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BEGINNER'S LUCK



Beginner's Luck

A writer solves a murder mystery

By Craig Sodaro



Meriwether Publishing Ltd.

Contemporary Drama Service

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A writer solves a murder mystery

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CAST OF CHARACTERS
(7M, 12F)

CHLOE CRENSHAW
Eighth grader (F)

EVE CRENSHAW
Her older sister (F)

CURT CRENSHAW
Their fifteen-year-old brother (M)

LIBBY CRENSHAW
Their mother (F)

ABBY ADAMS
Her sister (F)

PERCIVAL PETTIMAN
Wealthy publisher (M)

ROXANNE WINKLE
His secretary (F)

MINERVA PETTIMAN
His wife (F)

ARCHIE ADAMS
Abby's son, an accountant (M)

ROSIE
The Pettimans' cook (F)

AGATHA BAGATELLE
An older mystery writer (F)

EDNA ST. VINCENT McVEY
A poet (F)

RANDY CLANCY
A young how-to author (M)

JOE PUNCHETTE
Author of spy novels (M)

CYNTHIA SWALLOW
Chick lit author (F)

PENNY TRUEHEART
An author of romances (F)

LESTER McBEAN
An author of nature books (M)

LUCY LUCKLESS
Acting chief of police (F)

JAY EDGAR LUGER
Her deputy (M)

PRODUCTION NOTES

Props:

Cell phones (ALL)
Paper, pencil, book (CHLOE CRENSHAW)
Several large manuscripts (LIBBY CRENSHAW)
Small bottle (MINERVA PETTIMAN)
Ledger and several papers (ARCHIE ADAMS)
Plate of appetizers (ROSIE)
Tool kit (RANDY CLANCY)
Watch (PERCIVAL PETTIMAN)
Pill bottle (PERCIVAL PETTIMAN)
Whistle (LIBBY CRENSHAW)
Bowl of fortune cookies with names on them,
each containing a paper with a black dot on it (ROSIE)
Sheet of paper (ROXANNE WINKLE)
Tray covered with a cloth (ROSIE)
Small bottle (RANDY CLANCY)
Stacks of dishes (CHLOE CRENSHAW,
CURT CRENSHAW, and EVE CRENSHAW)
Hammer (RANDY CLANCY)
Note (JAY EDGAR LUGAR)
Tissue (PENNY TRUEHEART)
Book manuscript (LIBBY CRENSHAW)
Small pad and pencil (LIBBY CRENSHAW)
Bag of potato chips (CURT CRENSHAW)
Tea tray with teapot and cups (ROSIE)
Tray with three glasses (ROSIE)
Screwdriver (RANDY CLANCY)

Sound Effects:

Doorbell ringing
Banging Off-stage
Police siren

Lighting Effects:

Blackout, as indicated in the script

Costumes:

Modern everyday dress for all characters.

For comic effect, costume authors according to their characters:

Miranda — chic, expensive, in good taste.

Agatha — frumpy, old-fashioned.

Roxanne — perky, young, business casual.

Edna — diaphanous, ethereal.

Randy — overalls, flannel shirt.

Joe — black turtleneck, dark pants, mysterious.

Lester — jungle jacket, shorts, knee socks.

Cynthia — lots of jewelry, bright colors.

Penny — very feminine, pastels.

The Crenshaws and Abby — classic German Oktoberfest costumes. This includes embroidered dresses for the girls along with aprons and hair ribbons for Libby, Abby, and the girls. Curt wears lederhosen, a white shirt, suspenders, and may even have the Tyrolian hat. In their first scene, they wear modern, everyday dress.

Rosie — dark clothes with a white apron.

Percival Pettiman — flashy sports coat, open-collared shirt, and some bling.

Archie — long-sleeved white shirt, a bowtie, suspenders.

Lucy — a somewhat outdated pantsuit and a trench coat.

Jay Edgar — police uniform.

Setting:

The great room of “Pettiman Palace,” Saturday evening. Wing entrance Downstage Right leads to foyer and main door along with stairs (unseen) to second floor. Wing entrance Downstage Left leads to dining and other rooms on main floor with access to second floor. Couch or chair grouping at center with small accent tables. Fireplace Downstage Right with chairs set against the wall. Upstage Left, a door leading to the butler’s pantry (which connects with the kitchen, unseen). A large window on Upstage wall with curtains drawn. A screen stands Upstage Left. Downstage Left is a small table set with two or three chairs. Over the fireplace hangs a portrait of a handsome man looking very benevolent. The room gives the feeling of superficial ostentation.

Act I, Scene One takes place in the living room of Abby

Adams' house, played before the curtain. Nothing is required.

Scenes:

ACT I

Scene One — The living room of Abby Adams' house, played before the curtain. A midweek afternoon.

Scene Two — The great room of the Pettiman mansion, Saturday evening.

Scene Three — The same, an hour later.

ACT II

Scene One — The same, an hour later.

Scene Two — The same, a few minutes later.

Scene Three — The same, fifteen minutes later.

Synopsis:

When Abby Adams is suddenly laid off from her job, you'd think her widowed sister, Libby Crenshaw, would be very upset. After all, Libby and her three kids — Eve, Curt, and Chloe — have moved in with Abby because their own finances have crashed. But Libby's got a surefire way to get both sisters back on their feet. She's written what she knows to be a bestseller entitled *Beginner's Luck: How to Make a Million out of Nothing*.

The only problem is getting a publisher to even read the manuscript. But Libby has beginner's luck. Abby's son, Archie, is the accountant for Percival Pettiman, a wealthy publisher who is throwing a big dinner party Saturday night for his A-list writers. Luckily for the two sisters, the regular caterers were injured and Archie hires Libby and Abby and the kids to serve the dinner, which will be cooked by the Pettiman's regular chef, Rosie. At some point, Libby decides she'll spring the manuscript on Pettiman.

But Pettiman has a one-track mind. He's cutting expenses

and moving the entire operation to China. When his A-list writers arrive, he lets them know they're going to take hits themselves. The shocked writers include mystery maven Agatha Bagatelle, how-to guru Handy Randy Clancy, poet Edna St. Vincent McVey, spy master Joe Punchette, chick lit author Cynthia Swallow, nature writer Lester McBean, and romance queen Penny Trueheart. Is it any surprise that during dinner, health-nut Pettiman is murdered?

But not to worry. Crack Acting Police Chief Lucy Luckless and her deputy, Jay Edgar Luger, show up instantly and take charge. Unfortunately, they arrest Archie when evidence pops up that someone has embezzled \$300,000 from Pettiman Publishing. That's all Libby needs to hear. She opens her manuscript to chapters on how to be a private eye, and the game is afoot!

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ACT I
Scene One

(Living room of the Adams house, played before the curtain. At rise, CHLOE CRENSHAW lies on floor working on her homework. EVE CRENSHAW stands Downstage Left talking on her cell phone.)

CHLOE CRENSHAW: Eve, how do you spell formaldehyde?

EVE CRENSHAW: *(To CHLOE CRENSHAW)* Shhhh! *(Into phone)*
No, not you, Alex. No, no! I had a really good time last night.

CHLOE CRENSHAW: I've got to know how to spell formaldehyde for science homework.

EVE CRENSHAW: Chloe, knock it off! I'm on the phone.

CHLOE CRENSHAW: You're always on the phone! Ask your honeybunch how to spell formaldehyde. He's probably smarter than you.

EVE CRENSHAW: Wait 'til Mom gets home! Sorry, Alex, but you know how little sisters can be!

CHLOE CRENSHAW: I'm not little! I'm thirteen!

EVE CRENSHAW: Oh, you don't? Well, sorry. Oh, OK ... I'll be home. Bye.

CHLOE CRENSHAW: Finally! How do you spell formaldehyde?

EVE CRENSHAW: Look it up! I'm going to take a bath!

CHLOE CRENSHAW: Don't use up all the formaldehyde! *(ABBY ADAMS enters left wearily.)*

EVE CRENSHAW: *(Threateningly, not seeing ABBY ADAMS)* You know what you need, Chloe?

CHLOE CRENSHAW: Hi, Aunt Abby! You're just in time to save my life.

ABBY ADAMS: *(Distracted)* That's nice.

EVE CRENSHAW: *(To ABBY ADAMS)* What's wrong?

ABBY ADAMS: You mean aside from everything?

CHLOE CRENSHAW: Uh-oh! Mom said the same thing when she got laid off.

EVE CRENSHAW: Exactly why we moved in with you, Aunt Abby.

CHLOE CRENSHAW: Did Mr. Harshtingle get mad at you or something?

ABBY ADAMS: He wasn't mad at all. He said I'd get two weeks severance pay and a good recommendation.

EVE CRENSHAW: You've been laid off?

ABBY ADAMS: Fifteen years at Harshtingle Accounting, and he drops me like a hot potato.

CHLOE CRENSHAW: Well, you are pretty hot for somebody old.

1 EVE CRENSHAW: Chloe!
2 ABBY ADAMS: He wanted someone younger as his executive
3 assistant ... someone perkier ... someone cheaper. So
4 where's your mother?
5 CHLOE CRENSHAW: You know her ... off on some wild goose
6 chase.
7 EVE CRENSHAW: She's at Office Dungeon making copies of her
8 manuscript.
9 ABBY ADAMS: I will say she's determined.
10 CHLOE CRENSHAW: Well, she doesn't want to work at U-Pump-
11 It forever. If J.K. Rowling can do it, so can Mom. (*CURT*
12 *CRENSHAW enters right.*)
13 CURT CRENSHAW: Hey! The cable went off! I can't get my
14 game.
15 ABBY ADAMS: Sorry, Curt, but that's my doing.
16 CURT CRENSHAW: I promised I wouldn't play *Bloody Death*
17 *Rangers* again, and I haven't.
18 ABBY ADAMS: It's not that.
19 EVE CRENSHAW: Aunt Abby lost her job.
20 CURT CRENSHAW: Wow. Sorry. But how come you turned cable
21 off?
22 ABBY ADAMS: It costs too much. Until I can get another job,
23 we'll have to cut back on everything.
24 CHLOE CRENSHAW: It's OK. I like macaroni and cheese. (*LIBBY*
25 *CRENSHAW enters left carrying several large manuscripts.*)
26 LIBBY CRENSHAW: Hello, everyone! How are my favorite
27 people?
28 EVE CRENSHAW: Hi, Mom.
29 CURT CRENSHAW: Hi.
30 LIBBY CRENSHAW: Oh, dear! If I didn't know any better, I'd say
31 something's burning in the kitchen.
32 EVE CRENSHAW: Dinner! (*Races off right.*)
33 ABBY ADAMS: Something we can ill afford.
34 LIBBY CRENSHAW: Oh, Abby, I'm sure we can eat something
35 else.
36 CHLOE CRENSHAW: Aunt Abby got canned today.
37 CURT CRENSHAW: Chloe!
38 LIBBY CRENSHAW: Really, Chloe, use proper English.
39 ABBY ADAMS: Does "laid off" sound any better?
40 LIBBY CRENSHAW: Oh, Abby, no! Well, I'm sure dinner isn't
41 completely burned.
42 ABBY ADAMS: Libby, you've got to get in the spirit of things
43 here.
44 CURT CRENSHAW: Cable's already off.
45 CHLOE CRENSHAW: We're gonna buy Ramen by the case.

1 LIBBY CRENSHAW: Not to worry!

2 ABBY ADAMS: Libby, at least frown or something. (*LIBBY*
3 *CRENSHAW* tries, but starts laughing.) How about a look of
4 complete dismay? (*LIBBY CRENSHAW* again makes a face, but
5 is laughing too hard.)

6 CURT CRENSHAW: Try looking like you did when Chloe
7 splattered paint on your new jeans. (*Once again, LIBBY*
8 *CRENSHAW* tries, but ends up laughing again. *EVE*
9 *CRENSHAW* enters right.)

10 EVE CRENSHAW: Saved it just in the nick of time! What's wrong
11 with Mom?

12 CHLOE CRENSHAW: She's practicing for the asylum.

13 ABBY ADAMS: And hurting my feelings in the process.

14 LIBBY CRENSHAW: Oh, Abby, I'm sorry. I really am sorry about
15 your job, but you know I've always thought you were
16 better than Harshingle anyway.

17 ABBY ADAMS: Yeah? Well, you're better than U-Pump-It, and
18 that hasn't gotten you anywhere.

19 LIBBY CRENSHAW: But I've got wonderful news!

20 EVE CRENSHAW: What?

21 LIBBY CRENSHAW: I've got all of us a job this Saturday night.

22 CURT CRENSHAW: Us? You mean like me too?

23 LIBBY CRENSHAW: Yes, it'll be fun!

24 ABBY ADAMS: Libby, a one-night job isn't going to do much for
25 our portfolio.

26 CHLOE CRENSHAW: What's a portfolio?

27 ABBY ADAMS: As far as we're concerned, it's an empty
28 notebook.

29 LIBBY CRENSHAW: Apparently you never returned your son
30 Archie's phone calls.

31 ABBY ADAMS: I haven't looked at my phone. Why? Is Archie all
32 right?

33 LIBBY CRENSHAW: He's fine! And he's hiring us.

34 CHLOE CRENSHAW: He's an accountant!

35 CURT CRENSHAW: I hate math!

36 LIBBY CRENSHAW: He's not hiring us to do that. His boss is
37 throwing a special dinner party and the regular caterer
38 fell through.

39 ABBY ADAMS: Caterers don't just quit jobs like that.

40 LIBBY CRENSHAW: They do when they fall through the floor of
41 their shop because of wood rot. Oh, Betty Lou and Cindy
42 will be fine and back in business as soon as their broken
43 bones heal. In the meantime, Rosie, the regular cook, will
44 prepare the meal for the dinner party, and we'll all serve
45 the guests.

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