

WRITE ME A MURDER

A MYSTERY-COMEDY IN FOUR SCENES

By Michael Druce

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WRITE ME A MURDER
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CAST OF CHARACTERS
(5 WOMEN, 5 MEN, 1 EITHER)

*MIDLING (26 lines)
DORIS SWAN (85 lines)
INSPECTOR DUDLEY NICHOLS (58 lines)
LADY CONSTANCE (33 lines)
CASSANDRA ADAMS (38 lines)
DR. PRYCE (61 lines)
VIC POMPADOUR (31 lines)
TONY BISHOP (66 lines)
CLARA (99 lines)
SHERRI JUBILEE (51 lines)
**ZACH (107 lines)
VOICE ON TAPE (6 lines)

NOTES:

- *The role of Midling may be played by a male or female.
- **The actor playing Zach will also play the role of Mack; however, the role of Mack should not be mentioned in the program.

PRODUCTION NOTES

SETTING:

The parlor of Edward Fortune's lavish weekend retreat. A couch is positioned center stage. Comfortable chairs and small tables on both sides of the stage and upstage. A bureau or desk sits stage left with a tape player on it. Additional furnishings may be added.

Exits:

- Stage Right The front entrance.
- Stage Left The basement.
- Upstage Center A hallway leading to guest rooms and other areas of the house.

SOUND:

Gun shots, Doorbell, a Swoosh (body falling) and thud (body impacting ground), Voice on Tape (or read live), Bus horn, Music as desired.

PROPS:

Tape player on bureau

Small hand bell on bureau

Envelope on bureau containing a letter and room assignments

Manuscript (Swan)

Retainer case (Sherri)

Briefcase #1 (Dr. Pryce)

Audio tape (Dr. Pryce)

Robes or pajamas (All guests)

Hooded robe (Swan and Nichols)

Pencil and small slips of paper (All guests)

Vase (Bishop)

Bar of soap on a rope (Inspector Nichols)

Teeth [candy coated gum] (Zach)

Hat (Mack)

Briefcase #2 (Zach)

NOTE: All gunshots are fired offstage. No guns are displayed on stage.

DO NOT COPY

SCENE 1

AT RISE:

It is night. The stage is empty. MIDLING enters leading ten guests on stage. All of the guests are visibly impressed by the house.

MIDLING: Well, folks, here we are. Right this way.

SWAN: Finally. It's good to be on terra firma at last.

NICHOLS: *(Looking at the floor.)* What? I thought this was tile. It looks like tile to me.

LADY CONSTANCE: What a horrendous bus ride. We must be in the middle of nowhere.

MIDLING: Oh, no Lady Constance, we're in the middle of somewhere. We're just a long way from everywhere else.

CASSANDRA: *(Looking the room over.)* Wow, I wasn't expecting this.

DR. PRYCE: Yes, quite extravagant.

POMPADOUR: *(Striking an Elvis pose.)* I'll say. I'm all shook up.

BISHOP: Very impressive.

POMPADOUR: Thank ya, thank ya very much.

BISHOP: I was speaking of the house.

POMPADOUR: I knew that.

CASSANDRA: This is a weekend retreat?

MIDLING: Yes. Please, make yourselves comfortable. You'll receive your room assignments shortly.

POMPADOUR: So, this is how the incredibly wealthy live. Gaudy, excessive - - my kind of place.

MIDLING: Mr. Fortune subscribes to the notion that living well is the best revenge.

NICHOLS: A man after me own heart.

SWAN: *(Doubtful.)* Really?

NICHOLS: Oh, yes. If I weren't just a lowly but dedicated humble civil servant, I wouldn't mind having a "go" at being a millionaire.

MIDLING: Billionaire, Inspector.

NICHOLS: How's that?

MIDLING: Mr. Fortune is worth billions.

NICHOLS: Oh, I could go for that as well. *(Crosses to the bureau.)*

POMPADOUR: I could definitely get used to this place.

MIDLING: I wouldn't get too used to it. It's being demolished on Monday.

CASSANDRA: Demolished? Why?

MIDLING: Mr. Fortune is having this place torn down so he can replace it with something larger. You'll be the last guests to ever visit this place.

CASSANDRA: The last guests ever?

MIDLING: Yes, it's sad in a way. Once you're gone, the building will be gone as well.

SWAN: When can we expect to meet Mr. Fortune?

MIDLING: I'm afraid you can't. He won't be here.

DR. PRYCE: Excuse me?

MIDLING: Oh, no, Mr. Fortune won't be coming. He has other engagements.

BISHOP: I don't understand.

CLARA: But we received personal invitations to be Mr. Fortune's weekend guests.

MIDLING: And so you are, only he won't be here.

BISHOP: Now look here - - *(Fishing for Midling's name.)*

MIDLING: Midling.

BISHOP: Right, Midling. What's the story here? We had to rearrange our schedules to come here. Quite an inconvenience on short notice, not to mention the three hour bus ride. And now you tell us Mr. Fortune won't be coming?

LADY CONSTANCE: It's so terribly low brow.

SHERRI: I'm sure there's an explanation. There is an explanation, isn't there?

MIDLING: Yes, there is, Miss Jubilee. As Mr. Fortune instructed, my job was to see that the ten of you arrived here safely, to make sure that you're comfortably situated, and then to return for you Monday.

SWAN: What I find terribly curious is why Mr. Fortune's name doesn't ring a bell.

NICHOLS: *(Rings the bell on the bureau. All turn to him.)* Sorry, that was me.

DR. PRYCE: My thoughts exactly. Has anyone heard of him?

LADY CONSTANCE: Now that you mention it - -

DR. PRYCE: If he's so rich and so famous, why haven't any of us heard of him before?

MIDLING: Edward Fortune is a pseudonym.

NICHOLS: Oh, got something to hide, has he?

MIDLING: Yes, Inspector, his real identity.

NICHOLS: Right.

ZACH: What's the plan now? If our host - - whoever he might be - - isn't coming, what do we do in the meantime?

SWAN: It was my understanding this gathering was going to be a creative investment opportunity.

MIDLING: (*Crossing to the bureau.*) Your room assignments and everything you need to know will be found in this envelope. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a three hour journey back.

CASSANDRA: You're leaving us? Alone? What if I don't want to stay?

MIDLING: Then you may return with me.

LADY CONSTANCE: Miss Adams is right, why should any of us stay?

MIDLING: My employer is a most generous man. I'm certain you'll find your stay here to be most profitable.

POMPADOUR: How profitable?

MIDLING: Well, let's just say, if my name were on the guest list, I wouldn't think twice about staying. (*A beat as the guests ponder their decisions.*) I'll say good night then. Should anyone of you decide not to stay, the coach will be here for another ten minutes. (*Exits.*)

SWAN: How do we know this - - this - - Edward Fortune isn't a psychopath? Here we are in the middle of nowhere with nothing but miles of empty fields on one side and the sea on the other. Who says we're not pawns in some sort of demented game?

LADY CONSTANCE: Oh, yes, I've read stories like that. An eccentric but unknown host invites (*Counting the guests and herself silently.*) ten unsuspecting guests to a remote location for the sole purpose of murdering them.

POMPADOUR: That could put a damper on the old weekend.

SHERRI: You're letting your imaginations run wild.

NICHOLS: I'd say the proof is in the pudding. Let's have a look, see what's in that envelope.

DR. PRYCE: (*Unsealing the envelope. Pulling items out.*) Guest list. Room assignments. Letter. (*Examining the letter.*) Shall I?

SWAN: Yes, go on before Milding gets away.

DR. PRYCE: (*Reading.*) Ladies and gentlemen, good evening and welcome to my estate. Please make yourselves at home. Feel free to help yourselves to as much food and drink as you desire. Under ordinary circumstances I wouldn't invite guests to my home and then not be present, but these aren't ordinary circumstances. My presence here would only be a hindrance.

LADY CONSTANCE: Low brow, utterly low brow.

BISHOP: Continue, Doctor.

DR. PRYCE: Among my many business interests, I am the owner of a well-known theatre that specializes in staging murder mysteries. But, quite frankly, I am tired of the dull and uninspired mysteries my artistic director has been staging. I prefer something daring and bold, something unexpected and rough around the edges. I remarked to my artistic director that with the proper incentives, ten ordinary people could write a more entertaining play than anything staged in my theater over the last twelve months. The idea follows the old saying, "Given enough time, three monkeys locked in a room with a typewriter could eventually produce "Hamlet."

NICHOLS: Is he suggesting that we are - - ?

SWAN: Not we, Inspector. You.

BISHOP: Please, Doctor, go on.

DR. PRYCE: A wager was made, and now I am in the position of putting my money where my mouth is. Among the many who responded to my ad, you have been selected to test my theory. This is my creative investment opportunity: if you produce an original mystery in forty-eight hours, I will pay each one of you one hundred thousand dollars.

POMPADOUR: That's it? We write a play and score a hundred grand?

CASSANDRA: But what happens if we fail?

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DR. PRYCE: There's more. (*Continuing to read from the letter.*) If you don't succeed, you will have at least made new friends and enjoyed my estate for a weekend. As for me, I will have to put up with the insufferable gloating of my artistic director, who just happens to be my son. Yours truly, Edward Fortune.

SHERRI: It seems - -

SWAN: Suspect, very suspect.

LADY CONSTANCE: Monkeys, indeed.

NICHOLS: I don't know a thing about writing a play.

BISHOP: But you do know a thing or two about crime detection?

LADY CONSTANCE: Low brow, terribly low brow.

CLARA: (*To LADY CONSTANCE.*) If you hurry, Lady Constance, you can still make the bus.

LADY CONSTANCE: Why would I want to do that?

CLARA: Because if you say low brow one more time, I'll rip your eyebrows off.

LADY CONSTANCE: You're a very abrasive young woman.

ZACH: First things first. Is anyone here a writer?

SWAN: I'm an actress. I don't write. People write for me.

SHERRI: Really? Have you done anything recently?

SWAN: No, not recently. I'm looking for the right vehicle.

NICHOLS: I've got a vehicle you might be interested in. Got about a hundred thousand miles on it.

CASSANDRA: (*To SWAN.*) Of course, you used to do those commercials for denture-grip.

ZACH: What about you, Mr. Pompadour?

POMPADOUR: Oh, no, I've never done any commercials.

ZACH: I'm asking, do you write?

POMPADOUR: I work in Vegas. I'm an entertainer, you know, impressions, songs.

ZACH: Lady Constance? What do you do?

LADY CONSTANCE: Well, I attend parties and premieres.

ZACH: Bishop?

BISHOP: Actually, I'm a man of leisure.

NICHOLS: A what?

BISHOP: A raconteur, playboy, gadfly.

SWAN: In other words, you're a bum.

ZACH: Doctor? What about you? Do you write?

DR. PRYCE: I used to write prescriptions, but now I just play golf.

ZACH: Miss Adams.

CASSANDRA: Oh, no, I don't write.

ZACH: Miss Jubilee?

SHERRI: No, I'm just an ornament.

BISHOP: What about you, Mr. - -

ZACH: Zach will do. No, Clara and I aren't writers.

CLARA: Oh, that's not true. Zach's a wonderful writer. He wrote me the most wonderful love notes when we were dating.

ZACH: She's exaggerating.

CLARA: I am not. Let's see. Remember that time you wrote, "Your bonny brow, your cherry lips, your cheeks so - -"

SWAN: Thank you. We get the picture. (To ZACH.) You're elected. You'll write and we'll collaborate.

ZACH: Me? Why am I the writer?

SWAN: Because bad writing is better than no writing.

ZACH: Thanks for the vote of confidence.

SWAN: It's not confidence, it's pragmatism.

NICHOLS: Oh, yeah, I had that once. Couldn't see anything out of my left eye.

ZACH: Even if I do agree to help with the writing, we still need some ideas.

BISHOP: That's where Inspector Nichols comes in. What was your last case?

NICHOLS: An arrest for unpaid parking tickets.

BISHOP: Parking tickets? No, I'm talking about something big, sensational, something juicy.

NICHOLS: Yes, now I remember. There was an incident with a circus elephant.

LADY CONSTANCE: Was it a mystery?

NICHOLS: Oh, no, not old Bonny Big Tusks.

DR. PRYCE: Was Bonny Big Tusks murdered?

NICHOLS: No, not murdered. Well, Bonny did pass out. Actually, she fell on top of the clown car. Nasty business, very nasty.

BISHOP: Inspector, unpaid parking tickets and wayward elephants are the not the stuff murder mysteries are made of.

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DR. PRYCE: Face it, this project is doomed from the start.

POMPADOUR: Doomed? Why?

CLARA: We're not writers, and we haven't got any ideas.

POMPADOUR: I need the money. I have a dozen bookies to support. If there's a chance I can get my hands on a hundred grand, I say we break out the pens and pencils.

LADY CONSTANCE: But what about an idea?

POMPADOUR: We'll cross that bridge when we get to it.

SWAN: We've already gotten to it. We're on the bridge, you moron.

NICHOLS: I've got to agree with Vic, I could use a few bucks. *(To DORIS SWAN.)* What about you, Swan? You look like you could use a few "Benjamin's."

SWAN: Don't be ridiculous. I'm a major star --

SOUND CUE: From offstage we hear the sound of the bus horn.

CLARA: *(To SWAN.)* That's your cue.

DORIS SWAN folds her arms in front of her, turning her head away from CLARA.

DR. PRYCE: All right, it looks like we're all in. I suggest we retire to the library and begin throwing out ideas, lines, anything. Surely we can come up with something in two days.

NICHOLS: Here's a line for you: 'It was a dark and stormy night.'

SWAN: How about, 'He was an obtuse and stupid human being?'
We're writing a play, Inspector, we need originality.

NICHOLS: Right.

SWAN: Here's something you can probably handle. Why don't you bring in my baggage?

NICHOLS: How about this one? That's not original. *(SWAN shakes her head.)*

SWAN: My luggage, it's outside. Could you bring it in for me?

NICHOLS: Oh, sure. *(Exits to the front entrance.)*

SWAN: It's going to be a long weekend. *(All agree.)*

SWAN, CASSANDRA, LADY CONSTANCE. DR. PRYCE and POMADOUR exit up center.

ZACH: (To CLARA.) This is about to become the longest weekend of my life.

ZACH and CLARA exit, leaving BISHOP and SHERRI alone on stage.

BISHOP: (To SHERRI.) You know, Miss Jubilee, I had considered not coming along on this adventure.

SHERRI: Really?

BISHOP: But then when I saw you board the bus, I threw caution to the wind.

SHERRI: That's very flattering of you, Mr. - -

BISHOP: Tony. Please, call me Tony.

SHERRI: All right, Tony. You may call me - -

BISHOP: The brightest spot in an otherwise dull day?

SHERRI: Close, but Sherri works.

BISHOP: Here's a line: 'What's a girl like you doing on a weekend retreat like this?' (SHERRI laughs.) All right, how about something classical. 'To be or - - ?'

SHERRI: 'Not to be.'

SHERRI and BISHOP exit.

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