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THE DEATH OF DR. PEPPER

An Audience-Participation

Murder-Mystery by

Eileen Moushey

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

LT. PERCY BLUNT, APD - An unlikely detective. His half-embarrassed and self-effacing manner are a cover-up for his sharp mind and one-track search for the truth.

PETER URIAH PEPPER - A wimp and a whiner. Attempts to play the "tough guy" but comes off as a bully.

VIOLET ROSE - Italian, with an obvious accent. A no-nonsense, very direct lady.

LILY ROSE - Very much the Southern belle. An accent that simply drips honey.

PETUNIA ROSE - An innocent. Naive. Just this side of stupid. Very Brooklyn/New York/Jersey.

DR PAUL PEPPER - Older. Expansive. Loves a good time, especially when coupled with a member of the opposite sex.

TIMETABLE FOR THE EVENT

The times described are approximate. You may choose to space them differently. The chronology is what is important. We've almost always performed this show with dinner and that is the way the script is written. However, a section of the Production Manual is devoted to adapting the format to include dinner or not.

6:30 - The participants assemble. Blunt is there as part of the group. Dr. Pepper (in scrubs) is also there, looking for his wife who is supposed to meet him. Cocktails.

7:00 - (Or when dinner begins.) Dr. Pepper leaves, noisily. He's given messages to several guests to give to his wife.

7:15 - 1st interruption. Lily arrives and "works the group", looking for Dr. Pepper.

7:30 - 2nd interruption. Petunia enters looking for Dr. Pepper, as described above, exits.

7:45 - 3rd interruption. Violet enters, looking for Dr. Pepper, as described above, exits.

8:00 - As dinner ends (before dessert) Peter enters wildly, shouting "Where is he? Where are they?" Blunt takes charge, just as a shot is heard from outside. Dr. Pepper enters, dies. The ladies follow, Violet holding gun. The body is removed. The audience will identify the three women as "Mrs. Pepper". Blunt will take over the investigation and interrogate the women with frequent interruptions from Peter.

8:30 - The audience has an opportunity to directly question the three women. Also, they will see -via clue hunt or not - copies of the note that Petunia wrote to Peter. The Production Manual explains the clue hunt, if you decide to have one.

9:00 - Dessert is served as participants formulate solutions by completing the "solution sheet."

9:15 - The solution scene is played. The cast is introduced, winners announced, prizes awarded.

BACKGROUND OF THE CRIME

Famed plastic surgeon Dr. Paul Pepper has reached the top of his field. Status-wise. Career-wise. Money-wise. His one weakness is women. Old women. Young women. Happy women. Sad

women. Single women. Married women. Women of all sizes and shapes. But he's especially fond of actresses. And so Dr. Pepper felt it was fate that introduced him to the Rose sisters - who were all featured in the chorus of a touring company of "Gypsy". He courted them all, but ultimately married Petunia. But the good doctor underestimated the ties that bound the sisters - which ultimately proved stronger than the marriage vows. For the Rose sisters had devised the "perfect crime" whereby they could enjoy the Pepper fortune, minus the Doctor. What they didn't count on was Cousin Peter and the Akron Police Department. And the infamous Percy Blunt.

It should be noted that while some "scenes" are designated as improvisational, individual actors can certainly adapt other scenes to their own style and character.

DESCRIPTIONS - IMPROVISATIONAL SCENES

SCENE 1

As everyone arrives, has cocktails, etc., DR. PEPPER circulates, introducing himself and asking for his wife. He describes her in the vaguest of terms in regard to height, weight, etc., but does say she is wearing a PINK HAT - "you know, like those Frenchy painter guys wear." A beret. LT. BLUNT is also in evidence. He will also "work" the room, establishing his character and background.

SCENE 2

Dinner begins. (In between the next scenes, the ladies will trade the pink beret between them.) LILY enters, wearing the pink beret. She apologizes gushingly and "just needs a second." She looks around calling for "Paul, Paulie, my darlin'. Where are you, you little Pepper, you." She will get the "messages" entrusted to audience members by DR. PEPPER. She exits the same way as DR. PEPPER.

SCENE 3

PETUNIA enters, wearing the pink beret. She apologizes distractedly and begins to call for "My Widdle Paulie, where is my widdle Doctor Peeper?" She is a sweet but obviously a few croutons short of a salad. Once again, the audience will steer her in the direction of the absent DR. PEPPER.

SCENE 4

VIOLET enters, wearing the obligatory pink beret. She makes no apologies for the interruption and starts calling for "Dr. Pepper-butt" and "Where the hell ees thatta man?" She exits the same way as the others.

SCENE 5

Upon completion of dinner (minus dessert) PETER enters wildly, and truly "in a dither" (I've always wanted to write that.) He is looking for his uncle, DR. PEPPER or that gold-digger he married. His manner is such that BLUNT will calm him down, and take charge. Suspicious goings on have been...e r...going on and BLUNT thinks, maybe he should get involved. With that, a shot is heard from another room/outside, etc. DR. PEPPER enters, bloodied, and dies dramatically. BLUNT & PETER will both rush to him and BLUNT will pronounce him dead. BLUNT and PETER (or others recruited for that purpose) will remove the body. BLUNT will "deputize" several participants to go and find the ladies. Upon their return, he will question audience members about the ladies' capture - where each was hiding, etc.

INTERROGATION SCENE

BLUNT: Well, well, well, ladies. (LILY is wearing a violet, beret, PETUNIA is in a white one. VIOLET brings up the rear, wearing the pink beret and carrying a small pistol.)

BLUNT: You'd better give me that gun, Ma'am.

VIOLET: Thissa thing? Sure. Take it. (She hands it to PETUNIA, who hands it to LILY, who hands it to BLUNT. So much for forensics. This is not lost on BLUNT, who then asks them to identify themselves. LILY says she's VIOLET, PETUNIA says she's LILY and VIOLET says she's PETUNIA - Mrs. Pepper. They are the ROSE sisters.)

(An interrogation follows. This section is written so that the actors will expand and add dialogue that is in character for them. Also, LILY and VIOLET will sneeze several times .)

BLUNT: (To VIOLET as "Mrs. Pepper.") I'm very sorry, Ma'am, to be questioning you at this time, and all, but this is a pretty serious thing that just happened and I'm afraid you're just going to have to answer a few questions, if it's all right.

PETER: What do you care if it's "alright" with her? She killed my Uncle Pepper. Blew him away. Shot him in cold blood. Murdered the old guy. You're a cop. Do something. I'm an attorney and a taxpayer and I demand you do something. Handcuff her. Arrest her for murder.

BLUNT: Ah, now, Mr. Pepper, you're gonna have to calm yourself down. Can't go flying off in all directions here. We don't know that your uncle was murdered. Coulda been an accident.

PETER: He was shot in the chest at close range, Blunt. What d'ya think happened? Someone mistook him for an elk? Or maybe a deer? Maybe someone thought he was a rabbit?

BLUNT: (Nodding in agreement) Or a squirrel. (Aside) Or a lawyer. We'll call in backup, Mr. Pepper. But after I ask a few questions. See, Mr. Pepper, most crimes are solved within a few hours. So just let me do my job, Mr. Pepper, or, do ya mind, I mean is it okay.... if I just call ya Pete?

PETER: Peter.

BLUNT: So, Petey-boy, it's like this. I'll ask a few questions and when I've got a handle on the whole thing.... like an overview, the big picture as it were...well, then I'll call in the troops. PETER: Oh, all right. Do it your way.

BLUNT: (Turning toward VIOLET and starting to ask, but stops himself) You know, Petey, I don't know if you told me, but just what was your relationship to Dr. Pepper?

PETER: Whatd'ya mean? He was my uncle. I was his nephew. We didn't have a "relationship". We didn't date if that's what you mean. We were family. The last of a long line of Peppers. He was my father's oldest brother and...

BLUNT: You were an only child, then, eh, Pete? Musta been lonely.

PETER: What? Well, yeah, 'specially as my folks were so....remote. Sent me to military school. I hated it.

BLUNT: Are they dead now, Pete?

PETER: (Sniffs and nods) I was seventeen. They were at Jonestown. Do you know how I feel everytime I pass some kid with a Kool-Aid stand? And then, if that isn't bad enough, they leave all their money to Uncle Doctor. They didn't trust me, I guess....but they trusted that...that....womanizer!

BLUNT: There's worse, things, Pete. Worse things.

PETER: There are? Do you know he gave me three choices? The Jesuits, the Marine Corp., or law school. But I showed him. I went to St. Bruno's School of Law. And it was tough. But I knew....if I could make it there....

VIOLET: You'da make it anywhere?

PETER: Yeah. And I did. And now...

BLUNT: So you probably know who stands to inherit from your Uncle Doctor?

PETER: I do. I drew up the will. He's worth about seven mill., and it's all supposed to come to me. Unless....

VIOLET: It's a more like nine mill, now. And I'm afraid it's not comin' to you, P.U..

PETER: Don't you dare call me that! Noone calls me that....

VIOLET: (To BLUNT) It's his initials, see. Peter Uriah Pepper. PUP. But Paul just call him by the first two - P.U. Something to do with bed-wetting....

PETER: NIGHT SWEATS.....I get night sweats....

BLUNT: Mrs. Pepper? (VIOLET nods.) What did you mean? Isn't PU, I mean, Petey going to inherit?

PETER: I'm his lawyer. He didn't change his will. He wouldn't have done that without talking to me. He didn't change his will. Everything comes to me.

BLUNT: Mrs. Pepper?

VIOLET: He's right. Everything that goes into da court willa come to heem.

PETER: Thank God, I was afraid the old fart had changed his will..

VIOLET: Oh, no, his will, she's a still inna one piece. Justa da way you write it. (To BLUNT) Not that it'ssa so great, you know. As a lawyer, ol' PU is "phfft." (This is a "raspberry", accompanied by a "thumbs down.")

PETER: You can insult me all you like...

VIOLET: Hokey-dokey. Phfft. Phfft. Pfft.

PETER: I'm inheriting and you will be out on your ear. Or your ass.

VIOLET: Not so fast, Nephew Little Petey. Hey, I dint say you weren't inheriting.

PETER: You said that Uncle Doctor hadn't changed his will, and since I was the heir in the will, ipso facto, I inherit.

VIOLET: (Laughing) Well, hokay, I see where you mighta be confused. Causa you forget, PU, that there are other ways. It's called Joint With Right Of Survivorship. JTWROS. Itta means, if you gotta ting, and you putta you name and someone else's name onna dat ting, da ting is owned together. Jointly. An if, one-a-you die, da ting goes directly to the other person. Lika you wife. Lika me.

PETER: I knew it! I knew it! When the old guy wrote and said he was getting married, I knew it. You won't get away with it. The law prohibits a criminal from profiting from his or her crime! You killed the old guy and there's no way you're gonna collect on it. Or if you do, you won't have a lot to spend it on in prison.

VIOLET: But Ima no go to prison!

BLUNT: Wait, a minute, here, ma'am. Can we back up a second here? Just how did you meet Dr. Pepper?

VIOLET: Onna tennis court.

PETER: That's a lie. The old guy didn't play tennis.

VIOLET: Sure he did. Hadda mean backhand.

PETER: And this isn't the first time she tried to kill him!

BLUNT: Let me handle this, okay, PU.

PETER: Don't call me that! But ask her. Just ask about the roof.

BLUNT: I said I'd handle this! Okay, so what about the roof?

VIOLET: (Sneezes) Sorry, gotta those, whadda ya call it. Allergies, thassa it. Yeah, da roof. Hokay, see, this is how she happened. Da cat, Sprinkles, she's-a so dumb she goes on da roof and won' come down. So w hat does thatta stupid man go and do, eh? Whatta you tink? He goes uppa ladder to get. "Come backa down here, you stupid Pepperoni, before you breaka you stupid neck!" Does he listen? You tell me, eh. NOOOO, he done listen. Att was a beeg problem with datta man. 'Cause before you can say "pasta fazole" he comes h umpety-bumpety-humpety-bumpety. So I go quick and call for help. Dial a 911. Was a good ting thatta man not hurt, cuz it took them twenty minutes to getta to da house.

PETER: I checked, Blunt!! I checked. The reason the paramedics took so long was because she gave them the wrong address! You know what that means, don't you, lady, PREMEDITATION. The difference between doing a few years and a getting a permanent room upstate. Maybe even the chair.

VIOLET: Don' be crazy person! No jury woulda convict me.

BLUNT: Maybe I'm missing something here, ma'am. But based on what we've seen today, plus what one might call a distinct lack of sorrow over your husband's sudden passing, I'd say a prosecutor might have a pretty good reason to bring you to trial.

VIOLET: (Looking around and abruptly breaking into sobs.) Oh, I feela so bad. My little Pepperoni. (Just as suddenly she is "over it".) I'mma sure I'm-a go to trial. And I'mma sure to go free. Be acquitted. Because justa before that jury goes offa to tink, certain big surpise gonna happen. I'm gonna do like this (She immediately goes into an act.) Oh, pleasa sir, I gotta make da confession. Mea culpa, mea culpa. I'ma guilty. Not of killing da Pepper, but....I'mma protect somebody. Causa you see. (Dramatically) I'MA NOT PETUNIA PEPPER.

BLUNT: You're not?

PETUNIA: Naw, she can't be. Cuz I am.

PETER: What the hell goes on here!! (PETUNIA comes to the front, switches berets with VIOLET who joins LILY.)

PETUNIA: She was taking the rap for me, Lt. I'm the real Mrs. Pepper. Petunia. You have to understand how close we are. My sisters and I. Why, we're the singing Rose sisters. Violet, Lily, and me. Petunia. We'd do anything for each other.

PETER: Including going to prison?

BLUNT: I can't help but noticing that you and your "sister" have very distinct accents.

VIOLET: Different papas.

PETUNIA: Different old mans.

BLUNT: I see. So where did you meet Dr. Pepper?

PETUNIA: On the golf course.

PETER: He didn't play golf!

PETUNIA: Of course he did. What doctor doesn't?

PETER: (To BLUNT) Ask her about the roof!

BLUNT: Petey, boy, let me do the questioning. So, ma'am, why don't you tell us about the roof.

PETUNIA: Well, it's just as my sister said. Sprinkles was on the roof and I couldn't get her down. So Paulie got a ladder and accidentally fell off. And I called 119 and it took them forever to get there. But Paulie was okay, so no harm done. Oh, and I told them the correct address. They are just covering their little paramedical butts

PETER: Oh, right. Come on, Blunt, you have enough. And I guarantee you the prosecutor will have enough. Arrest the broad.

PETUNIA: He's right, Lt., I'm ready for the handcuffs. (Holds out wrists.) Read me my rights, take me downtown. The whole nine yards. Cuff me. Strip search. Finger prints. Strip search. Mug shots. Strip search. I'm ready to pay for what I've done.

BLUNT: You are?

PETUNIA: Sure. And I know I'll go to trial and the jury will be just about to convict me when... certain revelations will shock the court. (She goes into her act) Oh, your honor, ladies and gentlemen. I cannot violate our judicial system in this way. Oh, sister dear, I do not want to betray you, but I must give up this charade. And then I will tell the court that I am, in reality, NOT Petunia Pepper. There will be confusion and shouts for order, etc., and just as it quiets down, I will repeat. I am not Petunia Pepper.

LILY: Because I am. (She comes forward, trading berets with PETUNIA who joins VIOLET.) Yes, Lt., and Peter dear, I am Petunia. And I met your dear uncle on the ski slopes.

PETER: He didn't ski!

LILY: Peter, darling, your uncle was a lot more athletic than you obviously know. And before you ask, I'll tell you about the cat incident. Sprinkles - that silly kitty cat - was up on the roof and just wouldn't come down. So my darlin' li'l Paulie got the ladder, fell, I called 911, they came late. End of story. Not a plot, not a murder attempt. Just an accident. Fiddle-dee-dee, what a fuss over a little ole accident!

BLUNT: Well, I gotta admit, I'm getting just a teensy bit confused here, ma'am. You're really Petunia Pepper? But you sound completely different than them.

LILY: Why, we tole you, honey. We had different daddies. But I (sneezes) Darn old allergies. . .am truly Petunia Pepper. And I fully expect to be carted off to jail, indicted, and placed on trial for this heinous crime. And I have no doubt that there will be just all manner of incriminating-type evidence against me. But just before the jury begins their deliberations, I'll stand and ask if I might, just for a minute, address the court. (She takes "center stage" and builds this speech to dramatic climax.) Ladies and gentlemen, darlings. You have to know how it was. It was a dark, stormy, STEAMY night. Oh, yes, STEAMY. And I was feelin' all....I don't know. Kinda antsy. Unsettled.

Restless. Why, I felt just like a pussy cat, like that li'l Sprinkles did up there on that roof. That describes it perfectly. I felt like a cat on a hot tin roof. (Her sisters applaud her performance.)

BLUNT: And then you will announce to the court that you are not Petunia Pepper.

LILY: Oh, pooey, Lt. - I wanted to do that. Yes, (dramatically) I am not Petunia Pepper.

VIOLET: Because I am. (She comes forward.)

BLUNT: Well we seem to have a plethora of Petunia's here.

PETER: Arrest them all! It's a conspiracy! Hang 'em all!

BLUNT: Now, Petey, boy, let's not wet our pants, okay. What's the scam, ladies?

LILY: It's really quite simple and wonderful, Lt. If you accept that the real Petunia was the only one with motive to kill Paulie, then finding Petunia becomes very important.

PETUNIA: She could just kill the widdle doctor and run away.

VIOLET: And then how coulda she collect on all of those lovely tings?

PETUNIA: JTSRW....JSWRO.....SJORT

VIOLET and LILY: JTWROS...

ALL SISTERS: Joint With Right Of Survivorship.

PETUNIA: Now, we did think of just bumping him off and framing someone....

LILY: Like you, Peter, dear. But since you are scheduled to inherit diddly, that left you without a real clear motive.

PETUNIA: And of course there was the option of killing him and making sure Petunia beat the rap.

VIOLET: But thatta mean alibis, and big muckety-muckety lawyers and sounded justa too mixup. Better she be simple. Usa old double jeopardy defense. Thattsa one really neat rule. Is this a great country or what?

LILY: So we just all decided we'd take turns being Petunia. Take turns being tried. Take turns being acquitted And when we're all done....

PETUNIA: And none of us can be tried again...

VIOLET: The real Petunia she's a come forward and get alla dose lovely tings.

PETER: (Whining) You can't do it! It's not fair!

BLUNT: Well, now, ladies, it seems like a really clever plan. But I do imagine that with a little bit of detective work we discover which of you is the real Mrs. Pepper.

LILY: Oh, dear Lt. Blunt. We have thought of all that. See we grew up in Montana, on a remote farm. Mother and Dad taught us. And they're gone now. Didn't have any other family. Didn't have any friends. Didn't need any. We had each other. We're the RoseSisters, LT. We sing together. We stick together. Many men have tried to break us up but no one can.

BLUNT: Well, Petey, they could have us here.

PETER: What'd'ya mean? (To the girls) Dental records!

LILY: No cavities!! (They all smile, showing teeth.)

BLUNT: So, Petey, what do you know about her?

PETER: I've been wracking my brain, trying to remember. Uncle Doctor said he met her somewhere...geez, I wasn't payin' attention. He was always meeting women. But when he called to say he married Petunia Rose, I started paying attention. But he didn't say anything... except....something really odd. He said she had a handicap. No, no, he said she had TWO handicaps. And he laughed when he said it, like it was some kind of joke with them.

THE REST OF THIS SCENE IS THE NO CLUE HUNT VERSION. IF A CLUE HUNT IS BEING USED, GO TO THE ALTERNATE SCENE ON PAGE 18.

BLUNT: Nothing else to help us identify Petunia?

PETER: Nope. (Remembers) Wait. She wrote me a note. Just after they got married. (He finds it in pocket, gives it to BLUNT.)

DEAR PETER,

I GUESS I SHOULD ADDRESS YOU AS "NEPHEW PETER" NOW THAT I HAVE MARRIED YOUR UNCLE PAUL. WHEN YOU VISIT US YOU WILL SEE HOW HAPPY WE ARE. ALL MY LIFE I'VE ONLY WANTED THREE THINGS: TO SING WITH MY SISTERS, TO MARRY A RICH DOCTOR, AND TO SHOOT RAP. TWO DOWN, ONE TO GO.

YOUR NEW AUNTIE,
PETUNIA

BLUNT: Too bad it's typed, we could check handwriting. Well, now here's what it says...(he reads it). Interesting, that's what I'd call this here case interesting. Now, Petey boy, ladies...I'm not going to make a fool of myself by arresting three people for the same crime. No, sirree, Mrs. Blunt didn't raise any dumb boys. I'm gonna do what any red-blooded American does in times of indecision. Vote. That's right. We're gonna have ourselves a little detection election. (To audience.) Each of you will be given a ballot. I want you to write your name and address on that ballot. Let's see here. The ladies have been having a lot of fun with these here colored hats. Suppose we get ourselves some ballot boxes that are the same colors. (To hostess) Can we do that? (She agrees.) See, that way all of you can cast your ballot. Just put it in the box that matches the lady you believe to be the true Mrs. Pepper. And a murderer. The ladies will be available for any additional questions. As will PU. Maybe some of you want to hear that letter again. And then vote. Put your ballot in the PINK box if you think this little lady did it. Put your ballot in the WHITE box if you believe this is the murderer. Or cast your vote in the BLACK box if you think this is the real Mrs. Pepper? We'll come to a decision in (names a time fifteen minutes hence.) Good luck.

ALTERNATE SCENE IF A CLUE HUNT IS BEING USED.

BLUNT: Nothing else to help us identify Petunia?

PETER: Nope. (Remembers) Wait. She wrote me a note, just after they got married. Inviting me here for Christmas....(He searches pockets frantically.) Oh, no, I just remembered! I was so angry that I ripped it up.... There's probably pieces of it all over the hotel.

BLUNT: Not very bright, PU, boy. Look, I'll tell you what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna get that (names HOST/HOSTESS) I'm gonna get her to organize a clue hunt to look for your letter, PU. Where is she?

HOST/HOSTESS WILL TAKE OVER, EXPLAIN CLUE HUNT, SOLUTION W/DESSERT, ETC. THIS IS COVERED IN THE PRODUCTION MANUAL.

THE ACTORS CIRCULATE WHETHER OR NOT THERE IS A CLUE HUNT, ANSWERING QUESTIONS, ETC.

SOLUTIONS WILL BE COLLECTED, GRADED, AND A SOLUTION SCENE IS PLAYED.

THE VERY BRIEF SOLUTION SCENE IS NOT INCLUDED IN REVIEW SCRIPTS. IF YOU ABSOLUTELY MUST HAVE THE ENTIRE ACTING COPY BEFORE MAKING A DECISION ABOUT PRODUCING, PLEASE CONTACT US:

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PROPS/SET DRESSING

2 starter pistols or stage guns

pink beret violet beret white

beret letter to PU

Something for body removal - We've used a stretcher, a hotel luggage rolling rack, a wheelchair, a furniture dollie, and we've simply dragged offstage - which is tough if you're just using a playing area without wings. If you can get local paramedics to come in with a real gurney, etc., it's a nice realistic touch.

Clue packets and clue materials needed for your event. The Production Manual covers this.

INCLUDED IN THE PRODUCTION PACKET, SENT ELECTRONICALLY. Clue packets with Answer Key and flow chart - several version/samples. Blank flow chart to help you make your own clue hunt A 'clean copy' of the letter, suitable for copying.

Production Manual

OPTIONAL

All materials in the Production Packet, including the Production Manual (which is the same for all shows) are available in print format for a small fee.