

Murder at the Movies

Wes Wetzel





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MURDER AT THE MOVIES

by Wes Wetzel

CAST

CHARLIE CHIN THE THREE: Male, middle age, made up to look Chinese.

DIRECTOR: Big Mama Musselman, a hard-bitten female and boss of all the actors.

CAMERA OPERATOR: Male or female, non-speaking part.

VICTIM: Jake the Flake, non-speaking part.

SELDON SILENT SARAH SLAVEN: Always ready with a quip and prone to continuous talking if you don't shut her up.

SAM DIAMOND: Talks like James Cagney, did a TV serial "Murder is in the Cards" with co-star Sam Spade. Is carrying a deck of cards.

TONY THE PONY: Always has a racing sheet in his hand and a toothpick in his mouth.

MARY MAYFLOWER: Over from England to do this film, sweet younger redhead.

MI SIN: Pronounced "My Sin." Charlie's daughter, looks Chinese, is younger and always carries a magnifying glass.

GLORIA THE GORGEOUS: Cosmetically overdone, chews gum, a Mae West type.

COLUMBO: Of TV fame with trench coat and his famous last minute question before exiting.

A MALE SHILL: In the audience.

Place

A motion picture studio, with a live audience, in Hollywood.

Time

The present.

SCENE ONE

Setting: A motion picture studio in Hollywood. Our audience is the live studio audience. If possible, lighting on stage is set so all the action will be seen in silhouette. A chair is Center facing Left. A motion picture camera is Center Left facing the chair. A Director's Chair is Down Left. A table is Center Right.

An introductory overture may be added as a mime with a Russian sounding name comes out to conduct the world famous [your city's name] pit orchestra. After two false starts where the mime admonishes the fictitious orchestra players down in the 'pit,' we hear Chopsticks played on a kids' player piano on the third try. Create fun, ham it up!

At Rise (in silhouette): The CAMERA OPERATOR is behind the camera and films until the DIRECTOR says, "Cut." The VICTIM enters, sits in the center chair, opens a newspaper and reads to himself. SARAH enters and sneaks up behind the VICTIM, puts her arm up and over him and stabs him in the front of his chest. The VICTIM groans and slumps forward. SARAH sneaks back out the way she came in. Short pause. The DIRECTOR enters.

DIRECTOR: Cut! All right, that's a print. Lights, please. *(Stage lights come on.)* All right, cast, gather around. *(SAM, SARAH, MARY and TONY enter and huddle around the DIRECTOR)* Gang, I want to thank you all for your diligent work. It's been a long hard road, but it's almost over. All we have left is next week when Arizona 5-0 is available. *(Arizona can be changed to your home area if desired.)* I think we have got us a good film. *(The VICTIM is still slumped in the chair, the knife in his chest.)* All right, Jake, no more of your cheap hamming, you can get up now. *(As she looks at JAKE, he doesn't move. Finally, SAM DIAMOND goes over to see what's up. He bends down to inspect and straightens up in horror. TONY THE PONY rushes over to look.)*

SAM: By God, he really has been stabbed. I think he's dead.

(They all rush over to see)

TONY: That's real blood.

MARY: Well, how could this happen? That's a stage knife. You didn't change knives, did you?

SARAH: Did I kill him?

SAM: (*shaking JAKE*) He really is dead. That's (*pointing*) not a stage knife.

DIRECTOR: We are all in deep trouble. Jake is dead and you did it, Sarah.

SARAH: But, Mama, I was supposed to, it's in the script.

DIRECTOR: But you used a real knife.

SARAH: I didn't know that. It looks like the one we always use.

TONY: Look here, Big Mama, it even has a notch right where the other one did.

DIRECTOR: You're right. Someone must have changed knives. This can only mean one thing: he was murdered!

END OF SCENE ONE

SCENE TWO

Setting: *The center chair and movie camera have been removed from the stage.*

At Rise: CHARLIE CHIN THE THREE enters with chopsticks in his vest pocket. He is followed by MI SIN.

CHIN: (*talking to the audience*) Good evening, playgoers. Allow me to 'congratuate' you for coming to see Chin in my masterful performances of the past. But now I'm here to solve yet another 'aggrieveous' murder. I thought you people in Sun Cities (*a local community*) were quiet retirement community. Ahhh, but Chin has been wrong before. This time have brought my daughter to study my notes and maybe become Chinese Miss Marple. Please to introduce Mi Sin.

(MI SIN bows Chinese style to the audience, but says nothing.)

CHIN: Chin is number one son of revered father, who in turn was also number one son of grandfather, Grand Master of all criminal deduction. But I'm sorry to report gods have not favored Chin quite so well, have only two daughters, but I have decided to keep them, anyway.

(At this point MI SIN whips out a round magnifying glass and looks through it at the audience, carefully studying everyone while CHIN talks about her.)

CHIN: Mi Sin is number 7/8 daughter, she arrived 2 weeks early. Am not sure she all here. But now Chin must solve murder before he strikes again. Oh, excuse. Chin equal opportunity detective...killer could have been a lady. Who directs this masterpiece?

(BIG MAMA enters as MI SIN exits)

CHIN: You are director? A lady director?

DIRECTOR: You bet your sweet chopsticks. Why, I've more experience than a retired gangster.

CHIN: Ah, glad to see dragon lady in charge. Will be of much help to me. Please to tell name of man who was stabbed and why good looking lady stab him.

DIRECTOR: Look, Chin, none of my people would have switched knives. We're family. Even though Jake was a son-of-a-bitch, no one would kill him. Why, he was even married to Gloria at one time.

CHIN: Ah, so. Married to Gloria, very interesting. Is she the one with sunset in her hair?

DIRECTOR: Oh, no. That's Mary Mayflower. But she had a torrid affair with Jake when they did "*An Ocean So Big*" together in England.

CHIN: You have said none of your people would have stabbed. But all had opportunity, right?

DIRECTOR: Well, they were all here, if that's what you mean.

CHIN: Ah, Miss Director, whoever stabbed Jake have to have practiced very carefully, must buy knife exactly like this one (*holding up the stage knife*). I see it have a rubber blade that go into handle. Very clever. (*pause*) Miss Director--

DIRECTOR: It's Big Mama Musselman.

CHIN: Ah, yes, Big Mama. Did you see stabbing?

DIRECTOR: No, no, it was too dark. But I know how it was done. We rehearsed a few times in the light.

CHIN: Oh, all the ladies are beautiful as a lotus blossom. It's too bad the stabbing was in darkness.

DIRECTOR: They are lovely, aren't they? But most of the scenes were in the light.

CHIN: And does same lady always do stabbing? (*using chopsticks to point, also using them casually throughout the play*)

DIRECTOR: Well, it was always her, but that's what the script called for. She's having a hard time getting over this shock. She's in her room recovering, so please don't talk to her now.

CHIN: Ah, I see your care about your people.

DIRECTOR: Care? I love these people.

CHIN: And how many actors in this Chinese opera?

DIRECTOR: Well, there were 17 altogether, but only 7 in the scene we were shooting. Let's see, there was: Tony the Pony, but he's always at the track; Gloria the Gorgeous, and she really thinks she's hot stuff. There's Mary Mayflower, who comes to us from England. Oh, Seldom Silent Sarah Slavens, who's always talking. It seems she's making up for her grandfather, a great actor from the silent film era. And of course, Jake the Flake. Oh, yes, and also Sam Diamond, a real card.

CHIN: Miss Mama, you have said someone must have switched knives. So who is responsible for props?

DIRECTOR: Ah. Well, we don't have a special person, but Gloria kind of took care of them. She's one of our actresses.

CHINK: Ah, please to speak.

DIRECTOR: Look, Chin, anybody could have replaced that knife.

CHIN: Then you should not mind if I speak to her.

(DIRECTOR goes to edge of stage to summon GLORIA)

DIRECTOR: Gloria, Mr. Chin wants to speak to you.

(GLORIA enters. The DIRECTOR sits in the director's chair with her back to the audience)

CHIN: Ah, Miss Gloria, you are prop lady?

GLORIA: Yes, that's me.

CHIN: Oh, Miss Gloria, did you know Mr. Flake? I mean before the play.

GLORIA: Know him? He was my third husband.

CHIN: *(in dismay)* You were married to Mr. Flake?

GLORIA: Yes. I was pregnant and he was the lucky guy.

CHIN: You mean he possibly is not the father of your child?

GLORIA: Oh, I think he was. But that makes no difference now because I had a miscarriage. I was playing Virgin Mary. Have you seen that movie where I was the Virgin. It was called "*The 2½ Commandments.*"

CHIN: Not see movie.

END OF FREEVIEW

You'll want to read and perform this show!