

Inspector Drake and the Black Widow

- DRAKE All right Sergeant, enough girly stuff. What have we got?
- PLOD Dead body, sir.
- DRAKE [*walking behind the sofa, he apparently steps onto something, lifting him a foot taller*] Excellent. Whereabouts?
- PLOD Behind the sofa, sir.
- DRAKE [*steps down*] Right. What do we know about her?
- PLOD Er... him, sir.
- DRAKE [*peering more closely at the body*] What do we know about him, Sergeant?
- PLOD He was found early this morning, sir. No sign of a struggle...
- DRAKE Have you touched the body?
- PLOD Oh no, sir – wouldn't do that.
- DRAKE It's face down.
- PLOD Yes, sir.
- DRAKE And it's dressed in women's clothing.
- PLOD Yes, sir.
- DRAKE So how do you know it's a man?
- PLOD [*referring to his notebook*] Because, sir, his name is Mr Johnson.
- DRAKE So?
- PLOD Well, had he been a woman, his name would have been Mrs Johnson.
- DRAKE Who told you that?
- PLOD Always known it, sir. You see, my mum was called Mrs Plod, whereas my dad...
- DRAKE Who told you his name was Mr Johnson?
- PLOD Oh, the maid, sir.
- DRAKE The maid.
- PLOD Yes, sir. Whose name is... I didn't get her name, sir.
- DRAKE Rule number one, Sergeant. Never take the word of a domestic servant in a murder investigation. Remember – a maid is little more than a female butler.
- PLOD Never thought about that, sir.
- DRAKE We need proof.
- He instantly dons a six-fingered rubber glove, lifts up the skirt, delves in, then backs off rapidly as he squeezes a hidden honking horn.*
- Woah!

- PLOD Well, Wendy is... not your haverage harachnid, sir. She's...
- DRAKE Big?
- PLOD Oh no, sir.
- DRAKE Hairy?
- PLOD Not at all, sir.
- DRAKE What then?
- PLOD Erm... semi-tropical, sir.
- DRAKE I'll leave the heating on.
- PLOD Thank you, sir. Only...
- DRAKE Spit it out, Sergeant. Is this spider dangerous?
- PLOD Oh, bless you, no sir.
- DRAKE Good.
- PLOD Well, unless she accidentally bites you, sir. Then you're dead.
- DRAKE Sergeant, how did you come to have a dangerous semi-tropical spider as a pet?
- PLOD I bought it on the hinternet, sir.
- DRAKE Sergeant – get over here. [*Whispered aside*] This play is set in the 1920's. There's no such thing as the hinternet. Got it?
- PLOD Sir.
- DRAKE Right. So let's try that again, shall we? Sergeant, how did you come to have a dangerous semi-tropical spider as a pet?
- PLOD I found it on the web, sir.
- DRAKE Good man.
- PLOD Anyway, if you do happen to spot it, sir – just pop it in this jar.
- DRAKE If I do happen to spot it, Sergeant – I'll pop it under my heel.
- PLOD Oh – no, sir!
- DRAKE Maid!
- PLOD Right, sir.
- Plod exits and returns instantly with the nervous-looking maid.*
- MAID Did you want to see me, sir?
- DRAKE I'll ask the questions, if you don't mind.
- MAID Sorry, sir.
- DRAKE You are the maid.
- MAID Yes, sir.
- DRAKE Do you have a name?

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- PLOD That'll be the wife of the deceased, sir.
- DRAKE Shut up, Sergeant.
- MAID She's a friend of m'Lady, sir.
- DRAKE And who's m'Lady?
- MAID M'Lady Devonshire, sir. She's the lady of the house.
- DRAKE So, Mr and Mrs Johnson are friends of the family.
- MAID Yes, sir.
- DRAKE Do they actually live here?
- MAID Only Mrs Johnson, sir.
- DRAKE Why's that?
- MAID Because Mr Johnson's dead, sir.
- DRAKE Madam, I am rapidly running out of patience with you. Was he, or was he not, living here?
- MAID Yes, sir.
- DRAKE For how long?
- MAID Until he died.
- DRAKE Sergeant.
- PLOD Sir?
- DRAKE Beat the crap out of her.
- PLOD Sir.
- MAID All right! All right! He lived her for about two months, give or take a month or two. They always come over for the summer, you see, sir. They're from New Zealand.
- DRAKE Right, now we're getting somewhere. [*Counting on his fingers*] So we have Mr and Mrs Johnson from New Zealand, who are friends of the family but not of each other, Lady Devonshire, you – who else?
- MAID Well, there's the cook...
- DRAKE That's five.
- MAID The chauffeur...
- DRAKE Six.
- MAID The butler...
- DRAKE Seven.
- MAID The gardener – though of course, you've since killed him...
- DRAKE Seven and a half.
- MAID The triplets.
- DRAKE Triplets?

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DRAKE Think about it, Sergeant. You come to a remote country house, where a vicious murder has been committed. Nine and a half suspects. What are the chances of just tossing a crowbar out of the French window and nailing the villain first time?

PLOD I see your point, sir. It's never that easy.

At this point Drake's backswing catches Plod perfectly in the groin. (Plod should wear suitable protection so Drake can make good impact.) He goes down like a sack of potatoes. Drake completes the swing, replaces the club and continues oblivious.

DRAKE No. We need to dig deeper, Sergeant. There are too many questions here. Why was Johnson wearing that dress? Was someone trying to murder him, or his wife? [*Plucking out the sword again*] Where did this sword come from? Are the murderer's fingerprints on the handle? And if so, have I just knackered them? [*He slams the sword back in*] We need answers, Sergeant. And we're not going to get them from a dead gardener.

PLOD [*struggling back to his feet*] No, sir.

DRAKE All right, let's start at the top. Get Lady Devonshire in here.

PLOD Right, sir.

Plod exits, and again re-enters immediately, this time pushing Lady Devonshire in a wheelchair. She is dressed entirely in black, with a veiled face.

PLOD M'Lady Devonshire, sir.

DRAKE M'Lady.

LADY DEVONSHIRE M'Inspector.

DRAKE Lady Devonport...

LADY DEVONSHIRE Devonshire.

DRAKE Whatever. How close were you to the victim?

LADY DEVONSHIRE I detested John Johnson more than any other human being that has ever crawled upon the surface of the planet. I hope his rotting corpse is eaten away by poisoned maggots and the leftovers burn in Hell.

DRAKE I see. Do you know anyone who would want to kill him?

LADY DEVONSHIRE Yes, Inspector. Me. Ask me why.

DRAKE Why?

LADY DEVONSHIRE Because I want you to.

DRAKE I am doing.

LADY DEVONSHIRE Never mind, I'll tell you anyway. John Richard Johnson was my husband's business partner.

DRAKE And what business was that?

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LADY DEVONSHIRE They were both in oil.

DRAKE Sounds messy.

LADY DEVONSHIRE It was. JR was a rogue and a double-crosser. His unscrupulous dealings ruined my health and eventually led to my husband's untimely death from a heart attack.

[SX: Eerie suspenseful music builds]

Eerie suspended music builds underneath. She looks down at the body, and plucks the sword out, staring at it

Johnson killed my husband, Inspector, just as surely as if he'd pushed this sword into his ribcage.

[SX: Music reaches the climax]

She dramatically forces the sword back in, as the music reaches its climax

So yes, I would gladly have murdered him. Several times over. My only regret is that I didn't.

FLOD Was that a confession, sir?

DRAKE No, Sergeant, pay attention. She said she didn't.

LADY DEVONSHIRE I can assure you, Sergeant, that if I had inserted that sword into Johnson, it would not have been into his back.

DRAKE Tell me, Lady Dragonfly...

LADY DEVONSHIRE Devonshire!

DRAKE No, I'll come to her later. How did you know the Johnsons?

LADY DEVONSHIRE We met in New Zealand.

DRAKE Day trip?

LADY DEVONSHIRE Have you ever been to New Zealand, Inspector?

DRAKE Oh, a long time ago, when it was Old Zealand.

LADY DEVONSHIRE Find the man who did this, Inspector. I want to reward him, handsomely. I'll leave you to your business.

DRAKE One last question, Lady Dumbledore. Why the hat?

LADY DEVONSHIRE Inspector, I think you should know, I have not revealed my face in public, nor worn anything but black, since the day my husband died. Nor do I intend to, until it is finally time for me to pass over to the other side and be reunited with him. Well, if you'll excuse me, I have other matters to attend to. I presume you'll be here for some time?

DRAKE I can assure you, Lady Deadlegs – the Sergeant and I will remain right here until we have apprehended the murderer, and not a moment earlier.

Lady Devonshire takes a puzzled moment to grasp the meaning.

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DRAKE And Sergeant – be careful with it. That’s vial evidence.

Plod grabs the sword and walks out of the door with it facing out in front of him. A muffled shriek suggests he’s stabbed someone with it in the doorway, and we see the maid’s arm and the end of the sword, just sticking out from the doorway, slowly making their way down to the floor. Plod looks around furtively and, seeing that Drake is preoccupied with examining the body, he drags the maid out of the doorway and re-enters, whistling nonchalantly.

DRAKE Everything under control, Sergeant?

PLOD Sir.

DRAKE Sure?

PLOD Sir.

DRAKE [*examining Plod suspiciously*] You’re perspiring, Sergeant.

PLOD Sir.

DRAKE Come on – out with it.

PLOD Sir. Well, sir. Nothing important, sir. Except... well, I think that we might have to revise the current number of available suspects... er downward-wise, sir – to the tune of one.

DRAKE On account of?

PLOD On account of... the maid isn’t feeling too well, sir.

DRAKE On account of?

PLOD On account of... I’ve just killed her, sir.

DRAKE How?

PLOD With a sword, sir.

DRAKE With *the* sword, Sergeant.

PLOD Yes, sir.

DRAKE Are you trying to tell me that you’ve contaminated the evidence?

PLOD Yes, sir.

DRAKE Go on, say it.

PLOD I’ve contaminated the hevidence, sir.

DRAKE Bloody hell! Where is she?

PLOD In the hall, sir.

Drake takes a look.

DRAKE Terrific.

PLOD Can I just say in my defence, sir, that it was a haccident. And I didn’t expect her to be lurking right outside the door.

DRAKE Was she lurking?

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- PLOD Yes, sir.
- DRAKE Well, that'll teach her, eh?
- PLOD Yes, sir.
- DRAKE Anyway, no need to waste it.
- Drake crouches behind the doorway and emerges with a loaded tea tray.*
- DRAKE Milk and sugar, Sergeant?
- PLOD Just milk for me, sir.
- DRAKE [*handing him just the milk jug*] Oh, fair enough. [*Sipping on the tea*] Mmm. Lifesaver.
- PLOD Oh, look, sir – she's brought us some biscuits as well.
- They each grab a biscuit from the tray and start munching.*
- DRAKE You have to say, Sergeant, she did well not to spill any of this when she was stabbed.
- PLOD Excellent job, sir.
- DRAKE Anyway, we can't afford to lose any more suspects.
- PLOD That's one each, sir – next one's the decider.
- DRAKE If it's any consolation, Sergeant, I don't think the maid did it.
- PLOD Well if she did, sir, she won't do it again.
- DRAKE This is not good, Sergeant.
- PLOD No, sir.
- DRAKE Health and safety at work.
- PLOD Yes, sir.
- DRAKE She's a tripping hazard.
- PLOD Sorry, sir.
- DRAKE Get her moved, before someone...
- Julie Foster stumbles in through the door.*
- DRAKE Too late. Can I help you?
- DOCTOR FOSTER There's a dead maid in the hall.
- DRAKE Yes, the Sergeant has just eliminated her from our enquiries. And you are?
- DOCTOR FOSTER Doctor Julie Foster. [*A blank look from Drake*] Forensics?
- DRAKE Ah, about time.
- DOCTOR FOSTER Sorry – we've been up to our neck in it. Murder's very popular at the moment. Had to work right through my lunch hour – oh, can I pinch a biscuit?

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Plod exits.

AMY MALLARD You must be the infamous Inspector Drake.

DRAKE You've heard of me?

AMY MALLARD Oh, everyone's heard of you, Inspector. You're very big down under.

DRAKE Good of you to notice. And you are?

AMY MALLARD Amy Mallard.

DRAKE Amy Mallard? You're not on my list.

AMY MALLARD You probably have me under my married name – Johnson.

DRAKE Ah! So it was your husband that stained the carpet.

AMY MALLARD Yes, Inspector.

DRAKE You don't seem unduly upset.

AMY MALLARD On the contrary, I was very fond of that dress.

DRAKE Why's he wearing it?

AMY MALLARD I've no idea – you'll have to ask him. [*She giggles*] Look, Inspector, it's no secret that John and I didn't exactly get along.

DRAKE Then why stay with him?

AMY MALLARD Because he was gloriously and disgustingly rich.

DRAKE Fair enough. And now he's dead, I suppose you get to keep all his money?

AMY MALLARD Oh, nice try, Inspector. But I had all his money anyway. We had a joint bank account. He topped it up, I siphoned it off.

DRAKE Nice arrangement.

AMY MALLARD Yeah. Course, now he's dead, there's nobody to top it up any more.

DRAKE Shame. You must be gutted.

AMY MALLARD [*stroking his cheek*] Say – you're a little cutie, aren't you?

DRAKE [*stroking her cheek*] Am I?

AMY MALLARD Have you got a girl?

DRAKE Erm... not on me, no.

AMY MALLARD [*she picks up a bottle of whiskey*] Can I interest you in a little stiff one?

DRAKE No thanks, I'm sorted.

AMY MALLARD Come and sit down. Come on, don't be shy. [*Drake reluctantly joins Amy on the settee*] Right, little cutie. What shall we talk about?

DRAKE [*uncomfortable*] I, er... couldn't help noticing your accent.

AMY MALLARD Oh, yeah? Can you place it?

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DRAKE Aha!

PLOD Aha! Where am I looking, sir?

DRAKE There, Sergeant! On the floor! Would you like your glasses?

PLOD Sir.

Drake hands Plod two beer glasses, which he then uses like binoculars.

PLOD It's a trap door, sir!

DRAKE Indeed it is, Sergeant. And it explains everything.

PLOD What – even where babies come from, sir?

DRAKE All right, not quite everything. But it does explain what happened here. You see, whoever killed Mrs Johnson came in through this trap door, and then dragged the body away with him.

PLOD How do you know it wasn't a woman, sir?

DRAKE Because, Sergeant, the body was already on top of the trap door. It would have taken great strength to lift it up.

PLOD So my theory about it being the Black Widow...

DRAKE Is looking a bit thin, wouldn't you say? No, I'm convinced that we're looking for a man. All right, Sergeant – lift it up.

PLOD Righto, sir.

Plod lifts up the trap door. It opens towards the audience and we just see the top of it resting on the back of the settee.

DRAKE And cue sound effect.

[SX: Creaking Trap Door]

It now belatedly makes a glorious creaking sound.

Bloody hopeless. Shall we try that again?

They put the trap door down and get ready to lift it.

DRAKE Three, two, one, now!

[SX: Creaking Trap Door]

They lift it again, this time with the sound effect. They peer down it.

DRAKE Torch.

PLOD Sir.

Plod hands him a cardboard two-dimensional torch.

DRAKE What's this?

PLOD Torch, sir.

DRAKE This is a cartoon torch.

PLOD Sorry, sir. The props department ran out of money.

DRAKE How do you switch it on?

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He does. There's a dramatic burst of pseudo-religious music, a crack of lightning and other suitable lighting effects – followed by a knock on the door. A lady enters.

ZOO LADY Can I come in?

PLOD Who are you?

ZOO LADY I work at the Zoo. I'm a leading expert in poisonous spiders.

PLOD Oh, thank you, God!

ZOO LADY Don't thank God, Sergeant, thank Lady Devonshire. She rang me. She said someone had been bitten by a Black Widow.

PLOD That's right. Have you brought some hanti-venom?

ZOO LADY [*producing a small bottle*] Of course. But let's hope I'm not too late. Where's the victim?

PLOD This way.

Plod moves to go to Drake, but the Zoo lady immediately sees the body behind the sofa. Plod is crouched over Drake and doesn't notice that she's addressing the wrong body.

ZOO LADY Ugh! Good Lord – it's worse than I thought.

PLOD Oh, don't say that, miss.

ZOO LADY I've never seen a wound like that from a spider.

PLOD Please, miss. There must be something you can do.

ZOO LADY [*grabbing a syringe from her bag*] I'll try the anti-venom. But it might be too late.

PLOD [*looking round at her as she prepares the syringe*] Is there anything I can do to help, miss.

ZOO LADY As soon as I inject this, we'll need to get the blood flowing round the body. Take off as much clothing as possible.

PLOD Right you are, miss.

Plod frantically starts undressing himself, including pulling his trousers down. The Zoo lady dives behind the sofa to administer the injection and then starts tearing the clothes from the body. We hear ripping noises and see a dress tossed over the sofa. Suddenly she stands, alarmed.

ZOO LADY Good Lord! This woman has genitals.

PLOD What? Oh, no, it's not him, miss. He was dead already. Here's the man in question. Inspector Drake.

ZOO LADY What?

PLOD He's the one who was bitten.

ZOO LADY Are you sure?

PLOD Positive, miss. Just hurry up with the hanti-venom.