

THE MYSTERIOUS MYSTERY OF THE LOST LETTERS

By Salwa Meghjee and Samah Meghjee

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THE MYSTERIOUS MYSTERY OF THE LOST LETTERS

A One Act Comedic Mystery

By Salwa Meghjee and Samah Meghjee

SYNOPSIS: Zoe is an assistant to Detective Davis Darvis, an incompetent amateur who does not appreciate her talents. When he accepts a case regarding an old woman's stolen letters, he rejects Zoe's proposal to help. She teams up with her friend Isaac in a race to solve the case before Darvis does, using her wit combined with Isaac's botanical knowledge to aid their search. Their adventure brings them across an elderly pro-wrestler, a duck-obsessed cult, a knitting gang, and more as they try to find the lost letters.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

*(5 females, 3 males, 6-10 either, 1-4 extras; gender flexible,
doubling possible)*

DETECTIVE DAVIS DARVIS (m).....	An incompetent detective and Zoe's boss. (73 lines)
ZOE (f).....	An intelligent, enthusiastic crime-solver with repressed skill. (77 lines)
ABBY ARLINGTON (f).....	An old woman whose letters from a great-relative are stolen. (18 lines)
ISAAC (m).....	A florist and Zoe's best friend. (70 lines)
BROTHER DONALD (m/f).....	Member of the Duckology cult. (10 lines)
BROTHER DAFFY (m/f).....	Another member of the cult, who only speaks in quacks. (1 lines)
GERARD (m).....	Abby Arlington's son and a suspect in the case. (20 lines)
MABEL ARLINGTON (f).....	Abby Arlington's sister and an ex-pro wrestler. (14 lines)

ELAINE (f)	Gerard's creepy chess rival and an avid doll collector. (10 lines)
KITTY KISS (f)	The knitting gang leader and a member of Gerard's chess circle. (13 lines)
BODYGUARD #1 (m/f)	A knitting gang member and Kitty's bodyguard. (4 lines)
BODYGUARD #2 (m/f)	A knitting gang member and Kitty's bodyguard. (2 lines)
DANCE TROUPE LEADER #1 (m/f)	A member of a Shakespearean dance troupe. (6 lines)
DANCE TROUPE LEADER #2 (m/f)	A member of a Shakespearean dance troupe. (4 lines)
DANCER #1 (m/f)	A member of a Shakespearean dance troupe. (Non-Speaking)
REPORTER (m/f)	A reporter from the local newspaper. (2 lines)
DETECTIVE DANIEL (m/f)	A detective from the Detective Agents Agency. (9 lines)
LANDLORD (m/f)	The owner of Darvis' office. (2 lines)
MAYOR (m/f)	The mayor of the town. (1 lines)
EXTRAS (m/f)	(Non-Speaking)

CAST NOTES: It is possible for Brother Donald, Bodyguard #1, and Landlord to be played by one actor. It is possible for Brother Daffy, Bodyguard #2, Mayor to be played by one actor as well.

DURATION: 35 minutes.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES**SCENE 1: DETECTIVE'S OFFICE****SCENE 2: DUCKOLOGY MEETING****SCENE 3: GERARD'S HOUSE/DARVIS' OFFICE****SCENE 4: ELAINE'S HOUSE****SCENE 5: OUTSIDE KITTY'S HOUSE****SCENE 6: DANCE SHOW****SCENE 7: DETECTIVE'S OFFICE****SCENE 8: DETECTIVE'S OFFICE****SCENE 9: FLOWER SHOP****PROPS****SCENE 1**

- Stack of Files
- 1 Coffee Mug
- 1 Notebook
- 1 Pen
- 1 Check
- 1 Purse
- 1 Coat
- 1 Briefcase
- Miscellaneous Papers, Files, Coffee Mugs
- 3 Envelopes for Mail

SCENE 3

- Chess Board
- 2 Notebooks
- 2 Pens

SCENE 4

- Dolls
- 1 Hairbrush
- 1 Notebook
- 1 Pen
- 1 Jar of Bat's Eyes

SCENE 5

- Trash Can with Trash
- Letters
- Brochures
- 3 Pairs of Knitting Needles
- Yarn Balls
- 1 Basket
- Recycling Bins

SCENE 6

- 2 Notebooks
- 2 Pens
- Flower Bouquet
- Fake Police Badge
- Shakespeare's Letters

SCENE 7

- 1 Newspaper
- Miscellaneous Papers, Files, Coffee Mugs

SCENE 8

- Shakespeare's Letters
- Money
- 1 Fake Moustache
- Miscellaneous Papers, Files, Coffee Mugs

SCENE 9

- Shakespeare's Letters
- Money
- 1 Camera
- 1 Notebook
- 1 Pen
- 1 Medal
- 1 Phone

SET

Because of the frequent scene changes, a simple set consisting of a table, six chairs, and a bookshelf works well. Props can be used to differentiate the scenes. One option that also allows for a more elaborate set is having a split stage, with one side being a stationary set of Darvis' office and the other changing with each scene. A brightly colored set works well.

STAGING

The Duckology Members can be utilized as stage hands, moving set pieces on and off while quacking, holding brochures, and asking actors leaving the stage to join their “way of life.” During Scene 3, the two scenes are meant to flow as one conversation. While action is happening on one side, the actors can freeze, there can be a blackout on one half of the stage, or the actors can mime a conversation.

COSTUMES

Like the set, the costumes should be simple but brightly colored. The Duckology Members can be in cloaks or a uniform black. They can have duck elements to them, such as green eyeshadow or feathered costumes. After Scene 3, Darvis can keep his cape on for the remainder of the play. The knitting gang should wear knitwear.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Since the show has a large cast, double casting worked well. Much of the original production's blocking is written in the script.

To enhance the absurdity of the play, the characters can break the fourth wall often. This is especially applicable with the Duckology members, who can be used as stagehands and can encourage audience members to join their cult throughout the show. Duckology members can be incorporated throughout the show, such as in the audience of the dance.

In the dance scene, you should incorporate Shakespeare's letters into the dance. If you are unable to choreograph a full dance, simply have dancers stretching onstage and remove Isaac's line, “We can't do anything now, the show's about to start. Come on, let's sit.”

In the last scene, Abby can stay onstage and talk to the reporter, examine and sniff the letters, et cetera. When the Duckology members enter, they can enter the audience and hold up signs, pass out Duckology pamphlets, encourage audience members to join, et cetera.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

First performed at the Orlando Shakespeare Theater's Mandell Theater on August 9, 2015. With the cast and crew as follows:

ZOE -----Elizabeth Bellersen
 DARVIS -----Nicolas Garces
 ABBY -----Daniela Chacon
 ISAAC -----Eric Topolewski
 GERARD -----Joseph Salomone
 MABEL -----Allison Lloyd
 KITTY -----Elizabeth Williams
 ELAINE -----Kenyse Horsey
 BROTHER DONALD -----Riley Bailey
 BROTHER DAFFY -----Luke Salomone
 BODYGUARDS #1 & #2 --Luke Salomone, Edwin Alex Luke
 DETECTIVE DANIEL -----Edwin Alex Luke
 REPORTER -----Luke Salomone
 LANDLORD -----Salwa Meghjee
 MAYOR -----Precious Patton
 DANCE TROUPE LEADER #1 -----Tianna Holmes
 DANCE TROUPE LEADER #2 -----Erin Crobons
 DANCER #1 -----Sarah Bowlin

DIRECTORS: Salwa and Samah Meghjee

STAGE MANAGERS: Amelia Green and Isabella Chiodini

STAGEHANDS: Precious Patton

SET DIRECTOR: Tianna Holmes

ART DIRECTOR: Jennina Garde

COSTUMING DIRECTOR: Gouthami Gadamsetty

LIGHTING DIRECTOR: Joel Zishuk

SOUND DIRECTOR: Grace Yao

PROPERTIES DIRECTOR: Emma Bland

PUBLICITY DIRECTOR: Allison Huss.

HAIR & MAKEUP DIRECTORS: Sumaiyah Razzaq, Anupa Thirmiya,
 Emma Bland

SCENE 1: DETECTIVE'S OFFICE

AT RISE: *DARVIS is sitting at a desk, snoring softly. The desk and floor are covered in piles of files, books, crumpled papers and dirty coffee mugs. ZOE hurries through the door holding a huge, teetering pile of files.*

ZOE: Here's some more of the files I compiled, Detective.

DARVIS jolts awake at his name, wiping drool hurriedly from his face.

DARVIS: Huh? Oh, uh just lay them... *(Indicates vaguely stage right.)* ...Over there somewhere.

ZOE maneuvers her way through the piles of junk, trying to see over the stack of papers she is holding. ZOE lays down the pile and then selects a few files, placing them in front of DARVIS.

ZOE: Um, I found some really interesting stuff today, Detective. We were contacted about this lost guppy and I know it may just have been flushed down the toilet, but I've got this feeling that there's something fishy going on. And there were some robberies at the crayon factory, but the robber only takes the "Mango Tango" crayons, which is a little suspicious in my opinion. We can set up surveillance and maybe a couple booby traps, I found this one really neat octopus trap online that we can modify—

DARVIS stands abruptly and interrupts her.

DARVIS: Zoe, what do we do here at Davis Darvis Incorporated?

ZOE: We solve cases.

DARVIS: I solve cases. You get the coffee.

Harshly hands her a mug.

Extra strong. I'd like to stay awake today.

ZOE sighs and takes the cup dejectedly, walking out of the office without protest.

DARVIS: That's it, darling. We all do what we're good at. (*Picks up case file.*) Lost guppy. There could be something in that...

Knock on the door.

DARVIS: Come in.

An old woman walks in.

ABBY: Are you Davis Darvis? I have a case for you. I've lost something very dear to me.

DARVIS: (*Perks up.*) A case? Certainly! Please, have a seat.

DARVIS looks around for a chair, but before he finds one, the old woman sits on the floor.

Oh, there you go.

He pulls out a notebook and a pen from his desk and waits expectantly. ZOE comes to the door, clearly visible to the audience. She stops when she sees a client in the room, and is not noticed by DARVIS or ABBY. She hides herself behind the door and listens.

So, why don't you tell me what happened? What did you lose and how did you lose it?

ABBY: I have in my possession some very old letters, dating back hundreds of years to the Renaissance. They are my prized possessions, and I love them like my own children. Well, perhaps more so than that. They are very valuable. My great-great-great—how many 'great's was that?

DARVIS counts silently on his fingers but makes an error.

DARVIS: Six.

ABBY: Ah, yes. Great-great grandmother wrote them to her companion, Sir William Shakespeare.

DARVIS: You have letters from *Shakespeare*?

ABBY: I had them, until they were stolen from me.

DARVIS: Do you have any idea who might have taken them?

ABBY: Well, there were three people who came to visit me the day that they disappeared. My son, Gerard, came in that morning to have breakfast with me before his chess tournament. Then a solicitor came about converting me to her religion, Duckology.

DARVIS: I think I've heard of that.

ABBY: I invited her in for tea. She was lovely, but a little strange. She kept quacking.

DARVIS: Who was the third person?

ABBY: My sister, Mabel. She's always despised me. She wanted those letters for herself. I think she keeps waiting for me to die so that she can finally get her hands on them, but she got too impatient and stole them.

DARVIS: Did she come in? How long did she stay?

ABBY: Just long enough to borrow my book on the art of knitting left socks.

DARVIS: (*Beat.*) Just left socks?

ABBY: Why would you need any other socks?

DARVIS: Oh. Right.

ABBY: She must have taken the letters while she was there. She knows I keep them in my fridge. She could have grabbed them without me noticing.

DARVIS: Why do you keep them in the fridge?

ABBY: Don't worry. I give them socks so they don't get too cold.

DARVIS: ...Right. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me?

ABBY: Cold feet are the thirty seventh highest killers of old ladies in the United States.

DARVIS: Actually, they're the thirty-sixth. Now, please leave your name, number, zodiac sign, and method of payment, as well as a nonrefundable deposit, and I'll get started immediately. If you could give me your sister's address as well, that would be swell. (*Laughs.*) Well and swell! Isn't that funny? I rhymed.

ABBY: The duckology woman said rhyming was a sin.

DARVIS: Sorry.

ABBY stands up and gets ready to leave.

ABBY: I'll be in touch.

DARVIS: Don't worry. You're in safe hands!

Moves to open the door to let her out and trips over himself, falling on the ground.

ABBY: Oh, dear.

ABBY exits. ZOE bursts into the room as DARVIS picks himself off the floor.

ZOE: A case! We have a case!

DARVIS: I have a case. You have errands to run. I need you to take this check to the bank.

ZOE: We don't have a bank account.

DARVIS: That reminds me! I need you to open us a bank account. If you could also find out how to pay our bills while you're there, that'd be great.

ZOE: You haven't been paying the bills?

DARVIS: That's why I have you.

ZOE: Fine. But about this case! I think we should start with her son first, he had the most time to make a move and we could--

DARVIS: Zoe. You're approaching this totally wrong. I have to start with the evangelist. She was obviously communicating secret messages through duck quacks to her accomplice who was in the yard. And you need to go cash this check.

ZOE: But—

DARVIS: What do you do here at Davis Darvis Incorporated?

ZOE: Oh, come on, not this again.

DARVIS: I'm the detective, Zoe. Don't take it to heart. Not all of us can be supremely talented at the art of solving mysteries. Now, go cash that check. I must be off!

Grabs coat dramatically off the coat hanger and sweeps out of the room. After a moment, sweeps back into the room.

DARVIS: I forgot my briefcase.

Grabs it.

I must be off!

DARVIS sweeps out dramatically. ZOE sighs dejectedly and thumps into the desk chair. There is a knock at the door and ISAAC walks in.

ISAAC: Mail!

ZOE: Last I checked, you were a florist's assistant.

ISAAC: *Executive* florist's assistant, thank you very much. And before that I was a clock maker, census taker, maraca shaker, cupcake baker, and telephone operator. Maybe not in that order. I mix them up sometimes. Anyway, your mail got delivered to us downstairs by accident, so here you go.

ZOE reads the envelope.

ZOE: Eviction notice. I'm not even surprised.

ISAAC: So what's up? Any interesting cases? Chain-email murderers? Barbershop quartet's gone rogue?

ZOE: No, just the ever-exciting heist of coffee making and check cashing. It's riveting. Really dangerous.

ISAAC: Really? Nothing interesting?

Looks at desk and flips through notes.

Hey, this looks cool! Stolen letters!

ZOE: It would be, if I was allowed to help.

ISAAC: You aren't? Aren't you like, executive detective assistant?

ZOE: I wish. I'm not even detective assistant. I'm coffee-and-errands girl to the worst detective on the planet. He's going after some Duckology woman, for goodness' sakes. It's so obvious that the son did it.

ISAAC: Actually, I think the sister did it. Look, it says here her sister wants the letters.

ZOE: It can't be her. She picked up a book, it's unlikely she even made it into the kitchen. And she's waiting for her sister to die, right? She's got no motive to steal them if she's set to inherit them. The client is Abby Arlington. The Arlington's are loaded. Their grandfather invented the wind-powered pocket food processor.

ISAAC: I have one of those!

ZOE: ...Right. Mabel Arlington is much older than Abby, so she must have inherited the money, while Abby just got the letters. I doubt she's even after them. Abby's just paranoid.

ISAAC: Wow. You're good.

ZOE: I watch a lot of crime shows.

ISAAC: I bet you could solve this thing yourself, without that doofus detective.

ZOE: Too bad I'm stuck here.

ISAAC: We can solve it. I bet we could! I'd be a great detective! I'm like a plant to CO₂—I'll take whatever you have to say and twist it into something completely different.

ZOE: But Darvis said no, and I don't want to lose my job. And besides, aren't you supposed to be working?

ISAAC: I'm on my extended break. Let's solve it! We'll prove to your lousy detective that you're worthy of solving cases after all.

ZOE: I don't know...

ISAAC: Come on! It'll be great. The florist and the coffee girl. Zoe and Isaac. Or even better—wait for it—Isaac and Zoe. I'll bring the flowers. Come on!

Without waiting for an answer, ISAAC grabs ZOE and leads her out the door.

SCENE 2: DUCKOLOGY MEETING

DARVIS is sitting in a chair with a spotlight on him. Hooded figures are seated on the ground around him. All but BROTHER DONALD, who is closest to DARVIS, sit with their heads bent forward and their hands placed one on top of the other horizontally, resembling a duck bill. DARVIS is nervous and fidgety. He looks around the room with an oversized magnifying glass.

DARVIS: So, why don't you tell me a little bit about your religion?

BROTHER DONALD: It is not merely a religion. Duckology is life itself.

DARVIS: Sorry. I didn't mean to be so politically incorrect.

BROTHER DAFFY quacks. At the same time, all other DUCKOLOGY MEMBERS open and close their hands to resemble a duck bill opening and closing.

DARVIS: What do the quacks mean? Is it a secret form of communication?

BROTHER DONALD: They are a way of channeling our inner spirits, our true selves--

DARVIS: So you used your true selves to steal the letters?

BROTHER DONALD: We stole no letters! This is blasphemy!

DARVIS: Then why did you visit old lady Abby?

BROTHER DONALD: To enlighten her to our wonderful way of life.

DARVIS: So why would your cult want the letters? They aren't written in duck. Probably.

BROTHER DONALD: We don't want any letters! We want members!

DARVIS: So you visited her to convert her, but you also stole the letters.

BROTHER DAFFY: Oh, for the love of mallards—

BROTHER DONALD gasps and clasps BROTHER DAFFY'S face in their hands.

BROTHER DONALD: You broke the duck vow! You have broken the duck vow of silence!

BROTHER DAFFY buries their face in their hands. BROTHER DONALD glowers at DARVIS.

BROTHER DONALD: You have ruined my companion's silence! You have broken the connection with the inner self! Leave! Leave us!

DUCKOLOGY MEMBERS begin to rise, quacking menacingly and clapping their hands to resemble a duck bill opening and closing.

DARVIS: (*Panicking.*) Okay, okay, I'm going, goodbye!

DARVIS sprints off stage, leaving his briefcase behind.

SCENE 3: GERARD'S HOUSE/DARVIS' OFFICE

The stage is split with one side as GERARD'S house and one side as DAVIS' office. ISAAC and ZOE are seated across from GERARD at a table with a chess board on top. DARVIS is seated across from MABEL, who is wearing a wrestling cape. While one person is talking on one side, the other side is frozen.

DARVIS: Good morning, Ms. Arlington Two. Thank you for meeting with me today.

MABEL: Anything for an embarrassing picture of Abby.

ZOE: Uh, hi. How are you, Mr. Gerard?

ISAAC nudges ZOE.

ISAAC: Act like a real detective. Ask the hard questions. Be tough. Plant your feet. Hit the table a bit. No mercy!

DARVIS: Can you tell me about your visit to your sister's house a few days ago?

GERARD appears panicked.

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