

THE MURDER FARCE

By Michael Bigelow Dixon and Jon Jory

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THE MURDER FARCE

A One-Act Mystery Comedy

By Michael Bigelow Dixon and Jon Jory

SYNOPSIS: Friends of Karen, the birthday girl, plan a surprise party at a remote Air B&B Fishing Lodge with no cell or internet service. Guests arrive—two caterers who are frenemies, an ex-boyfriend, a spiritual advisor, a gastroenterologist, and a balloon artist—but Karen is nowhere to be found. A car drives up, the guests turn off the lights for the birthday surprise, the door opens and closes, a gunshot, the lights turn on—and there’s Karen... lying dead on the floor. Obviously, the guests decide that the only way to solve the murder, is to re-enact the crime. “This is so much better than the average birthday party,” says the kleptomaniacal spiritualist. Will the mystery be solved when the Delivery Person arrives—remember, UPS always rings thrice.

DURATION: 35-40 Minutes

SETTING: A fishing lodge living room.

TIME: The present.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(7 females, 3 males)

SHIRL (f)Caterer and would-be detective. *(145 lines)*
 WATT (m)Her assistant in food and crime. *(93 lines)*
 ANGELA (f)A long ago friend of Karen’s. *(42 lines)*
 KARMA (f)A current friend of Karen’s. *(56 lines)*
 DARREN (m)Karen’s ex-boyfriend. *(31 lines)*
 JANET (f)Karen’s frenemy. *(47 lines)*
 BRAD (m)Karen’s fiancé. *(56 lines)*
 KAREN (f)A dead body. *(Non-Speaking)*
 UPS WOMAN (f)Secretly a police detective. *(9 lines)*
 SALLY (f)A balloon expert. *(57 lines)*

SET: A fishing lodge. Four doors. A couch and chairs center. A chair and small table to the right. Two chairs stage left. Downstage center a large golden button set into the floor. This is not explained or discussed until the end of the play.

COSTUMES: Either contemporary or the 90s.

SOUND: Music and a gunshot.

DO NOT COPY

AT START: *An Air B&B Fishing Lodge in a National Forest with no cellphone or Internet service. A couch and chairs center. A chair and small table to the right. Two chairs stage left. Woodsy arts and crafts decorate the walls. Cute signs as in “Mother Nature Knows Best” and “See the Forest for the Trees.” Fishing rods stand in a corner. Stage left, a door to the rest of the house. Center, the front door. Stage right, a swinging door to the kitchen. Near the front door, a closet door. There is a knock at the front door. Silence. Another knock. The door opens halfway as the Caterer, SHIRL, and her assistant, WATT, stick their heads in.*

SHIRL: Karen? Hey, Karen?

WATT: Maybe she’s out back?

SHIRL: Didn’t see her car.

WATT: *(Looking around.)* Nice place.

SHIRL: Not if you’re a fish.

They carry boxes of food and WATT pulls a rolling cart with more caterer’s paraphernalia.

SHIRL: Karen?

The door to the rest of the house opens and ANGELA informally dressed but wearing some eye-catching jewelry enters.

ANGELA: Hi.

SHIRL: Oh. Hi.

ANGELA: I’m Angela not Karen.

SHIRL: Right. Karen’s an old pal.

ANGELA: *(Amused.)* You moving in?

SHIRL: Caterer paraphernalia. I’m a caterer.

ANGELA: Good for you.

SHIRL: This is Watt.

ANGELA: What?

SHIRL: Watt.

ANGELA: Sorry, I thought you said his name was “what”.

SHIRL: Watt. W-A-T-T.

ANGELA: *(Laughing.)* Got it. Hi Watt.

WATT: Didn't catch your name?

ANGELA: Angela. I'm a surprise at Karen's surprise birthday party.

SHIRL: Have you seen Karen?

ANGELA: I haven't. I have however seen Karen's suitcase in what I take to be Karen's bedroom and it's open so she must be around.

SHIRL: Old friend?

ANGELA: Who's asking?

SHIRL: Oh. Sorry.

ANGELA: No, no, no. Am I an old friend? More or less. Ups and downs, thises and thats. Do you need a hand?

SHIRL: Don't want to get gravy on you.

ANGELA: I hate gravy. Gravy is simply an attempt to keep you from tasting the food.

WATT: Or it compliments it.

ANGELA: What?

WATT: Watt.

ANGELA: Right.

SALLY enters.

SALLY: Anybody seen Karen?

SHIRL: I'm sorry, who are you?

SALLY: I'm nobody, who are you?

Are you nobody, too?

Then there's a pair of us.

Shhh, don't tell.

SHIRL: (*Confused.*) Nice.

SALLY: Actually I'm the balloon lady.

WATT: You mean like balloon animals?

SALLY: I mean like balloon art. Which includes animals.

SHIRL: Karen never mentioned a balloon artist?

SALLY: Who's Karen?

SHIRL: It's Karen's surprise birthday party.

SALLY: If it's a surprise, why would she know there's a balloon artist?

WATT: Who hired you?

SALLY: Who wants to know?

WATT: I'm Watt.

SALLY: What?

ANGELA: Here we go again.

SALLY: I didn't get the name, they just gave me an address. What they didn't tell me was that I would need an off-road vehicle.

SHIRL: So they just told you to show up and make balloon animals?

SALLY: Well, they did give me a time.

SHIRL: Huh.

SALLY: "Huh" what?

WATT: (*Sensing bad blood, he intervenes.*) Hey Shirl, we should get this stuff out to the Kitchen?

SHIRL: (*Still examining SALLY.*) Right.

WATT: Cards on the table. Shirl and I are co-owners of Heavenly Foods, a vegetarian catering service.

ANGELA: A vegetarian catering service that uses gravy?

SHIRL: Onions, veggie broth, add soy sauce. Done.

SALLY: Yuk.

SHIRL: (*Starting to get angry.*) Listen, balloon girl ...

WATT: (*Trying to save the moment.*) We will definitely hold the gravy on yours. Come, oh queen of vegetables. Let's hike the makings out to the kitchen. (*WATT grabs stuff and exits.*)

SHIRL: (*Calling after him.*) I'm going to start on the table decorations.

SALLY: Actually, I'm going to start on the table decorations.

ANGELA: "When things change inside you, things change around you." (*Starts out through the door to the rest of the house.*)

SALLY: Who said that?

ANGELA: I did.

ANGELA disappears as JANET and KARMA arrive together. JANET carries a small present while KARMA carries a large present.

JANET and KARMA: Where's the birthday girl?

SHIRL: Hi Janet.

JANET: Hi Shirl.

KARMA: Hi Shirl.

SHIRL: Hi Karma.

JANET and KARMA: So where is she?

SHIRL: Karen, in my experience, is never where you think she should be.

SALLY: Hi, I'm Sally McQuiggen. I'm the balloon artist.

KARMA: Is that because you can't get a real job?

SALLY: And what's your real job?

KARMA: I'm a gastroenterologist.

SHIRL: Checkmate.

WATT enters carrying party hats. During the next few lines SALLY hands JANET a helium balloon on a string.

WATT: I'm Watt.

KARMA: Your name is what?

WATT: Watt.

KARMA: I just asked you what.

WATT: My name is W-A-T-T.

KARMA: How disturbing. *(To both WATT and SHIRL.)* I'm Karma, because I believe in it.

SHIRL: *(Just not liking her much.)* Uh-huh.

JANET: Love to see you again, Shirl.

SHIRL: You look fabulous as always.

JANET: I am fabulous, but the world just doesn't care.

SHIRL: What are you up to?

ANGELA: *(Entering.)* I'm Angela.

Neither JANET nor SHIRL pays any attention.

JANET: *(To SHIRL.)* Same old, same old. You run a catering service. I run a catering service. You, of course, run a better catering service which has driven me into salads.

ANGELA: Hi, I'm Angela.

JANET: *(Paying no attention to ANGELA.)* Salads, of course, are a useless specialty eight months a year so during that time I'm a security guard.

ANGELA: *(Getting a little grim.)* Hi, I'm Angela.

JANET: And that's why my present for Karen is very, very small while Karma here has obviously brought her an elephant which must be hard to wrap.

ANGELA pops the helium balloon which JANET holds and exits. WATT arranged the party hats on the table.

JANET: Who was that?

WATT: I think she was "Angela".

SALLY: *(To JANET.)* And I'm Sally.

JANET: *(Going right on talking to SHIRL.)* So you, Shirl, are doubtless rich while I am salad poor but then you have always been successful while I am a hot mess.

SALLY: And I'm Sally.

SHIRL: Let's not forget you were prom queen.

JANET: Actually, I won five hundred dollars on a scratch-off and bribed my way to prom royalty.

WATT: That is utterly fabulous.

JANET: Actually it was the beginning of my life of crime.

SALLY: Sally is going to blow up balloons now.

SHIRL, JANET, and WATT: That's good, Sally.

KARMA: *(To JANET.)* I didn't know you did crime?

SALLY goes about blowing up balloons.

JANET: Shoplifting. It's the only thing I've ever been really good at.

KARMA: You must be good at salads.

JANET: My salads are tasteless but crunchy. My shoplifting rocks.

WATT applauds.

KARMA: I distrust colorful backgrounds. I myself am quite boring.

WATT: It's what one looks for in a gastroenterologist.

JANET: Well, at least Brad and Karen's being late is typical.

KARMA: I cannot understand why Karen treats that lovely man so badly.

SHIRL: And you know Brad how?

KARMA: Through unrequited lust.

WATT: Unrequited lust is exhausting.

KARMA: Actually, I'm his gastroenterologist and, by the way, that man has an outstanding stomach.

SHIRL: Too much information.

JANET: He does have a nice stomach. It's all ripples.

SHIRL: I never noticed.

JANET: That's because you're only attracted to vegetables.

SHIRL: (*Getting annoyed.*) And that means what?

JANET: It's a compliment.

SHIRL: It doesn't sound like a compliment.

KARMA: I don't think I can watch cage-fighting before dinner.

SALLY: (*Still off by herself, referring to herself.*) You are really good at blowing up balloons, Sally.

JANET: I'm going to haul my over-packed suitcase off to my luxury bedroom here in fishing hell. Which way?

SHIRL: Though the door with the fish on it.

JANET: (*As she exits.*) It's odd to pass a fish on the way to your bedroom.

KARMA: People who make salads are always looking for a fight. I think I'll feel better if I shower.

KARMA starts off. WATT cups his ear with a hand.

WATT: Car.

KARMA: (*Stopping.*) Car what?

WATT: Car pulling in.

SHIRL: Oh wow, it must be Karen and Brad.

KARMA: Nice of them to arrive after dark.

JANET: (*Entering.*) A car just pulled in.

KARMA: We know.

JANET: It must be Karen and Brad.

SHIRL: We know.

JANET: What do we do?

WATT: We sing "Happy Birthday"?

KARMA: Brilliant!

JANET: Don't we have to hide?

SHIRL: We should probably hide.

SALLY: But I don't even know them.

SHIRL: Just hide.

SALLY: But I'm blowing up balloons.

KARMA, JANET, SHIRL, and WATT: Hide!

SALLY: But ...

SHIRL: Go, go, go, go, go, go, go, go!

Everyone starts looking for a place to hide.

SHIRL: When I start “Happy Birthday” everybody pops out and sings.

SALLY: Wait, wait, wait!

JANET, KARMA, and WATT: What?

SALLY: I’ve forgotten the words to “Happy Birthday.”

WATT: Just lip synch.

SALLY: No, I want to sing.

ANGELA: *(Speaking at record speed.)* Happy Birthday to you, happy birthday to you, happy birthday whoever, happy birthday to you.

SALLY: Say it once more.

SHIRL: Turn out the lights. Go!

People hide behind furniture, go outdoors, or in WATT’S case flatten against the wall. There is complete silence and no movement for a count of three. The front door opens and it’s DARREN. He is KAREN’S ex-boyfriend. The lights are switched back on.

ALL: Surprise!!

SHIRL: You’re not Brad.

SALLY: *(Singing as fast as possible.)* Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you, happy birthday dear person, happy birthday to you.

WATT: Totally the wrong person, but you have a nice voice.

DARREN: Of course I’m not Brad. Who would want to be Brad?

SHIRL: This is Karen’s ex-boyfriend Darren.

ALL: Hi Darren.

SHIRL: He is a disaster and has been told never, ever, never to come within a mile of Karen.

DARREN: I need to talk to her.

SHIRL: Nobody invited you.

DARREN: Karen invited me.

SHIRL: She would never invite you in a million years, you stole her cat.

DARREN: That cat loved me.

SHIRL: You are so full of it, that cat... wait, you spoke of the cat in the past tense?

DARREN: There is news and it is crucial that I tell her.

There is a knock at the door.

SHIRL: *(In a stage whisper.)* It's Karen.

KARMA: If it's Karen, why would she knock?

WATT: Maybe it's Brad.

DARREN: Why would Brad knock?

WATT: *(Losing it.)* I don't know why Brad would knock. Maybe he fell head first against the door.

ANGELA: Maybe Karen suspects there's a secret party and doesn't want to spoil it.

SHIRL: I think we should be ready to sing.

SALLY: Everybody get a balloon. Get two balloons!

Everybody rushes to get balloons.

WATT: Turn out the lights.

SHIRL: Wait... wait, wait. The special hats are on the table. Your names are on them.

A louder knock. People rush to the hat table saying things like, "No, that's mine," "I can't find my hat," and "Wait, you've got mine on."

KARMA: *(Urgently.)* Watt, you've got my hat.

WATT: Sorry, I forget my name under pressure.

Another knock.

WATT: Turn out the lights!

People rush to hide. SHIRL turns out the lights.

SHIRL: Come in. *(Nothing.)* Come in. *(Nothing. Then a gunshot.)*
What was that?

JANET: A gunshot.

SHIRL: Turn on the lights.

WATT turns on the lights. SHIRL rushes to the door and opens it.

SHIRL: There no one here.

WATT: (*Pointing at a body downstage.*) But here's Karen.

ALL: Oh my God!

WATT, SHIRL, KARMA and, surprisingly, SALLY rush to the body.

DARREN: From what she's wearin', it's definitely Karen.

She's face down and they roll her onto her back.

SHIRL: It is.

SALLY: She's not breathing.

SHIRL: I'm not getting a pulse.

WATT: I don't see any blood.

SHIRL: She can't be dead, she eats a plant-based diet.

KARMA: Back off, I'm a doctor.

SHIRL: I am backed off.

KARMA: You're not backed off enough. (*They back off. She shouts at KAREN.*) Boo!!

WATT: (*Horrified.*) What are you doing?

KARMA: I'm using the Cardwell Brinkerhof Field Mortality Test.

WATT: How did she do?

KARMA: She's dead.

General reaction to this news.

SALLY: You're sure?

KARMA: I'm a physician, you're a balloon specialist, who do you think is right?

DARREN: (*To SHIRL.*) I told you I had to talk to her!

SHIRL: Why?

DARREN: She's in danger.

SHIRL: Well the horse is kind of out of the barn, Darren.

JANET: (*Who is near a window.*) A car just drove up.

WATT: Who is it?

JANET: Brad drives a Tesla, right?

WATT: He's going to walk in and see Karen's dead body? He will completely freak out.

KARMA: He's an emotional timebomb.

SHIRL: I think he has a heart problem.

DARREN: Karen is dead and we're worried about freaking Brad?

WATT: This could kill him! We have to prepare him.

SHIRL: The closet.

ANGELA: What?

SHIRL: The closet.

BRAD: What?

SHIRL: (*Losing it.*) Put her in the closet so we can prepare Brad.

SALLY: You can't move her before the police come.

JANET: Do you want to be responsible for Brad's death?

SALLY: Well no, but ...

SHIRL: Put her in the freaking frumping, fracking closet!

WATT, DARREN, SHIRL and JANET rush over, get KAREN on her feet and move toward the closet.

DARREN: We're making it look like a crime!

JANET: You would prefer Brad dies of a heart attack?

DARREN: We're all going to jail.

SALLY: Not if we don't call the police.

DARREN: We have to call the police.

SHIRL: When we call the police, we'll take her out of the closet.

Just as they're closing the closet door on KAREN, BRAD enters.

SHIRL: Oh Brad, hi.

ALL: Hi Brad!

BRAD goes to SALLY who is closest to him.

BRAD: I don't think we've met, I'm Brad, Karen's fiancé.

SALLY: Hi, I'm Sally the specialty balloon person.

BRAD: Well you are one smokin' hot balloon person.

SALLY emitting a low scream backs away from him.

BRAD: (*To KARMA.*) What's the matter with her?

KARMA: She has intimacy problems.

BRAD: *(To ANGELA.)* Hi, I'm Brad, Karen's fiancé.

ANGELA: I'm Angela and I'm just here.

BRAD: Well, you could be in Iceland, so you made a good choice.

(Taking off his coat.) Well, let me tell you the traffic was a zoo from the time you're on 111 to the time you do the cloverleaf thing until you get onto 264.

SHIRL: Hey Brad...

BRAD wanders the room talking. Whomever he talks to backs away from him. He doesn't notice.

BRAD: So I hung a left onto Highway 80 and then took 24 South all the way to Walkinsburg...

SHIRL: Hey Brad...

BRAD: Where, by the way, is the Pie in the Sky Diner...

SHIRL: Brad...

BRAD: *(Still moving.)* The best pie anywhere so I got Karen a Mississippi mud pie with a chocolate graham cracker crust...

SHIRL: About Karen...

BRAD: Which would rock your world and... why is everyone backing away from me?

WATT: You're such an overwhelming male presence.

BRAD: I know. Whoa! It is so hot! *(Taking off his suitcoat.)* Gotta get out of this coat. Is this a closet?

WATT: *(Not thinking.)* Uh-huh.

EVERYONE ELSE: Noooooo!

But it's too late. BRAD opens the closet door.

BRAD: *(As he opens it.)* So where's Karen?

And of course KAREN falls out of the closet and into his arms.

BRAD: Karen! Karen, are you all right?

WATT: *(Trying to be helpful.)* Well, actually she's dead.

BRAD screams and drops her on the floor.

WATT: I didn't mean to put it like that.

BRAD: What do you mean, she's dead?

KARMA: Irreversible cessation of circulatory and respiratory functions including the halting of all functions of the brain and brain stem.

SHIRL: Which in English means she's dead.

BRAD: (*Drops to one knee.*) Karen, Karen darling, Karen say something.

DARREN: She's gone, man.

BRAD: Gone where?

JANET: She's up with the cherubim, seraphim and archangels.

BRAD: She is?

WATT: Uh-huh and they are all singing, "We Are the Champions."

BRAD: (*A despairing cry.*) Noooooooooo!

SHIRL hits him with a roundhouse right and knocks him out.

WATT: Well, that was a good idea.

SHIRL: We needed a little quiet to decide what to do.

WATT: Achieved.

ANGELA: I think we need to get out of here.

All but SHIRL and WATT stampede toward the front door.

SHIRL: Stop where you are!!

They stop.

SHIRL: There is a right thing to do now and a wrong thing.

WATT: What's the right thing?

SHIRL: I have no idea. (*Everyone starts for the door again.*) But! (*They stop.*) I know the wrong thing.

KARMA: What's the wrong thing?

SHIRL: Fleeing the premises looks like you are guilty of murder.

BRAD: (*Awakening.*) I just had this weird dream that Karen was dead.

KARMA: She is dead.

BRAD: She couldn't be dead.

KARMA: But she is dead.

BRAD lifts one of KAREN'S arms. He releases it. It falls.

BRAD: She is dead.

KARMA: You're perfect for medical school.

SHIRL: All right—all right, all right, all right! We have to keep our wits about us. We have to be focused and rational!

WATT: (*Seriously.*) That is such good advice.

SHIRL: Situation: We are in an isolated fishing lodge. There is no cell or internet service and it's a forty-five minute drive to the nearest police station. The murder victim has a bullet wound directly over her heart.

SALLY: That was the sound we heard!

DARREN picks up a gun from behind the sofa. He's thrilled. He holds it up in his right hand.

DARREN: Look I found the gun! (*Transfers it to his left hand.*) See, it's the gun. (*Transfers it to his right hand.*) Found the gun!

SHIRL: And now it has your fingerprints all over it.

DARREN looks at the gun, then races to the front door and throws it out.

ANGELA: What are you doing?

DARREN: I threw it in the lake.

KARMA: You just threw the murder weapon in the lake, you idiot!

DARREN: She said it had my fingerprints on it!

SHIRL: Stop! I read police procedurals and this would be called a classic "locked room mystery." I've read hundreds of them. I even write fan fiction. I can handle this.

WATT: She can handle this!

BRAD: I can't bear seeing Karen like this. She was so young, so vibrant, so full of life.

SHIRL: You are so right, Brad. Put her in a chair.

With great effort BRAD puts her in a chair. The others encourage him.

DARREN: Doing great, Brad.

WATT: Fabulous technique.

JANET: You've got this, Brad.

She's in the chair. Applause from those gathered nearby. She falls off the chair.

BRAD: Sorry.

BRAD puts KAREN back on the chair.

DARREN: Lock in, baby.

SHIRL: You can do this.

KARMA: This is so much better than the average birthday party.
(KAREN'S body is re-seated.)

SHIRL: *(Trying to be in charge.)* All right. It is clear the murder scene has been compromised. What we must do is re-enact the murder.

SALLY: But it happened in the dark.

SHIRL: But this way we'll see where everyone was and how the body ended up on the area rug.

WATT: Perhaps the area rug was poisoned.

SHIRL: Be quiet, Watt.

WATT: Right.

JANET: This is so deliciously creepy.

SHIRL: Okey dokey... now... here we go... we ought to start by... no, really, first we should... all right, here's the deal... actually, I have no idea what I'm talking about. *(WATT whispers in her ear.)* We need to take Karen outside.

ANGELA: How do we know she came from outside?

SHIRL: *(A touch irritated.)* Because in police procedurals the body has always been moved from somewhere else to where it is found.

KARMA: That's even true in French films.

SHIRL: Darren, take Karen outside.

BRAD: I should take Karen outside.

DARREN: No, I should take Karen outside!

SHIRL: *(Trying to stop the escalation.)* We could flip a coin.

DARREN: Forget it. I am not carrying a dead ex-girlfriend.

WATT: That seems extremely suspicious, Darren.

DARREN: Fine, I'll carry a dead ex-girlfriend.

BRAD: Actually, I don't give a flying flunky anymore! (*BRAD moves away and sits.*)

KARMA: This is really going so well!

DARREN picks up KAREN.

SHIRL: Out on the porch, Darren.

WATT: Oh, she loved the porch.

SHIRL: There's a hammock, put her in the hammock.

WATT: Oh, she loved that hammock.

SHIRL: Hurry up, Darren, we don't have all day.

DARREN: (*As he's moving to the door.*) I think she's gained weight.

DARREN carries KAREN out the door.

WATT: He's a lot nicer than what I remember.

SALLY: (*Raising her hand.*) You know, really, I'm just an unimportant balloon person. Is it really necessary that I do this?

SHIRL: There are no small parts, Sally, there are only small actors.

BRAD: I'm an actor and that is complete baloney.

SHIRL: You're going to do this, Sally, or I'm going to hurt you.

SALLY: That's completely convincing.

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