MURDER Runs in the Family

By Pat CooK

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Jack Sparks is a seedy, wise-cracking private eye. Anyone can tell he's a detective just by looking at his jacket. And he knows just how to handle his latest job, protecting Heather Pallfeather, whose father died rather mysteriously. The will is to be read at midnight. But which "will" will it be?... The one substituted by the ex-con son-in-law? Or the one switched by the crazy aunt? Even the butler is a suspect since he carries a gun and seems to know more than he's telling. Heather's mother, Mirium, seems a bit batty but she has a plan of her own. And dead bodies pile up like firewood as Jack tries to unravel just who is killing all the Pallfeathers. And he only has until midnight. Unfortunately, the prime suspect is Jack himself. Throw in a lady of mystery, twins who are never seen together, and a thunderstorm and Jack comes to the conclusion that murder runs in the family.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(5 men, 7 women)

JACK SPARKS: A 30 year old private eye who's seen too many late movies.
HEATHER PALLFEATHER: A naive young woman who's out to solve a murder.
MONTGOMERY: The quintessential butler, staunch, never smiling.
MIRIUM PALLFEATHER: A dithering matron who has her own plan to find the killer.
CLAUDE PURDY: A shady but eloquent ex-con.
PATRICIA PURDY: Heather's stepsister and Claude's man-hungry, conniving wife.
MAXINE PALLFEATHER: A sinister, "missing" daughter, very athletic.
KATHLEEN PALLFEATHER: One of a set of twins, Heather's younger sister.
AUNT ZELDA: A batty sister of Mirium's
CLEO BURDETT: A disorganized lawyer.
MESSENGER: A Western Union messenger.
POLICEMAN: An investigating officer.

TIME: The present.

PLACE: The living room of the Pallfeather estate.

SETTING

The setting for this little intrigue is the outer living room of the estate of the late Bernard Pallfeather. The large living room gives the appearance of having once seen better days. Nevertheless, it maintains a proud facade as if denying the ugly crime that occurred some days earlier.

The front door is located SR and is flanked by two windows, each grandly draped. The second door is located on the US wall near the front door. The closet, like the house, is of another age and is very large. A set of stairs in USL. The third door, which leads to the rest of the house is located on the SL wall.

The furniture is a fairly standard assortment of chairs, end tables, lamps and throw rugs but each piece seems unique as if it has a story of it's own to tell. The large couch resides DSL near the fireplace. On the sofa table directly behind it rests the telephone. Near its DSR arm is a matching stuffed chair. The rest of the furniture makes up other small areas about the room.

SOUND EFFECTS

Advancing footsteps, thunderclaps, gunshots, door openings and slams and approaching siren sounds.

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: MONTGOMERY is on the phone, and during the conversation he keeps looking over his shoulder, making sure he is not overheard.)

MONTGOMERY: I understand your concern but you must believe me. Everything is under control. That's right, the reading of the will is at midnight. That's why everyone has to stay here tonight. Mrs. Pallfeather? No, we can't get rid of her, not now. Maybe later. *(HE opens his jacket with his free hand and takes out a revolver.)* No, don't worry. If it comes to that I'll take care of her. Where is she now? I'm not real sure but I've taken precautions. *(HE smiles and returns his gun.)* Well, do you remember the old story about the mouse putting a bell on the cat? Something like that. *(A loud clanging is heard offstage.)* I gotta' go. Milady is clanging.

(HE hurriedly hangs up the phone and picks up a feather duster. HE begins dusting the sofa table as MIRIUM enters through the SL door.)

MIRIUM: Montgomery! Montgomery! *(MONTGOMERY turns to face her. SHE blithely moves into the room, still searching.)* Montgomery? Montgomery! *(SHE is now standing in front of MONTGOMERY. Still SHE calls.)* Montgomery! Montgomery! *(Suddenly she "sees" HIM.)* Oh! There you are.
MONTGOMERY: Yes mum.
MIRIUM: Is everything ready for tonight?
MONTGOMERY: Yes mum.
MIRIUM: Good, good. Now, I want you to assemble the staff.
MONTGOMERY: I AM the staff, Mum.
MIRIUM: Nonsense, man, you are the butler.
MONTGOMERY: Yes Mum, but I'm filling in for the others.
MIRIUM: Oh? What about the gardener?

MONTGOMERY: Released a few days ago.
MIRIUM: Oh. The chauffeur?
MONTGOMERY: Given his notice, Mum.
MIRIUM The groundskeeper?
MONTGOMERY: Laid off.
MIRIUM: The cook?
MONTGOMERY: Let go.
MIRIUM: The upstairs maid?
MONTGOMERY: Pink slip city.
MIRIUM: The accountant?
MONTGOMERY: In the unemployment line.
MIRIUM: The laundress?
MONTGOMERY: Got her two weeks and gone.
MIRIUM: Oh well. At least, none of them were fired.
MONTGOMERY: If you say so, Mum.
MIRIUM: You're filling in for all of them?
MONTGOMERY: How well you put it, Mum.

(MIRIUM paces in front of MONTGOMERY like an inspecting officer.)

MIRIUM: Well, well, well! Well, well, well! Well, well... *(SHE stops and looks hard at the BUTLER.)*
MONTGOMERY: Well, Mum?
MIRIUM: Exactly, Montgomery. *(SHE get right in HIS face.)* You DO see the problem, don't you sir?
MONTGOMERY: Problem, Mum?
MIRIUM: Filling each of those positions yourself. Quite a quandary, don't you agree?
MONTGOMERY: You're rambling on even more than usual for the afternoon, Mum.
MIRIUM: *(Proudly)* Well, I have been practicing! Pay attention, Montgomery.
MONTGOMERY: *(At attention)* Yes, Mum.
MIRIUM: Each of those positions requires one day off, correct?
MONTGOMERY: Yes, Mum.
MIRIUM: And they are alternating days off.
MONTGOMERY: Yes, Mum.

End of Freeview

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