DEADLY DEAL

By Billy St. John

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DEDICATION

To the cast and crew of the original production and my parents Billy and Hazel St. John, for their love and support.

The Playwright, Billy St. John

This play, originally entitled “Death Card,” was first produced at the Soldier Show Center, Fort Campbell, Kentucky, on January 21, 1988, under the direction of the playwright, Mr. Billy St. John, with the following cast:

Charles Lansing ... Phillip Whittinghill
Lt. Kenneth Paris ... Mike Shoulders
Evelyn Lansing ... Carmen Klapperich
Carolyn Bascomb ... Ann Petrie
Craig Williams ... James Stump
Laura Williams ... Ginger Mulvey
Madam Arcadia ... Betty Gaia
Fenton Marshbanks ... Bill Ezell
Minnie Marshbanks ... Pam Baker

SYNOPSIS

Here's a mystery your audience will love because they get to help solve it!

Charles Lansing, a devious millionaire with lots of enemies, has been found murdered at his country estate and Lt. Paris is in charge of the investigation. Alibis are reenacted by the suspects including Evelyn, the third wife, married to Lansing for less than a year; Laura and Craig, the brooding stepchildren; Carolyn Bascomb, the deceased's attorney, a woman opposed to his third marriage and the recent changes in his will; Madam Arcadia, a spiritualist, who predicted his death; and the Fenton and Minnie Marshbanks, the handyman and his wife who wish to leave their jobs. Everyone had motive and opportunity.

At the end of Act I, Lt. Paris leads the audience in a relaxed question and answer session with the seven suspects. During intermission, the audience can cast their ballots. We include dozens of sample questions and answers at the end of each playbook and a sample ballot for your program.

Actors and audience alike will enjoy this tightly woven, suspenseful play with one easy set. Don't just stage another mystery play - stage an event, *Deadly Deal.*

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Time: The present, just after midnight.

Act I: The parlor of Darkwood, the country estate of Charles Lansing, who has been found shot to death.
Intermission: Audience can question the cast.
Act II: The parlor of Darkwood, a short time later.
At curtain: Audience winner is named.

CHARACTERS
(4 M, 5 W)

CHARLES LANSING: Devious millionaire with lots of enemies.

LT. KENNETH PARIS: In charge of the investigation; a gruff man, his humor sardonic. Beneath the hard exterior there is a warmth that he reveals when dealing with some of the suspects, the Williams in particular.

EVELYN LANSING: An attractive woman, mid-30s, intelligent, and shrewd. She attempts to play the bereaved widow for Lt. Paris, but doesn't bother to hide her true nature from the others.

CAROLYN BASCOMB: Reserved in manner and appearance. She keeps her emotions under control, and is capable of exhibiting a somewhat cool detachment from the others. She is strong, but never hard or harsh. We can see the warm feelings she has for Craig and Laura.

CRAIG WILLIAMS: Mid-20s, but he is a child emotionally. Very likable, but is nervous and easily frightened.

LAURA WILLIAMS: A year or two older than her brother, but the responsibility of caring for him has given her an air of maturity. She is attractive, good natured, and seemingly innocent.

MADAM ARCADIA: Gray-haired, of indeterminate age. She is a spiritualist and looks the part, dressing flamboyantly. Her belief in spiritualism must never appear phony. She is used to dealing with skeptics, and their barbs leave her totally unruffled.

FENTON MARSHBANKS: A hard-working old gentleman who, like his wife, Minnie, is from the old country. They worked for Craig and Laura's mother, Ava, long before she ever married her second husband, Charles Lansing.

MINNIE MARSHBANKS: In her 60s, with white hair and wire-rim glasses. Has a Cockney accent that becomes more pronounced when she gets nervous or excited which is often.

*See additional notes at the end of the script.

ACT I

(AT RISE: The stage is dark. After a beat, a pin SPOT comes up slowly on CHARLES LANSING dressed in dark slacks, a white shirt and a velvet smoking jacket. Lansing is sitting slumped in UR high-back chair. There is a bullet hole in the center of his forehead. Rivulets of blood run from the hole and down his face. After a brief silence, a voice from the darkness DL says:)

LT. PARIS: Charles Lansing was murdered tonight.

(The SPOT on LANSING begins to fade as another SPOT comes up on Police Detective LT. KENNETH PARIS in the DL corner.)

LT. PARIS: *(To the audience.)* He was seated in the parlor at Darkwood, his country estate. At approximately midnight, someone pointed a gun at the man's head and fired a bullet into his brain. Lansing's death was instantaneous ... or so the coroner said. I didn't think to ask him if it was permanent as well.

(By now the SPOT on LANSING is completely out. LANSING leaves the stage and the other CAST MEMBERS come on.)

LT. PARIS: In case you're wondering, my name is Paris ... Police Detective Lt. Kenneth Paris. I caught the call when Mrs. Lansing phoned the station to report her husband's demise. I herded my forensics team into squad cars, and we sped to Darkwood with our sirens screaming. They made quite a racket, but not, I can assure you, enough to wake the dead.

(The LIGHTS come up on a parlor in Darkwood. The following people are positioned on the set thusly:Seated on the fireplace bench SR - CAROLYN BASCOMB. Standing UR - MINNIE and FENTON MARSHBANKS.)

(Seated on the UC chair at the round table - MADAM ARCADIA. Seated on chair to the SR of the desk - EVELYN LANSING. Seated on the chair to the SL of the desk - CRAIG WILLIAMS. Standing above the chair SL of the desk - LAURA WILLIAMS. THEY face forward, expressionless, and do not acknowledge the detective.)

LT. PARIS: In addition to Charles Lansing, there were seven other people in Darkwood tonight. Well, seven that we were sure of.

(HE crosses into the scene, approaching each CHARACTER as he introduces him or her. The DL corner LIGHT fades out.)

LT. PARIS: There was his wife of almost one year, Evelyn Lansing. He married her three months after the second Mrs. Lansing died ... or rather she married him, if you catch my drift. *(Crossing SR.)* The charming nuptials were performed against the expensive advice of his lawyer, Carolyn Bascomb.

(HE crosses back to the desk area.)

LT. PARIS: Equally opposed to this union made in heaven-knows-where were Lansing's stepchildren, Craig and Laura Williams, offspring of his then recently departed spouse. Craig Williams is, sad to say, a victim of arrested development. Though he is an adult in many respects, emotionally Mr. Williams is no more than ten years old. His main purpose in life was, apparently, to stay out of his step-father's way. Laura Williams is quiet-natured like her brother, but hers is a brooding silence. There appears to be an intelligent mind at work behind those seemingly innocent eyes. She gives the impression she knows something you don't ... maybe she does. *(HE crosses to SC.)* Although Lansing was a staid and humorless man, he did allow himself one eccentricity ... a belief in the supernatural.

End of Freeview

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