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It's Only Murder

An Adult Comedy Mystery

With a Number of Immature Moments

Sam Bobrick

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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IT'S ONLY MURDER was first presented as a staged reading as part of the Seasoned Readings series at the Writers Guild of America, West in Los Angeles, CA on March 31, 2014. The performance was directed by Susan Morgenstern. The cast was as follows:

JEROME TEPPEL . . . . . Richard Horvitz
FRANCINE TEPPEL. . . . . Devon Sorvari
LENORE FRANKLIN . . . . . Bridget Flanery
SID DECKER . . . . . Philip Proctor

THE CAST

(In Order of Appearance)

JEROME TEPPEL – A CPA in his late thirties.

FRANCINE TEPPEL – Jerome's wife in her late twenties.

LENORE FRANKLIN – The Teppel's next door neighbor in her early thirties.

SID DECKER – A very seedy Private Detective in his forties.

TIME

The Present.

PRODUCTION NOTE

The play has no formal set and is done with appropriate lighting and a minimum of furniture.

ACT I

Scene One

(TIME: The present. Evening.)

(PLACE: The **TEPPEL** *living room.)*

(AT RISE: **JEROME TEPPEL**, *a somewhat uptight CPA in his late thirties is sitting at a desk and going through his monthly credit card statement, checking the charges against a stack of receipts he has in front of him. After routinely going through several of them and marking them off the statement, he sees something on the statement that confuses him.)*

JEROME. What the hell is this?

(He then searches through the receipts until he finds the one he's looking for.)

Oh, my God.

(Calling)

Francine! Francine!

(Looks at the receipt again)

Jesus Christ! This is crazy.

(Calling again)

Francine!

(Louder and more impatient. He turns and calls upstage:)

Francine!

*(***FRANCINE TEPPEL**, *an attractive, seemingly sweet, innocently naive and concerned woman in her late twenties enters the room. She is in a bathrobe.)*

FRANCINE. I'm sorry, Jerome, I was getting ready for bed. Something wrong?

JEROME. Yes. Very wrong.

I was going through this months's credit card bill and there was a charge from a place called Larry's Gun Shop.

FRANCINE. Yes. And?

JEROME. I knew it had to be some kind of mistake. So I went through this month's receipts and here it is. Larry's Gun Shop. Three hundred and seventy-two dollars and eighty-four cents for a thirty-eight Smith and Wesson revolver.

(Holds out the receipt to her)

See, here's the receipt.

FRANCINE. Yes. And?

JEROME. What do you mean "yes and"?

FRANCINE. I know how important it is for you to have receipts for everything so I always make sure I get one.

JEROME. Damn it, Francine, you seem to be missing the point. You bought a gun.

FRANCINE. I did. Yes, I know.

JEROME. Why?

FRANCINE. Two reasons. First of all, I know how you love for me to buy things on sale and it was marked down from four-fifty. Of course the bullets were extra but I even got twenty percent off on those. Wasn't that wonderful Jerome?

JEROME. Not necessarily. And your second reason?

FRANCINE. Well, Frankly, I thought we need to have one in the house.

JEROME. Why? I hate guns. Just seeing one makes me nauseous.

FRANCINE. I know. But these are not good times Jerome. There are more home robberies than ever before, more stick ups at ATM's, more drive by shootings. Our streets are swarming with pedophiles and rapists and with police protection stretched to the limit, it's a very dangerous world and I think one that's getting worse every day.

JEROME. I see. So basically what you're saying is that I'm not adequately terrified.

FRANCINE. You're an accountant, Jerome. You live in a whole other world. I thought it was about time one of us approached this troubling situation in a realistic way.

JEROME. First of all, and I'm sorry I have to keep reminding you of this, Francine, I'm not just an accountant, I'm a CPA. There's a difference. Like the difference between a doctor and a dentist. A mother is always prouder of the doctor.

FRANCINE. And you're the…

JEROME. The doctor! Yes. Secondly, what the hell do you know about shooting a gun?

FRANCINE. There's really not that much to know. Larry, the gun shop owner, showed me how in just a few minutes. You flip the chamber open, put in the bullets, flip the chamber back, bang bang someone's dead. No big deal. A five year old kid can learn how to do it.

JEROME. Yes, and unfortunately they do. Still, I'm really surprised by this. You never mentioned you wanted to buy a gun before. And we always discuss major purchases together.

FRANCINE. Of course, Jerome, but I was under the impression that a major purchase is something like a car or a refrigerator. This was just a tiny little gun and frankly I felt very good leaving the store with it.

JEROME. They gave you the gun the same day? No background check?

FRANCINE. No, Larry said that if a customer has an honest face that was good enough for him, which was frightening in itself because I realized if I could get one that easily, any nut could get one. Scary, isn't it?

JEROME. More than you know. Okay, so where is this gun?

FRANCINE. Here's another sticky part of that story. I lost it.

JEROME. You lost the gun?

FRANCINE. Yes. The very same day I bought it. That's why I didn't bother bringing it up. You see, after I bought the gun, I had a ton of other errands to do, the mall, the dry cleaners, the grocery store, and so on and so on and when I came home and unloaded the car, it was gone.

Obviously, rushing around to do all the things I had to do, I must have accidentally left the car unlocked and someone stole it.

JEROME. That's terrible.

FRANCINE. I know. That's why you really need a gun. To prevent these kind of crimes.

JEROME. Well, I hope you reported it to the police. I think that's the first thing you're supposed to do when you discover a firearm is missing.

FRANCINE. Well, I haven't done that yet but here's what I was planning. I'm going back to Larry's Gun Shop, explain to him what happened and see if he'll give me another one at the same low, low price and maybe he could also handle all the paper work that goes with reporting my lost gun.

JEROME. Whoa, whoa, whoa! You're not buying another gun.

FRANCINE. No? I need to be honest, Jerome, since I lost the one I bought, I'm feeling very vulnerable.

JEROME. Francine, we've been married ten months now and while at times I have found you a bit flaky, buying a gun has taken things a bit past flaky.

FRANCINE. You think so?

JEROME. Yes, I do.

FRANCINE. You're annoyed with me, aren't you?

JEROME. Yes, I am.

(She sits down and starts to sniffle.)

FRANCINE. I can't do anything right.

JEROME. No, no. That's not true. Sometimes you can.

FRANCINE. Our marriage isn't working, is it Jerome?

JEROME. Of course it is.

FRANCINE. No, no I sense it. You think I'm a scatterbrain, don't you? Admit it.

JEROME. No, not a scatterbrain. Sometimes…sensibly challenged. How's that? Better?

FRANCINE. No. No, it isn't better. I want to be a good wife to you, Jerome, but for my own self worth I need to be my own person in this marriage. I refuse to go on with my every move being questioned, my every decision coming under your scrutiny. I need to be an equal partner in this relationship. Otherwise, Jerome, we are doomed as a couple and as you recall, I refused to sign a pre-nup.

JEROME. *(Thinking about that for a moment)* That's true, isn't it. Smart move on your part. Okay. I'm sorry, Francine. Maybe you're right. I am a bit controlling and maybe I do need to loosen the reins. So, okay, how's this?

(Puts his arm around her to comfort her)

As of right now this marriage is going to be one hundred percent fair.

As of right this minute I, Jerome Teppel, CPA, promise that I will no longer be constantly looking over my wife's shoulder, always criticizing her wifely efforts to make our life together the wonderful relationship I had hoped it would be, even though some of the things she's done in the past have been questionable, if not plain out and out stupid. There! Satisfied?

FRANCINE. Yes. Much more. Thank you, Jerome. You'll see. I'm going to be a very responsible, practical and thoughtful partner.

JEROME. I'm sure of it. Now is there anything else I should know?

FRANCINE. As a matter of fact, while we're on the subject of family expenditures, next month there'll be a six hundred and fifty dollar charge from the Crystal Springs Cemetery.

JEROME. This is going to be a doozie, isn't it Francine?

FRANCINE. Well, you know, Jerome, how the cost of everything keeps rising? I received a solicitation call from one of the sales people at the cemetery who told me that for only a six hundred and fifty dollar deposit, we could reserve a burial plot for the next twenty years at this years low, low price. Knowing how important it is to you that I constantly look for money saving opportunities, I reserved one.

JEROME. One? You reserved one? Only one?

FRANCINE. It made the most sense.

You see with your being nine years older than I am and with men known to die at least ten years before their wives, chances are excellent you're going to go way, way before me and by then who knows if I'm going to want to live in this area anymore.

JEROME. *(Nods. A beat.)* Uh huh. Let me recap this, Francine. You bought a gun to protect us and a cemetery plot for me to save money for us, yes, I guess it all makes sense.

FRANCINE. Of course it does. Plus I no longer am faced with having to make last minute funeral arrangements for you during my time of bereavement which, for the past few months, has been a constant burden on my mind just thinking about it.

(Kisses him on the cheek)

Well, I'm off to bed.

JEROME. I'm happy to hear that.

FRANCINE. *(Starts off then stops and turns)* Oh, one more thing, Jerome. Are you going to be around Thursday evening?

JEROME. Yes, why, I'm afraid to ask.

FRANCINE. Well, a lawyer from the firm that handles your estate will be coming over with a few documents you need to sign.

JEROME. Documents? What kind of documents I'm even more afraid to ask?

FRANCINE. Well, since you're a married man now with new responsibilities, meaning me, and since we are now finally taking a long, hard look at the future, I've arranged for your Will to be amended so that when you do bite the big one or are incapacitated in any way, the financial control of your estate will be smoothly and without question, transferred to your heirs, meaning me, so that she, I being she, will not have to go through any unnecessary legal hassles or costs and will continue to be properly provided for in a way that a loving CPA as yourself would want her to be. Well, don't stay up too late Jerome. I'm quite relieved we had this little discussion. Good night.

(She kisses **JEROME** *on the cheek and exits.* **JEROME** *faces the audience. He is stunned. He starts to count on his fingers.)*

JEROME. A gun, a cemetery plot, changes to my Will… Holy shit, what did I get myself into?

(Blackout)

Scene Two

(TIME: Several days later. Lunchtime.)

(PLACE: A park bench.)

*(***LENORE FRANKLIN***, an attractive woman in her early-thirties sits on the bench, obviously waiting for someone.* **LENORE** *is a very outspoken, straight-to-the-point kind of woman. Right now she seems concerned, troubled. She sees someone and waves.)*

LENORE. Jerome! Over here!

*(***JEROME** *approaches her. He is carrying a bag with their lunch.)*

JEROME. I'm sorry, I'm late, Lenore. There was a line at the deli and it seemed to take forever.

(He starts unpacking the bag which consists of two sandwiches and two cups of coffee.)

LENORE. I'm so glad you were able to make it, Jerome. I know it's strange, my wanting to meet here since we live right next door to each other and are fairly good friends, but I can't take any chances. I need to be very discreet about this which, I think I am being.

JEROME. Yes. Well, whatever the problem is, it seemed to be very urgent.

LENORE. Urgent and uncomfortable. Very uncomfortable.

*(***JEROME** *hands her a sandwich.)*

JEROME. Here you are. A turkey sandwich for you and a roast beef for me.

LENORE. Thank you. It's very sweet of you to bring lunch for us.

JEROME. No problem at all. Besides, I have to grab a bite whenever I can. It's tax season and as usual I'm overwhelmed with more new government forms to fill out, more new government regulations to read, more new irresponsible clients not giving me the right information…it's murder.

LENORE. I know the feeling. The insurance business is no piece of cake either. People late with their premium payment, people making fraudulent claims, people constantly threatening to sue us because they failed to read the small print and didn't realize how few things their policies cover…the day to day stress is overwhelming.

JEROME. I thought you were just a receptionist.

LENORE. I am but I have to open all the mail in the morning and this is what I'm faced with. Believe me, if there was anyway I could dump that job I'd do it in a minute but when you're married to a dead beat, as my husband Anthony has proven himself to be, I have to think twice about that. If I didn't walk away with a nice settlement from my first marriage I don't know how we would be able to afford our lifestyle which is the only reason I think that jerk married me in the first place.

(Bites into sandwich)

Oh, my god, there's mayonnaise on this sandwich. I hate mayonnaise.

JEROME. Really? I'm almost positive you said turkey with mayo.

LENORE. *(Annoyed)* No, I didn't say turkey with mayo. I would never say anything with mayo. Especially turkey.

And I know I said no mayo because I'll always say no mayo even when ordering something they never put mayo on.

JEROME. I'm so sorry. Well, why don't we switch sandwiches? Do you mind mustard? I have roast beef with just mustard on it.

LENORE. Yes, I think that will be much better. I actually like mustard a lot. That's what you should have put on the turkey. Here, I'll take yours and you take mine. That works out much better. Thank you very much.

(They switch sandwiches. **JEROME**, *with disgust, looks at the one he was just handed which now has a big bite out of it.)*

JEROME. Sure. Anyway, you said it was very important that we meet in private.

LENORE. Very. I didn't want Anthony to find out I was talking to you. He's quite paranoid you know.

JEROME. No, I didn't know.

LENORE. Yes. Even more so than I am.

JEROME. So then this is a problem concerning you and Anthony?

LENORE. Partly. It also concerns you too, Jerome. Actually, very much you.

(Bites into **JEROME***'s sandwich)*

Ech! Yuck! I can't eat this. This is practically raw.

JEROME. Yes, well, it's rare. That's the way roast beef usually comes at a deli. Very rare.

LENORE. This is more than very rare, Jerome. You have to be a cannibal to eat this. Let me try my turkey sandwich again.

(Takes the sandwich out of **JEROME***'s hands)*

Turkey!

(Takes a bite, chews it then holds up the roast beef)

Roast beef!

(Takes a bite, chews it then hands it to **JEROME***)*

I think I'll stick with the turkey. But next time, please, no mayo on anything, ever.

JEROME. I'll keep that in mind.

LENORE. Except for chicken salad or egg salad because then the mayo is in it, not on it. I actually *like* mayo when it's in it and not on it.

JEROME. Really?

LENORE. Yes. It's not a bad idea for you to remember that. Now, where were we?

JEROME. I have no idea.

LENORE. Oh, yes. About my husband and your wife.

JEROME. Francine?

LENORE. Yes. And my husband, Anthony. They're having an affair.

JEROME. You're kidding me?

LENORE. I'm afraid not.

(Sips on her coffee)

Oh, damn it. You put cream and sugar in here.

JEROME. Well, I thought you said a coffee reg.

LENORE. A reg, yes. But I meant a reg like in regular size. Coffee comes black, you know. That's the way I like it. If I wanted cream and sugar I would have said cream and sugar. I can't drink this, it's awful.

JEROME. I'm sorry. Actually, mine is black. Why don't we just switch.

LENORE. You don't mind?

JEROME. No, not at all. I would just like to get back to this conversation. You just hit me with some very upsetting news, that my wife and your husband are having an affair.

LENORE. Yes. I'm almost sure of it.

JEROME. What do you mean *almost* sure?

LENORE. We live next door to each other, Jerome. My husband being an artist, a very romantic profession, your wife being an unhappy housewife, both of them home alone, what more do you need to know?

JEROME. Wait a minute. Hold on. What do you mean my wife is unhappy?

LENORE. Because if she was happy she wouldn't be having an affair. Look, you choose to be blind to what's going on, but I don't.

(Sips the coffee)

Oh, my God. This coffee is too hot. It'll never cool off in time to drink it. Let me try the other one again with the cream and sugar.

JEROME. Goddamn it, Lenore. Before you put one more friggen thing in your mouth, for God's sake finish telling me what you came here to tell me.

LENORE. Jerome, Jerome, Jerome. How dimwitted are you? We're neighbors. And although I've always felt you were a very difficult man, as well as being somewhat arrogant, judgmental and for reasons that totally escape me, extremely anti-social, still, you must admit we do have contact with each other. Sometimes we go out to dinner, sometimes a barbecue in our back yards…

JEROME. Jesus Christ, Lenore, I know what we do together! Can you please, please get to this affair stuff before I lose my mind!

LENORE. Jerome, Jerome, Jerome. Don't you see the way they look at each other, the way their eyes brighten when they meet, the way their faces light up? Haven't you noticed any of that?

JEROME. No, not at all.

*(***LENORE** *places her cup next to* **JEROME** *and takes his from his hand.)*

LENORE. Well, I have and I've been noticing it more and more. I can only imagine what happens when we're at work and they're home alone.

JEROME. Imagine? That's the key word. Imagine. This accusation could all be just that, a case of "imagine".

LENORE. Well, then, how's this. The other day I went into Anthony's studio. He is now in the midst of painting a nude portrait of your wife.

JEROME. No?

LENORE. Yes. Full frontal. You see everything. Her no-no's and her yahoo.

JEROME. *(Shocked)* Her yahoo?

LENORE. Her muffin, her love basket, her clam can. Whatever you guys call it.

JEROME. *(Now very upset)* I know what we call it! A nude painting! Oh, my God. She never mentioned she was doing anything like that? Are you sure it's her? Maybe he's doing it from a photograph. Her face and someone else's body. That's done all the time. I'm willing to bet it's not Francine's body.

LENORE. There's a birth mark on her left breast in the shape of a one legged duck.

JEROME. That's Francine's body.

LENORE. You bet it is. I also found something else in his studio that has me very, very worried.

JEROME. Like what?

*(***FRANCINE** *puts down her coffee cup, opens her purse and pulls out a gun.)*

LENORE. Like this. A brand new thirty-eight Smith and Wesson revolver. Anthony has never owned a gun in his life.

JEROME. I think I'm going to throw up.

LENORE. Good. That's the reaction I was hoping for. By the way, did you happen to bring a dessert? I always like to finish my meal with something sweet. I like almost anything but a prune danish, but if that's all you brought, I'll try my best.

(The lights dim. **LENORE** *continues eating.* **JEROME** *has a confused, worried look on his face.)*

You'd better drink your coffee before it gets cold.

(Blackout)

Scene Three

(TIME: That night.)

(PLACE: The **TEPPEL** *living room. Another area.)*

*(***JEROME** *and* **FRANCINE** *are sitting in two arm chairs angled so that they almost face each other as well as the audience.* **FRANCINE** *is reading a magazine and humming softly to herself.* **JEROME** *stares at her for several beats.)*

JEROME. *(Finally)* I had lunch with Lenore today.

FRANCINE. *(Not really interested)* Oh. Lenore from next door.

JEROME. Yes, Lenore from next door. She insisted on talking to me about something very, very upsetting.

FRANCINE. Oh. That's too bad.

JEROME. Do you want to know what it was about?

FRANCINE. Well, I'd say it was about their marriage, if anything.

JEROME. Yes, as a matter of fact, it was about their marriage.

FRANCINE. Well, it's not going to work out. That marriage is too far gone to be saved.

JEROME. Oh. You know that for a fact?

FRANCINE. She's horrible to him. Anthony has been complaining to me about it for months.

JEROME. Complaining to you? Isn't that a bit strange?

FRANCINE. No, not at all. We're neighbors. Every now and then we have coffee together and we talk about our problems, you know the way a lot of women do, except in Anthony's case he's a man.

JEROME. Yes, he is a man, isn't he. And just what problems do you two talk about?

FRANCINE. Well, let's start with Anthony's. Number one, he finds Lenore very difficult to live with. She's never happy with anything. They go to a restaurant she complains about the food, they go to a movie,

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