

# **Murder by Accident**

*(A killer farce in two acts)*

By  
*Joan Sween*

## **Performance Rights**

It is an infringement of the federal copyright law to copy or reproduce this script in any manner or to perform this play without royalty payment. All rights are controlled by Eldridge Publishing Co., Inc. Contact the publisher for additional scripts and further licensing information. The author's name must appear on all programs and advertising with the notice: "Produced by special arrangement with Eldridge Publishing Company."

**ELDRIDGE PUBLISHING COMPANY**  
**hiStage.com**

© 2011 by Joan Sween

Download your complete script from Eldridge Publishing  
<http://www.histage.com/playdetails.asp?PID=2381>

### **STORY OF THE PLAY**

Elaine has had enough. Ralph, her exasperating, risk-taking husband, has got to go. With the help of Pookie, her younger sister; Anthony "Prettyboy" Ferrari, her father; and Rudy Gambruzzo, her father's personal assistant, she sets out to stage an accident that will rid her of marital stress.

In the space of one morning, she accidentally kills the pool guy and the mailman before finally clobbering Ralph. Then she learns that Ralph must be alive that afternoon to sign a vital contract or she will be not only happily widowed, but unhappily bankrupt.

Pookie and Elaine lash Ralph's inert form into a wheelchair and frantically hide him until he is made to appear to sign the contract. Her dreams of widowhood are dashed when it is discovered that Ralph was merely passed out and her third murder victim was actually the meter reader. Full evening, one interior set.

This farce is ideal for theatres looking to expand their talent base. The weight of the play is carried by two women—one young, one middle-aged—and all other roles are small parts with several entrances but few lines. Perfect for giving beginning actors a taste of theatre without an overwhelming burden of memorization. And fun, too. .

*The play was originally written for the International Mystery Writers Festival in Owensboro, KY.*

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*10 men ages 18-55, 6 women ages 20-55.*

**Ralph Winston** .....a wealthy industrialist  
**Elaine Winston**.....his wife  
**Anthony “Prettyboy” Ferrari** .....Elaine’s father  
**Antonia “Pookie” Ferrari** .....Elaine’s sister  
**Francis Rosen**.....Ralph’s personal assistant  
**Chuck** .....the pool guy  
**Biff Frijole**.....Elaine’s personal trainer  
**Martin Martin**.....the mailman  
**Rudy Gambruzzo**.....Mr. Ferrari’s personal  
assistant  
**Brian Cadwell**.....a wealthy industrialist  
**Cynthia Forbes** .....the notary next door  
**Louise**.....the housekeeper  
**Gunnar**.....the gardener  
**Lt. Sam Sargent** .....a homicide detective  
**Monica** .....a crime scene officer  
**Joanne**.....a crime scene officer

***Doubling possible:*** Chuck and Martin can double as Rudy  
and Gunnar.

**Scene:** The living room of the upper-class Winston home.

**Time:** The present.

## **SETTING**

SR and up two steps is a foyer level containing the front door. One can exit US on the foyer level to the library and other areas of the house. US of the foyer, on the main level, is a staircase that curves up and out of sight to the R, over the foyer. USC is a glass wall of sliding patio doors with a view of the patio area. The doors are flanked by pull-drapes held back with tasseled satin rope loops. One of the doors stands open. SL is a double door leading to dining room, kitchen, and other areas of the house. The room is filled with designer furnishings, including a liquor cabinet, a decorative writing desk, a full-sized couch and a coffee table. Tall plants in large pots accent the decor, including several on the floor in the curve defined by the staircase. A topiary tree stands against the wall on a step partway up the staircase.

**Act I**  
**Scene 1**

*(AT RISE: We see the living room of a high-end house. The room remains empty for a beat or two, then ELAINE enters from the L door, leaving it open. We can see that she is not a spring chicken, but is very well-preserved and still attractive. She wears an elegant silk dressing gown. Without breaking stride or looking at anything in particular, she crosses to the patio door.)*

**ELAINE:** That is disgusting! Have you no sense of shame?  
*(SHE looks out at the patio.)* It's another beautiful day.  
Most people are out doing healthful things.

*(SHE exits up the staircase. The room remains empty for a beat or two, then LOUISE steps just inside the L door. She wears a plain dark dress and white apron, which immediately identify her as the housekeeper. She stands stiffly and speaks to the room in general.)*

**LOUISE:** Mrs. Winston says breakfast can be cleared if no one else comes to the table in the next ten minutes. *(Beat. Looks at her watch.)* The time is 8:43. Ten minutes from now is 8:53. *(Beat. She grumbles to herself.)* I was hired to cook. Not to wait.

*(SHE turns and exits back through L door, leaving it open. The room remains empty for a beat or two, then POOKIE enters through the L door, munching a piece of toast. She is young, lovely and wearing a heavily embroidered kimono for a dressing gown. Two chopsticks with dangling flowers protrude from her hair. She crosses toward the stairs, not looking at anything in particular.)*

**POOKIE:** Louise says seven minutes and counting.

*Murder by Accident*

- 6 -

*(SHE exits up the stairs. The room remains empty for a beat or two, then ELAINE comes down the stairs, fully dressed for the day. She walks to upstage of the couch and prods something with her foot.)*

**ELAINE:** Your yes man will be here in less than 15 minutes. You want him to see you looking like that?

*(RALPH crawls up from behind the couch. We can see that he is rather more well-nourished than well-preserved. He wears an undershirt, suit pants and no shoes. Everything about him is rumpled. He has an empty lo-ball glass in his hand, which he lets slide down onto the couch cushions.)*

**RALPH:** Sweetheart! How's my baby?

*(HE sweeps HER into a bear hug, tries to give her a big smoochie on the cheek, staggers, and hangs on to her for stability.)*

**ELAINE:** *(SHE tries to push him away.)* Stop that! I said your dancing flea---

**RALPH:** *(Hugging HER and snoodling his face into her neck.)* Mmmmmm. You smell good. You're some classy babe.

**ELAINE:** Do you want him to see you---

**RALPH:** *(Still nuzzling HER.)* He's called a personal assistant and I pay him to like me any way he finds me. I've got an idea. Let's go upstairs and make him wait.

**ELAINE:** *(Trying to get un-hugged.)* Ralph, we have to talk. You can't keep doing this every weekend; you'll make yourself sick. You need a hobby.

**RALPH:** Sugar, I work hard all week. My hobby is staying soused all weekend. It relaxes me.

*(SFX: The doorbell chimes. LOUISE enters from L and crosses to the front door.)*

**LOUISE:** It's half a mile from the kitchen to the front door, if anyone wants to know. *(No one pays any attention to her. This is apparently a familiar topic.)*

**ELAINE:** Ralph. Seriously. Look at me. *(SHE holds HIM at arm's length.)* Seriously. This has gone on too long. You have to choose. It's me or the booze.

**RALPH:** Aw, Sweetcakes, you don't mean that. I'm sober five days of the week.

*(HE awkwardly pulls HER to him again and smooches along her jaw line. She pushes him hard enough to get him to release her. He makes a grab for the back of the couch and supports himself.)*

**ELAINE:** And five days of the week you work till midnight or you're off on some business trip. I've had it. Take your pick, me or the booze.

**RALPH:** Babykins, you know you don't mean that. If you left me, who would pay your charge accounts?

*(LOUISE returns from the front door with FRANCIS ROSEN following her.)*

**LOUISE:** Mr. Rosen is here. *(Grumbling to herself.)* I'm doing the half mile back to the kitchen.

*(SHE crosses to the SL door and exits. FRANCIS, in a suit and carrying a briefcase, stands R, feeling awkward.)*

**RALPH:** You'd be smarter to kill me.

**ELAINE:** What??

**RALPH:** Women are too emotional. They never take a logical look at things. If I was married to a man—perish the thought—he would say to himself, Do I want to be a penniless divorcée or a rich widow? And he wouldn't leave, he'd kill me. *(HE laughs largely at his own joke, wobbles over to ELAINE, gives her a smoochie, turns her around, and slaps her on the rear.)* Go run up a charge account, Pussycat, and don't worry about me.

### **End of Freeview**

Download your complete script from Eldridge Publishing  
<http://www.histage.com/playdetails.asp?PID=2381>

Eldridge Publishing, a leading drama play publisher since 1906, offers more than a thousand full-length plays, one-act plays, melodramas, holiday plays, religious plays, children's theatre plays and musicals of all kinds.

For more than a hundred years, our family-owned business has had the privilege of publishing some of the finest playwrights, allowing their work to come alive on stages worldwide.

We look forward to being a part of your next theatrical production.

Eldridge Publishing... for the start of your theatre experience!