY screams and jumps up onto the chaise.)

SECRETARY

IT'S THE RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS! IT'S REANIMATING HIS JOINTS!

DETECTIVE

(Uses his magnifying glass like a sword)

Stand back! It's a postmortem mutiny!

(CORPSE'S torso suddenly jerks upward into a sitting position. His eyes are open, but his face remains completely blank. His right arm shoots up, smacking DETECTIVE squarely in the crotch a second time.)

DETECTIVE

Ow! Again! He has a vendetta against my nethers!

PROTÉGÉ

(Excited)

No, that's not it at all! He's doing the choreography from my avant-garde interpretive dance piece about Mother Teresa.

SPOUSE

(Disgusted)

Roosevelt, stop that. You look ridiculous. You're dead, have some decorum.

(CORPSE doesn't stop. He begins to scoot himself across the floor on his buttocks, chasing DETECTIVE.)

SPOUSE

What's he doing?

SECRETARY

He looks like a malfunctioning Roomba.

DETECTIVE

(In absolute terror)

He's hunting me! He knows I found out he wears shoes! Somebody do something!

(SECRETARY throws handfuls of paper clips at the moving body.)

SECRETARY

Die, die, and die again! I already filled out the death certificate in blue ink! Do you know how hard it is to use white-out on legal documents?! It gives me chemical fumes, Roosevelt! Chemical fumes!

(CORPSE grabs DETECTIVE by the legs and wrestles him to the floor.)

DETECTIVE

Help! I'm being oppressed by the deceased!

PROTÉGÉ

Dance, Mama! Dance!

(CORPSE rises, shrieks, then collapses in a heap on top of DETECTIVE, who suddenly finds himself pinned to the floor under the body. CORPSE'S dead hand points directly at the bar cart.)

SPOUSE

If only your hand hadn't been fused in that waffle iron, you could puppeteer your way out of this.

DETECTIVE

I'd use his dead tendons like strings!

PROTÉGÉ

Wait a minute. He's pointing at the gin. Even in death, he's a functioning alcoholic. It's honestly inspiring.

DETECTIVE

No, you dumb dumb. He's not pointing at the gin. A man of his stature would never choose gin when there's an imported vermouth right next to it. He's pointing at the truth!

SECRETARY

The truth is in the bar cart? Is it a bomb? Please let it be a bomb. I have a coupon for a burial plot that expires tomorrow.

DETECTIVE

Silence! My brain, it's doing the thing! The thing where thoughts bounce around like bath beads in a blender! Look closer at the angle of his rigid index finger. He isn't pointing at the alcohol... he's pointing at the dust ruffles!

SPOUSE

(Gasps)

My dust ruffles! Can you believe I found them inside an abandoned Sears? They're Egyptian cotton!

DETECTIVE

Exactly! And what grows in Egypt?

(A dramatic beat. Nobody answers.)

Pyramids! And who lived in pyramids?

(A dramatic beat. Nobody answers.)

Mummies! And what do mummies do?

PROTÉGÉ

(Enthusiastic)

Dance, of course!

DETECTIVE

No! They decompose! And who else is decomposing?

(A dramatic beat. Nobody answers.)

Lord Roosevelt!

SECRETARY

(Jumps up and down like a madwoman)

WE KNOW HE'S DECOMPOSING! HE'S A CORPSE ON YOUR LEGS! WHAT'S THE REVELATION?!

**END OF PREVIEW**

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