

The Body

An Improbable Mystery Solved in One Act

by Bryan Arnold

Cast of Characters:

The Detective

The Man

The Body

The Wife

Setting: The set is comprised of three bushes placed Stage Left, Stage Right and Upstage Center. At far right is the Man's office.

Scene 1

Lights up on the Man with his feet up on desk. There are bottles of whiskey, a phone, a bird cage, and stacks of newspapers on the desk.

Man: I am a private eye and it fits me quite well. I like day old chow mien and stale cigarettes. I like my women quiet and almost not there. I spend most of my time playing darts and talking to myself in my office with the lights off. I have a pet canary because my doctor told me they were uplifting.

God? Is there a god? I'm sure of it, and he's crapping on my life, holding me back from ever making something of myself. I guess my life is full of regrets, but the biggest one I would have to say was ever coming out of my mother's womb. Free room and board and no responsibilities, I was set.

The other day this Dame comes strolling into my office. Attractive enough but trouble with a capital T. She has a proposition for me. She wants me to kill her husband and split some big insurance claim with her. I figure, what the hell else do I have to lose? I have to pay the rent. My door hasn't moved in weeks other than my coming and going. The crazy thing is that this dame's husband

comes walking in my door the next day. He says there's this guy he wants me to trail and see who he's meeting the next night. I figure hey, what the hell? I'll get paid by this shtick and then kill him for the insurance. That's what I'm hoping this case will end with. I just want there to be no complications. If the cops get involved, I want them to trust me and stay out of my way. I'll just say the whole thing was an accident. I just hope this dame and her husband don't screw things up for me. Neither one of them seemed too bright. Oh well, here it goes.

Lights fade down on office.

Scene 2

Lights up on the Body Down Stage Center with an umbrella sticking out of his back, flanked on either side by the Detective and the Man.

Detective: Sooo, you found him like this?

Man: That's what I said.

Detective: You did say that, didn't you?

Man: I just said I did.

Detective: Yes. Yes, I think you did.

Man: That's right.

Detective: Uh-huh. What about the umbrella?

Man: Not mine. Looks like somebody stuck it in his back, doesn't it?

Could have been an accident, though.

Detective: Whose the detective around here? Are you a detective? Nooo.

All right then!

Man: Well... it's not mine.

Detective: Your what?

Man: Umbrella. It's not my umbrella.

Detective: Did I ask you? Stick to my damn questions. (Beat)Is that your umbrella?

(Man stands in dumbfounded silence.)

Detective: (needling) Why're you so nervous?

Man: I'm not. I just don't like standing around looking at dead guys.

Detective: And, what, you think I do?

Man: I didn't say that.

Detective: You implied it, though, didn't you?

Man: Look, Detective. I was just minding my own business--

Detective: They always are.

Man: I don't know the guy. I just tripped over this rock, dropped my fucking um--

Detective: Your umm?

Man: My--

Detective: You said your umm...

Man: My Um...what?

Detective: Your what?

Man: My what?

Detective: You said your um something.

Man: My ummmm--I forgot what I was going to say. Do you remember?

Detective: No. Something about an um-something.

Man: Oh well. Never mind.

Detective: No, no, no. You were going to say something. Come on.

Man: All right! I said um because I was trying to think of something to say because I'm lying to you. I was making up a story because, umm--

Detective: Umm, what?

Man: Nothing.

Detective: Now you're lying! Hah! I knew it! Why'd you do it?

Man: Now you're really jumping ahead, here. I didn't do it. But that is my goddamn umbrella and you know it is because you scared the hell out of me!

Detective: If you didn't do it, why were you so scared?

Man: You scared me on purpose!

Detective: I did not.

Man: You didn't think that jumping out from behind a bush yelling "boogalaboogaboogala!" was going to scare me?

Detective: No. Not really.

Man: This is ridiculous!

Detective: Tell me about it. (Writing down on pad) So, it's your umbrella?

Man: I just said it was.

Detective: And how did it just happen to get stuck in this guy's back?

Man: I just told you. You scared me!

Detective: So you kill a man over a little practical joke? You are a sicko.

Man: What?

Detective: So you kill a man--

Man: No. The last part.

Detective: You are a sick--

Man: Huh?

Detective: Sicko! Sicko! Sicko!

Man: All right, all right. I heard you the first time.

Detective: How many other guys are lying face down with an umbrella in their backs because of you?

Man: Look. I've really had enough. I'm just going to take my umbrella and pretend this never happened.

Detective: That would be easy, wouldn't it? Except for one little problem, Sicko, I've got a dead body here!

Man: He's not dead.

(The Body reaches up and smacks the Man in the leg.)

Detective: What?!

Man: (Pointing at the Body) Not dead.

Detective: Suuure, buddy. Dead people don't mind pepper spray like this guy--

(Detective sprays Body in the face with pepper spray. Body is restraining his pain.) See. He doesn't care.

Man: But!

Detective: And, if he were alive, he certainly wouldn't appreciate fifty thousand volts of electricity streaming through his body! (He pulls out stun gun and zaps Body. Body flops around.) But this guy is dead.

Man: He might be now.

Body: (Feebly) No. I'm not. (Detective and Man scream. Detective jumps into Man's arms.)

Both: What?!

Body: You bastards...Why are you trying to kill me?

Both: We're not.

Detective: I thought you were dead.

Man: It was an accident.

Body: Where's my wife?

Detective: (Writing in his notebook) You have a wife?

Man: He obviously has a goddamn wife! He just asked for her.

Body: He's right, officer. I did say that I have a wife.

Detective: I'm not an officer. I'm a Detective.

Body: Right. Sorry. Is my wife around?

Man: I haven't seen anybody's wife around here--

(The wife jumps out from behind the bush, stage left.)

Wife: Boogaboogaboogala!

(Everyone screams. Detective jumps onto Man's back.)

Man: (Looking at Detective) See. I told you that shit's scary!

Detective: You're right. Sorry. (To Wife) Who are you?

Wife: (In slow southern drawl) I'm his wife. And I am vehemently opposed to discussing any of this business about who I am, or what I was doing hiding behind that bush while my poor, dear husband is a lying there like a stuck pig. I mean, truly, blood is pouring out of him like lava. And you boys are standing around askin' me who I am and why I done it.

Man: He didn't ask you that yet. You've gotta let him work through it at his own pace.

Detective: Thanks, but I'll take it from here. (Long pause.) So...who are you?

Wife: My gawd.

Body: Don't let her come near me.

Wife: I'm his wife, Detective. And I came here to kill him.

Body: (Trying to crawl away from her but not getting far) Please...

Detective: Would you stop moving around? You're messing with my crime scene! I'm trying to do a murder investigation here and no one is cooperating! Not even the body!

Wife: (Seducing the Detective) Oh, just look at him salivate. Like a wolf in Detective's clothing. I like wolves in clothing other than their own, especially if it's a uniform. And it helps if the wolf's not that hairy, because I hate hairy wolves. And that awful dog breath! Sickening!

Detective: (Checking his breath.) I can assure you, lady, my breath isn't that dog like. And, as a matter of fact-- (Detective grabs Wife and kisses her.) I just got my back waxed yesterday!

Wife: Oooh, Detective! How swank!

Man: What the hell?!

Body: (Pulling on Man's leg and pointing at the Detective) That's him! That's the guy!

Man: It can't be... he says he's a detective.

Detective: Well, I'm not! I'm a prostitute! And I was supposed to meet this lady here behind that bush.(Specifically points to bush, stage right.)

Wife: Oh, shit...wrong bush!

Man: But you're a guy. So, wouldn't you technically be a gigolo?

Wife: No. He's not.

Man: Not what?

Wife: A guy.

Body: (Horrified) You're not?!

Man: So, you're a woman?

Detective: What's with all the questions?

Man: I'm a dick. (The Wife eyes him hungrily.) I'm a private eye.

Detective: A what?!

Man: What the hell is wrong with you?!

Detective: (Pouting) I liked it better when I was the Detective. I don't do submissive very well.

Man: So. You're not a guy?

Wife: No! No, he's not!

Detective: Whatever gets you through the night, sweetheart.

Wife: Well, I--

Man: What's going on here?! Are you a man or a woman? Did you come here to kill your husband? Are you two having an affair?

(Responses of the Wife and Detective overlap)

Detective: Yeah, I'm a man but she really thinks that I've got to be a woman because her husband is threatening to run off with his lover and she doesn't think that her husband could give her up for a man and no we're not having an affair because she didn't meet me behind the right bush. She wanted to see what the hell made a man so much better than her and I thought that was only fair!

Wife: Yeah, he's a he but I gotta think in my mind that he's a she because my husband's threatening to run off with his lover and there's no way my husband's leavin' me for no man. So I thought I'd try him out but I hid behind the wrong bush. I jes' needed to know what made him better than me! I thought it was only fair!

Man: Uh-huh!

Body: So, you are a man!

Detective: A what?

Man: A Man! He said you're a man!

Detective: Yes. And so much more.

Body: (To Detective) How could you do this to me? How could you stab me in the back like this?

Detective: Oh no! It's you! No, no! It was this guy! It's his umbrella!

Man: You're all crazy. This guy here (points to Body) hired me to trail you in here and see who you were meeting. He must have been tailing his wife-

Body: I was. And I would have been able to hide behind that bush (indicating bush, upper center stage.) if you hadn't come crashing through it and speared me with your umbrella! Hack! Hack! (He goes into a convulsive fit.)

Man: Settle down. We've got to figure this out before you die. She said she came here to kill you.

Body: It doesn't matter anymore.

Detective: It does. Because I love you.(Detective bends down and holds the Body.)

Wife: That is repulsive! I can see your back hair growing out from under your shirt collar. Why, you didn't wax at all! My gawd! I don't know what my husband sees in you!

Man: Neither do I. Should we do it?

Detective: Do what?

Man: Would you be quiet? Can't you see that I'm trying to have a private conversation here. That's why I'm whispering.

Detective: Actually, you were yelling. Whispering sounds more like pss-pss-pss-psss-pss. See?

Man: (To Wife) I hate him! (Taking out revolver) Can we do it now? We've really wasted enough time.

Body: (Feebly) What are you doing? I hired you to...

Man: I know why you hired me. But you don't know why I let you hire me.

Body: You needed the money?

Man: No.

Body: It was a good case?

Man: Definitely not.

Body: I needed help?

Man: Try again.

Body: Uhhh...

Man: Do you give up?

Body: Just give me a second. (Long Pause. Light bulb.) Because--

Man: Nope! Because your wife and I were planning on knocking you off for your insurance money.

Body: That's not fair. I was going to say that.

Man: Well, too bad. I already told you.

Body: But I don't even have insurance.

Man: Bullshit! Your wife said you did.

Wife: He does.

Body: She probably means my car insurance.

Man: (Looking at Wife.)Car insurance!

Detective: I won't let them hurt you!

Wife: Car insurance is good, isn't it?

Man: Oh my god!

Wife: What's wrong? Just shoot him and we get the money, right?

Man: No. It doesn't really work that way. I'm going to have to shoot all of you now.

All: What?!

Man: And I won't even get a dime for it. Jesus. It would have been nice to at least get reimbursed for the bullets. (Pause.) Do any of you want to pitch in?

Wife: (Digging into purse with a sigh.) How much are they?

Man: Never mind! Keep your fucking hands where I can see them!

Wife: My gawd! Do you want the money, or not? I mean, really!

Detective: Yeah, you don't have to be so rude! Potty mouth!

Man: (Turning to Detective.) Fuck you! I am about to kill you people and-- (Wife has pulled out revolver from her purse and is pointing it at Man.)

Wife: No. (Beat.) Did you think I was really gonna split my husband's car insurance settlement with you? Oh, no, mister. There's things that a girl needs in life, but a private dick dipping into her purse just ain't one of them! (To Body) Especially after just getting out of a bad relationship.

Man: Put that gun away, lady, or your husband gets it.

Wife: Would you just do it already?

Detective: I think he's dead.

Both(Man and Wife): Really?

Detective: (Checking pulse and breathing.) Yeah... no... maybe...uh...yeah, I think he's dead. And you're both in some pretty big trouble.

Wife: I'm rich!

Man: What are you talking about, trouble?

Detective: Well...there's a dead man here with your umbrella sticking out of his back--

Man: I told you already: you scared me!

Detective: You were contracted to kill him by his wife.

Man: You got me there.

Wife: But I'm not paying him anymore. He was supposed to shoot him dead. And I don't think he did a very good job. It took so long for my husband to die.

Detective: (To Wife) And you. Soliciting a prostitute, conspiring to murder your husband, car insurance fraud. You're looking at a long time, lady.

Man: What are you talking about?

Detective: I'm a Detective.

Man: Right. Haven't we been over this whole gay gigolo guy thing?

Detective: I was undercover.

Man: Yeah. Under his covers.

Wife: Would you stop that?! I mean that's my deceased husband you're talking about.

Detective: There was nothing illegal about our relationship. (To Wife) He never had to pay me.

Man: Well, this is all fine and dandy, but I have a gun pointed right at your head.

Wife: And don't forget I've got one trained on you.

Detective: And no one wants to see the heat I'm packing under this skirt!

Man and Wife: Rrrright!

Man: So isn't there something we can work out here?

Detective: No. Not really. Everything we've said has been monitored by my partner in that van right over there. (Points out to audience. Long pause while they look out to van.)

Wife: Where?

Detective: There.

Man: Where?

Detective: (Emphatically pointing) There!

Wife: There's no van.

Detective: What?

Man: Yep. She's right. No van. You're fucked.

Detective: Oh shit! Well, I'm sure we could work something out.

Man: How about I just take my umbrella and pretend like this never happened.

Detective: Okay.

Wife: And I'll go back behind that bush and pretend like nothing happened.

Man: Sounds good.

Detective: And I'll forget I saw a thing. But what about him?

Wife: Do I need him to make the insurance claim? (They both shrug.) Well, I guess I'll take him with me. Can you give me a hand?

Detective: It's only fair, I suppose. I'm as responsible for his death as you were.

Detective and Wife: And we both loved him. (They both look at each other and give corn ball romantic googly eyes.)

Man: This is ridiculous. (He pulls his umbrella out of the Body's back.)

I'm out of here. (The Man EXITS.)

The lights fade on the Detective and the Wife drag the Body off behind bush, stage left.

Scene 3

Lights up on the Man entering office. He takes out flask, swigs, sits in chair.

Man: Welllll...that sucked.

The End