

Head First or Feet First?

Douglas Campbell



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HEAD FIRST OR FEET FIRST?

by

Douglas Campbell

CAST

EMILY THROCKMORTON: Sister of the deceased.

MILLIE THROCKMORTON: Wife of the deceased.

ELWOOD THROCKMORTON: Brother of the deceased.

GRETA FIREFLY: A famous detective.

POLICE OFFICER: A female or male officer of the law.

Place

The Copa Coconut, a residential hotel catering to seniors.

Time

The late 1940s.

Setting: The game room of the Copa Coconut Hotel. The main entrance to the game room is Up Right. There is an entrance to a balcony Up Left. A chair can be seen on the balcony. (The balcony could be suggested by a small wood fence panel.) Near Center Stage is a game table with chairs. Down Right is a telephone table. A bookcase could be placed Stage Right and a potted palm Down Left. A sign could be placed on the telephone table or on top of the bookcase saying, 'Copa Coconut Hotel Game Room.'

At Rise: The stage is dark. (SOUND CUE: A man's scream and a loud crash.)

SCENE 1

EMILY: *(offstage)* What was that?

MILLIE: *(offstage)* It sounded like someone screamed and knocked over a lamp.

(SOUND CUE: Door opening. The lights come up. EMILY and MILLIE enter.)

EMILY: Or it might have been Elwood trying to sing again and someone threw a vase at him.

ELWOOD: *(entering)* I resent that, Emily!

EMILY: Elwood! I didn't know you were behind us.

ELWOOD: *(looking around)* Nobody is in here.

EMILY: Millie? Was Malachi drinking on the balcony again?

MILLIE: Let's look and see. *(They cross Up Left to the balcony and look down)* It's Malachi! He's fallen off the balcony!

EMILY: Good grief! Is he all right?

ELWOOD: What do you mean, "Is he all right?" If you fell head first, three stories, would you be all right?

EMILY: How do you know he fell head first? Maybe he fell feet first.

MILLIE: I think he's fallen on the trash can. We better go down and —

ELWOOD: Stay here. I'll go down. You and Emily come back inside. I don't want either of you falling off the balcony.

(ELWOOD exits Up Right. MILLIE and EMILY return to Center.)

MILLIE: Maybe we should call an ambulance.

EMILY: That's a good idea, Millie. You sit down, and I'll call the hotel operator.
(she crosses to the telephone table)

MILLIE: *(sitting down at the game table)* Poor Malachi! I don't know how many times I've told him not to drink on the balcony.

EMILY: *(picks up the telephone)* He should definitely lay off the beer.

MILLIE: At least it's better than drinking gin.

EMILY: Hello? Hello? Operator? Operator? Are you there? Oh, thank goodness. This is Emily Throckmorton calling from the game room. Could you call an ambulance? I think my brother, Malachi, has fallen from the game room balcony. No, this is not a prank call. This is a matter of life and death. Yes, right away, please! *(hanging up)* Inefficiency. *(she shakes her head in disgust and crosses to MILLIE)*

MILLIE: I hope they come soon, Emily! I'm a bundle of nerves!

EMILY: If the driver doesn't stop for coffee and a donut, the ambulance should be here in ten minutes.

MILLIE: Malachi just won't listen to reason. That balcony rail is simply too low. He must have had too much beer and fell.

EMILY: Let's just hope he's all right.

ELWOOD: *(returning, Up Right)* What a mess!

EMILY: Is he alive, Elwood?

ELWOOD: Of course not. He's dead.

MILLIE: Oh, no! Not my Malachi!

ELWOOD: And five perfectly good trash cans were flattened.

EMILY: We know you hated him, Elwood. But have a little respect for the dead.

ELWOOD: Everyone deals with grief in his own way.

(Greta Firefly enters Up Right)

GRETA: All right, everybody! I saw Malachi Throckmorton whiz past my window. Now he's deader than an alehouse doornail. Which one of you did it?

EMILY: Did what, Miss Firefly?

GRETA: Murdered Malachi.

MILLIE: What?!

ELWOOD: What makes you think he was murdered?

GRETA: A man who regularly drinks on the balcony, Doctor, is not likely to fall over. Now which one of you did it?

EMILY: I resent that, Miss Firefly! Why would one of us murder Malachi?

GRETA: Because you all hated him.

ELWOOD: All the senior residents at the Copa Coconut Hotel hated him.

MILLIE: I never hated Malachi. After all, he was my husband. I...I...

EMILY: Adored him?

MILLIE: Well...tolerated him.

GRETA: If you consult any basic psychology textbook, you'll find that the word tolerated is just a euphemism for despised.

ELWOOD: He was probably smashed on gin and lost his footing.

MILLIE: Oh, Elwood, you knew he gave up hard liquor for beer.

ELWOOD: I'm sorry to tell you this, Millie, but I've seen him sneak out there for a whole bottle of gin. Heck, sometimes even vodka or whisky.

GRETA: Come on! Out with it! Which one of you pushed him?

ELWOOD: Pushed him? There's no one in this room who could push a 300-pound man over a balcony.

MILLIE: That's right, Elwood.

EMILY: You may be our most famous resident, Miss Firefly, but you certainly aren't our brightest!

ELWOOD: This is one case that the great detective, Greta Firefly, can't solve for the simple reason that there is no case. It was an accident, pure and simple.

GRETA: In my experience, Doctor, nothing is pure and nothing is simple. (*GRETA quickly crosses and enters the balcony Up Left*)

MILLIE: What is she going out there for?

EMILY: Probably to look for clues.

ELWOOD: Clues! I'm afraid she's wasting her time. She won't find any.

(*GRETA exits the library and enters the library*)

GRETA: I wouldn't be too sure about that, Doctor. Somebody left a pair of socks and shoes, as well as a blue notebook. (*GRETA places the socks and shoes on the game table. She then begins to read the notebook.*)

EMILY: Elwood must have been out there in his bare feet!

MILLIE: He could have caught a bad cold.

EMILY: Or worse, pneumonia.

MILLIE: Or bronchitis.

EMILY: (*sarcastic*) Maybe even bubonic plague.

MILLIE: Bubonic plague?!

ELWOOD: Relax, Millie. I think we can rule that out.

MILLIE: He could have certainly caught some respiratory ailment.

EMILY: He always did have a bad cough.

MILLIE: I know! He must have sneezed, lost his balance, and fallen over!

(*GRETA snaps the notebook shut and places it on the game table*)

SCENE 2

Setting: *The game room, three hours later.*

At Rise: MILLIE, EMILY, and ELWOOD are sitting in the game room. GRETA is on the telephone.

GRETA: Oh? I see. Really? That's very interesting. Well, thank you very much, Captain. We'll be expecting your people shortly. Bye. *(hangs up telephone)*

(ELWOOD picks up the blue notebook and begins to read it)

MILLIE: Did the police determine the cause of death, Miss Firefly?

GRETA: They most certainly did.

EMILY: It was suicide, wasn't it?

GRETA: What makes you think it was suicide?

EMILY: Well, Malachi had nothing to live for except his stinky cigars.

MILLIE: Maybe he slipped on a banana peel and fell over the rail.

EMILY: Nonsense, Millie. I think he killed himself.

MILLIE: Oh, Malachi would never do anything like that.

EMILY: Why not?

MILLIE: What do you mean, "Why not?"

(ELWOOD snaps the blue notebook shut and quickly puts it in his pocket)

EMILY: Malachi was always a little off his rocker.

ELWOOD: We have to face facts. Malachi Throckmorton was a deeply disturbed man. And because he was disturbed, everyone hated him. It was only natural that he would feel the rejection and eventually do himself in.

MILLIE: Nonsense! I think it was an accident.

ELWOOD: It was either an accident or suicide, Miss Firefly.

GRETA: Wrong. As I said before, he was murdered.

EMILY: Murdered?! How?

GRETA: He was drugged!

ELWOOD: Drugged? Who drugged him?

GRETA: You, Doctor!

ELWOOD: Me?

GRETA: Yes, you! The autopsy report found a heavy dose of Toezac, an experimental drug used to treat toenail fungus. Because of the numbing of the toes, it's supposed to be injected into the feet while the patient is in bed. As his chiropodist, you administered the drug as he was sitting on the balcony, smoking. Because of the placement of the chair, you knew that when Malachi stood up, he'd topple over and plunge to his death.

ELWOOD: Nonsense, Miss Firefly. True, I gave him an injection of Toezac. However, I encouraged him to quickly retire to his bed. Was it my fault that he didn't take my advice and chose to remain on the balcony to smoke his foul smelling cigars?

GRETA: Yes! The effects of Toezac are felt immediately!

MILLIE: I don't understand why Elwood would murder his own brother.

GRETA: Please hand me the blue notebook, Doctor.

ELWOOD: Blue notebook? What...what blue notebook?

GRETA: The one I put on the library table about an hour ago.

ELWOOD: I...I haven't seen any —

GRETA: I saw you slip it into your jacket pocket a little while ago.

ELWOOD: *(taking out a notebook)* Oh. You mean this one? *(GRETA snatches the notebook from ELWOOD)* Hey, that's my—

GRETA: Your notebook? I think not, Doctor.

MILLIE: That belonged to Malachi! That was his To Do List.

GRETA: That's right, Millie. If you remember, I found the blue notebook on the balcony. I put it on the game table where Elwood would be sure to find it. If Elwood were guilty, I knew he would make every effort to hide it.

EMILY: Hide it? Why?

GRETA: Because the details in the notebook explain why Elwood might murder his brother.

MILLIE: Well, what does it say?

GRETA: According to his notes, Malachi planned to see his attorney tomorrow and cut Elwood out of his will.

MILLIE: Why would Malachi do something like that? He knew that Elwood can't afford to retire. That's why he's still working at the foot clinic.

GRETA: According to his notes, Malachi gave Elwood six months to cure his toenail fungus. It's been five years. He was fed up!

ELWOOD: I told Malachi these conditions take time. He just wouldn't listen to reason. During his last visit to the clinic, he told me he was removing my name from his will. I pleaded with him. I even offered to give him a larger discount than the one that I give the senior residents of the Copa Coconut Hotel.

EMILY: How much of a discount were you going to give him, Elwood?

ELWOOD: That's confidential, Emily. Between doctor and patient.

(Sound Cue: A siren)

MILLIE: Thank goodness! The police are coming.

ELWOOD: THE POLICE!

GRETA: That's right, Doctor!

ELWOOD: I've got to get out of here! (*ELWOOD spins around and dashes Up Right. A POLICE OFFICER appears at the entrance.*)

POLICE OFFICER: Hold it right there, buddy!

GRETA: Officer, you can arrest this man, Dr. Elwood Throckmorton, for the murder of his brother, Malachi Throckmorton!

ELWOOD: I knew I should have escaped the moment Greta Firefly arrived!

POLICE OFFICER: (*handcuffing ELWOOD*) Never mind, Doctor. Thanks, Miss Firefly!

GRETA: You're welcome, Officer.

POLICE OFFICER: My pleasure. Come along, Doctor. The paddy wagon is waiting. (*he hauls ELWOOD away*)

EMILY: This is terrible, Millie!

MILLIE: It certainly is.

EMILY: A horrible, horrible, tragedy!

GRETA: It's difficult. Knowing one brother is dead and the other killed him.

EMILY: Oh, it's not that, Miss Firefly. I always knew Elwood was a bad apple. And I knew Malachi had one foot in the grave.

GRETA: Really? What is it then?

EMILY: Where in the world are we going to find another cheap foot doctor to treat our corns?

BLACKOUT