

Murder is On The Air

By Jack Pachuta

Act 1

(Lizzie, Macie and Ricardo are in their dressing rooms on the corners of the stage talking on the phone. Fred is on a headset in the front of the sitcom set, shuffling through a copy of the show's script. Sneer is in his office at his desk with the chair's back to the audience.)

FRED

(Fred moves to the center of the stage holding a script and speaks in a quiet voice.) Hello! Hello! Is anybody listening? Hello! Why do I always have this problem? *(Clears throat and yells.)* HELLO! I SAID HELLO! *(Continues when audience is quiet.)* I just want to make sure that everybody is ready for . . . *(Listens to voice in headset.)* Yes, sir! Yes, sir! I know, I know. Yes, Mr. Sneer told me about that. But, but, but . . . he can't do that. I've been with this network ever since it started. *(Listens into headset.)* OK, OK, I'll speak real loud and I won't stutter like last time.

(Speaks to audience.) Hello! My name is Fred Finkelmeyer. I'm the floor director here. Get ready for The Lizzie Show - it's the top-rated program on television. We'll be on the air live in a few minutes, so you need to pay real close attention to me because . . .

(Listens to voice in headset.) Of course, I know the hand signals. *(Speaks to audience.)* This is real important. My job could be at stake. When I hold up my hands like

this and clap, *(Holds hands in air and claps.)* you need to applaud. Let's try it. *(Gives signal and waits for applause. Continues to move hands up and down – sometimes quickly to get applause from audience.)* That was pretty good. Try this one. I'll do this when I want you to laugh. *(Moves hands up and down in front of his chest as if giving a belly laugh. Plays with audience in similar fashion using the "laugh" signal.)* You'll be laughing a lot tonight because Lizzie Bell is SOOOO funny. *(Laughs awkwardly and stops abruptly.)* And, her co-star Macie Dixon is a stitch. *(Laughs awkwardly again, and stops quickly.)* And you women out there will like this. Our guest star tonight is RicardOOOOOO MonteladOOOOOOOOO. *(Thinks he'll get swoons. When he doesn't, he signals for applause.)* OK, OK, we'll be on the air soon. If you have to - well, you know what I mean - do it now while you have the chance. When you hear the announcer, you'll know the show is on the air live to millions of TV sets all across the country. *(Moves to side of stage and pages through the script.)*

LIZZIE

(Lights come up on Lizzie's dressing room. She is talking on the phone.) You saw that report in the trade paper. I can't believe she would treat me that way after everything I've done for her. She's the one who was seeing Dizzy, that rat of an ex-husband of mine. *(Listens to person on phone.)* No, of course, I don't want him back. Not now! But if I'd have known it was her, I never would have made her my co-star. That devious little . . . *(Voice fades out as Macie starts talking.)*

MACIE

(Lights come up on her dressing room. She is talking on the phone to Dizzy.) But Dizzy Sweetie, she would have found out eventually anyway. You know I've been carrying her on this show and it's about time they realize it. I'm the funny one. She's just riding along on my talent. Mr. Sneer must know that. There's even a rumor that he's going to fire her. It only makes sense that he'd want me to take over the show. *(Listens and smiles.)* Yeah, Sweetie, I know. I'm the real star anyway. *(Voice fades out as Ricardo starts talking.)*

RICARDO

(Lights come up on his dressing room. He is talking on the phone to his agent. He speaks with a strong Spanish accent.) You're my agent. How could you agree to let me do this ridiculous show? You know what I'm playing? A bank robber! I'm a romantic leading man and they make me a criminal. AND . . . you know what they gave me to eat? Pizza! Yes, pizza. They could have at least ordered the deluxe, but you know what I get? DE PLAIN, DE PLAIN! And they told me I can't even mention my new movie, "One Angry Man." I'm holding you personally responsible for this.

(Lizzie, Macie and Ricardo slam down phones simultaneously and speak in unison.)

LIZZIE AND MACIE

I could just kill her.

RICARDO

I could just kill somebody.

(Lights dim in dressing rooms as Lizzie, Macie and Ricardo look in mirrors and get ready for the show. Lights go up in Sneer's office. He's sitting at his desk and his chair's back is to the audience. He swivels it around to face the audience. He puffs on a cigar as Samantha barges in.)

SAMANTHA

Schnookems, did you take care of it?

SNEER

(Looks at Samantha and stammers as he answers.) But, Doll, it's not that easy. She's the hottest thing on television and the sponsor loves her. He's selling cases of that Vegitol stuff because of her.

SAMANTHA

But, Schnookems, you promised you'd fire her, change the show's name to "The Sammie Show" and make me a star. *(Sits on his desk, leans forward and talks to Sneer in a seductive voice.)* You know all about my hidden talents. *(Samantha fiddles with Sneer's tie. Sneer wipes his forehead with a handkerchief.)*

SNEER

Yeah, well, I said that in a weak moment. You might say I wasn't in a position to refuse you, Doll.

SAMANTHA

(Still being seductive.) Schnookems, I love everything about you. Your hair. *(Runs her hand over his receding hairline.)* Your wardrobe. *(Pulls handkerchief from his coat pocket, rubs it on her body, kisses it intensely, and puts it back in his coat pocket.)* And even your cigar. *(Rubs cigar up and down slowly, and sniffs the air.)* It smells so good.

SNEER

(Tries to compose himself and stammers again.) Oh, ah, oh! These are new cigars, Doll. A box of them was on my desk when I got here today. They're authentic Cuban cigars made in Mexico. Somebody told me they were a present from you. I figured they were for services rendered, you might say.

SAMANTHA

Schnookems, you told me you want to make me happy. Happiness is a wonderful thing – especially between a man and a woman. And, Schnookems, you know that when I'm happy, I really, really, really like to . . . schnook! *(Sneer's cigar goes erect in his mouth.)*

SNEER

I must admit you are very persuasive, Doll. But I've got to do this my way. If I just fire her, it could cost me millions. The sponsor might cancel his contract. That Zack LaPaine can be very scary. Have you seen the muscles on that guy? He calls me and acts like he owns the network. He doesn't get it. I'm the one who's running things. He even told me I need to lose a few pounds and get to the gym. Who does he think he is? Next thing you know, he'll want to start advertising that juicer of his.

SAMANTHA

But, you told me nothing scares you. *(Changes from seductive voice to irritation.)* I'm starting to think you're just stringing me along, Schnookems. I don't think you want to fire her at all. And, if you don't get rid of her, I'll never be a big star. *(She opens cigar box, takes out a cigar, and closes the box.)* I can be very, very nice, or I can be very, very angry. *(She crushes the cigar and spreads the remains over top of Sneer's head.)* Which Samantha Starr do you want? *(Goes back to her seductive voice.)* I know which Sammie I'd like to be with if I was sitting in that chair.

(Samantha exits angrily. Sneer thinks for a second, picks up his phone, dials it and swivels his chair so that its back is toward the audience. Lights in office dim as lights on sitcom set come up. Card table with two chairs is in the middle of the set. Fred moves to side of stage with script.)

ANNOUNCER (*Off stage voice.*)

And now, America, it's time for The Lizzie Show, starring your favorite wacky, but lovable redhead, Lizzie Bell. (*Fred signals for applause as Lizzie exits dressing room and sits in one of the chairs.*) And, her ditsy, but laughable co-star, Macie Dixon. (*Macie exits her dressing room and sits in the other chair as Lizzie glares at her. Macie glares right back.*) Appearing as the bank robber is guest star Ricardo Montelado. (*Still in his dressing room, Ricardo cringes and waves his hands in the air.*) Tonight's episode, "All's Fair in Love and Yahtzee," is brought to you by our continuing sponsor, Vegitol, the tonic that boosts your fatigued corpuscles. As our show opens, Lizzie and Macie are in Lizzie's apartment on Main Street hotly contesting a game of Yahtzee.

(*Lizzie and Macie glare at each other, then look up at the "ceiling fan."*)

MACIE

I've been playing Yahtzee since I was a kid, Lizzie, but this is a first. I can't believe you bounced the dice so high that one of them got caught in the fan.

LIZZIE

It's not my fault. You've won every game so far. I figured if I put a little body language in it, (*Simulates rolling dice with lots of hand and arm movements.*) my luck would change.

MACIE

Just turn the switch on, it'll come down.

(Lizzie walks to wall and flips on switch. Lizzie and Macie move head in circular motion as if watching a fan go round.)

(SFX: Die landing in vase.)

LIZZIE

It landed in the vase. I'll get it. *(Lizzie walks to vase, puts in hand and smiles.)* Got it!
(She tries to get her hand out of the vase, but it's stuck. Fred gives laugh signal as Lizzie struggles to get her hand out. She is unsuccessful.)

MACIE

(Walks to tool kit sitting by door.) Let me see if I can find something in that toolbox you were using to try to fix the lock. *(Picks up a hammer.)* This should work. Put your hand on the table. I'll break the vase. *(Lizzie's eyes open wide.)*

LIZZIE

Let you swing a hammer at me? *(Screams.)* My Aunt Midge gave me that vase as a wedding present – not that you care about marriage. But I know how you like to break things up. *(Smiles and pauses.)*

MACIE

(Glares at Lizzie for a few seconds. Fred frantically pages through script.) I'll think of something. *(Lizzie sits down in chair at table. Macie holds hammer above Lizzie's head as if she's thinking about hitting Lizzie, then replaces it in the toolbox.)*

LIZZIE

I knew it was going to be a bad day. Mr. Magillicuddy's car backfired again and it scared me. I nearly fainted and hit my head.

MACIE

(Mumbles.) With a little luck . . .

LIZZIE

(Quizzically.) What did you say?

(Fred pages through script as if he's trying to find the right page.)

MACIE

I – ah - said his name is Chuck. Chuck Magillicuddy. *(Fred continues to page through script.)* I mean . . . It's that old Studebaker of his. He should've bought a Dodge. We always had a great time in my father's Dodge, and dad never had any problems with it. *(Fred finds the right page in the script and starts to follow along.)*

(SFX: Loud backfire.)

LIZZIE

(Looks startled and holds chest.) There it is again. *(Goes to window, yells and points at him with the vase still on her hand.)* Magillicuddy!!! Find a good mechanic and get that thing fixed before somebody calls the cops on you.

(Fred gives laugh signal.)

(SFX: Gunshots.)

(Lizzie is startled and clutches chest with free hand.) Macie, look! Somebody robbed the bank. The police are chasing him down the street. Oh, I hope they catch him before that storm rolls in. The weather forecast said we could have a big downpour.

(Macie looks through drawer and pulls out a die.)

MACIE

Look, we had a spare one in the drawer. *(Rolls dice together, writes on pad and yells.)* Yahtzee! I win again! Want to play one more time? *(Lizzie looks at the vase on her hand as if wondering how she'll be able to roll the dice.)*

(SFX: Loud thunder.)

LIZZIE

(Lizzie clutches her chest with free hand and sits down back at the table.) You can't be that lucky. You were cheating. *(Tone of voice changes to confrontational.)* And if anybody knows about cheating, you do. If it weren't for you, "I Love Lizzie" would still be on the air. Dizzy wasn't much, but he was all mine. Now I find out it was you all along.

FRED

(Pages through script. He is confused. Talks into headset.) No, it's not in my script, either. They're off script. OK, OK, I'll get their attention. What do you mean it's my job? You sound just like the boss. *(Waves arms and points at script. Mumbles the next line.)*

MACIE

(Raises her voice and speaks in a catty tone.) It wasn't about me, Honey. It was about you. You spent so much time talking to reporters that you forgot about your man. It's no wonder . . . *(Sees Fred out of the corner of her eye and tries to get back on script. Fred frantically gives laugh signal. Stutters as she delivers next line.)* I'm just a good Yahtzee player, Lizzie. *(Sarcastically.)* You should be so good. I can't lose when you're the competition.

FRED

(Looks at script and talks into headset.) Close enough.