

Death By Radio

By Paul Falcone

This play is dedicated to the civilians who fought on the Home Front during WWII

Due to an unexploded bomb at the BBC studios the live broadcast of an episode of the popular drama series “The Mystery of the Mummy’s Curse” is being broadcast from the Chington Floral Hall.

Nobody had anything to do with this bomb.(You might be asked about this)

The show, performed before a live audience has been running for five years and is one of the most popular on the radio.

The setting is a ballroom with part of it set up like a radio studio. There are wires and ‘things’ strung all around.

The cast and extras are milling around trying to set up the studio. Several of the crew have not been able to work because of warden duties etc.

The cast are mingling with the audience according to their character or revising their scripts with the exception of Violet who hasn’t been given hers yet. She wanders around with a drink in her hand. When the play section starts they should be sat reading their scripts or out of the room. Sydney is very calm at first he is sitting around doing a crossword in a newspaper. He checks the time.

Sydney: *(Aloud to cast and crew)* Ten minutes ladies and gentlemen.*(Throws down newspaper)*

Violet: Sydney, I haven’t received my script yet.

Sydney: It’s in my case, Violet, I’ll go and fetch it.

Violet: Why haven’t I received it?

Sydney: It’s in my case, Violet. I said I’ll fetch it.

Violet moves aside attend to her hair and make-up. Sydney goes to exit and is stopped by Lord Nigel. They do a funny handshake.

Lord Nigel: I wonder if I could have a word about some of these lines?

Sydney: Nigel, your always changing your lines. I know the code of 'The Brotherhood' and I know we had an agreement but I would like the integrity of the play intact.

Lord Nigel: It's not that big a change. I've never upset the production before. The script will be alright, it's just I can't get my tongue around some of the phrases, old chap.

Sydney: Look, I've got a lot of problems at the moment. I'm missing some stage crew and have no sound effects people. Leave things as they are.

Lord Nigel: But Sydney...

Sydney: I'm busy. Now where is everybody

Sydney exits Rodney moves centre stage and hisses a stage whisper Nigel.

Rodney: Pssst!

They meet in the middle.

Rodney: I've got two bottles of whisky for you.

Lord Nigel: All good stuff?

Rodney: The best.

Lord Nigel: Where did you get it?

Rodney: *(Taps the side of his nose)* Ask no questions.

Lord Nigel: Here's your money.

Nigel passes Rodney a few notes and exits. Rodney counts his money and puts it away.

Rodney: *(Stage whisper)* Lisbeth, Lisbeth!

Lisbeth enters. She runs to Rodney and takes his hand.

Rodney: Come on let's go and have a quick cuddle before your Dad gets back.

They quickly exit in a different direction to the one that Sydney went through. Sydney returns with some scripts in his hand. He hands one to Violet.

Sydney: *(Shouts)* Is everybody ready? Where's Malcolm?

Malcolm: Here I am.

Sydney: And where's Jane?

Jane enters. She looks bothered.

Jane: You and I need to have a word .

Sydney: Can't it wait?

Jane: No. Where's my money?

Sydney: This is hardly the time. Besides people are watching.

Jane: I don't care. I gave you my life savings, Where is it?

Lisbeth and Rodney rush on hand in hand they spot Sydney who also spots them. There is a moments pause.

Sydney: Rodney, if I may have a word with my daughter please.

He pulls his daughter to the side. Rodney doffs his forelock and goes to a quiet corner or exits to read his script.. Jane grunts and goes to Malcolm.

Sydney: Now look Lisbeth. I think you should stay away from that Rodney. He's a bit of a cad, a geezer, a blinking blighter. He's beneath you. Besides, he's got a criminal record.

Lisbeth: But Daddykins...

Sydney: But, Daddykins nothing. I've given you this part to further your career. Now concentrate on that and not with young men.

Violet gives a loud scream. All turn to look at her. Lisbeth uses the opportunity to escape and exit

Violet: ***(Gulps a drink and overacts)*** What have you done? You swine what have you done?

Malcolm: Violet, darling, whatever's the matter?

Violet: I've been sacked. ***(Pointing at Sydney violently and dramatically)*** He's written me out of the play. He's killing off Lady Bullivant. Why oh why oh why?

Violet continues to over do the sobbing and wailing. Sydney exits. Malcolm and Jane attempt to comfort Violet.

Jane: ***(Glancing at the script)*** It seems he's given his daughter a part in the series. Look at this she comes on for no reason.

Malcolm: ***(Glancing at the script)*** The man's a cad and a boundah. I think I'll give him a piece of my mind.

Jane: Come, come, Violet let's go and find somewhere for you to lie down.

Violet: ***(Sobbing)*** I'll refuse to say my last line, that's what I'll do. If that doesn't work I might have to do something drastic.

She takes Violet off crying and sobbing. Sydney enters with Lisbeth.

Lisbeth: What if I get the line wrong Daddy? When do I say it?

Sydney: Don't worry your pretty little head over it my dear, I'll give you a nod.

She slinks away reading the script to herself, visibly mouthing the lines.

Malcolm: Sydney, why have you killed off Lady Bullivant?

Sydney: The character is getting stale.

Malcolm: Yet, conveniently you've given Lisbeth a part. A bit nepotistic isn't it?

Sydney: The play needs a new lease of life. I've included a great new character, Veronica Yearsley and Lisbeth is ideal.

Malcolm: But it's one line for goodness sake! Is that any reason to get rid of Violet?

Sydney: Look, the budget will not stretch to another cast member. There is a war on you know. But that wouldn't worry you would it?

Malcolm: What do you mean by that old boy?

Sydney: I know about you. You're a 'conchey' (*contentious objector*) a coward in other words.

Malcolm: How dare you!

Sydney: Did you serve in the Great War, I think not!

Malcolm: I.... I.... I...

Sydney: I'm going to blow the gaff on you. You won't be a housewives favourite for much longer.

Malcolm: You wouldn't dare.

Sydney: Trust me.

Malcolm: You'll live to regret it if you do.

Malcolm storms off. Jane enters.

Sydney: Come on everybody. We do have a job to do remember. We are part of the war effort.

Jane: Less of the jingoism. Where's my money?

Sydney: I went to America as I said. I invested the money and it didn't work. I'm sorry.

Jane: Sorry! I think you've been living it up in America. Spent all my money gambling. That's the gossip in the studios.

Sydney: I had to entertain the clients. Any way I have this new idea. Television will be the thing of the future. I have an idea for a weekly series based on a cobbled street in Manchester built during the Coronation. I'll call it 'Victorian Street'.

NB: If this is played in another country then rearrange the words to reflect a well known soap opera.

Jane: You'll pay for this.

She storms off. Sydney runs after her.

Sydney: Jane, Jane, It's all a misunderstanding. I can explain. How about a programme set in a Yorkshire Farm? ***(Or another soap opera)***

Sydney exits. Rodney and Lisbeth enter.

Rodney: What did your old man have to say?

Lisbeth: He says I'm to stop seeing you.

Rodney: He's just being a snob, cos I'm from the East End. Anyhows' I thought he'd do anything you ask.

Lisbeth: Usually.

Rodney: I think we should run away to Gretna Green and get married, and set up house. I would be too late then.

Lisbeth: Where would we get the money?

Rodney: No money! What with the money your old man's worth! Doesn't he give you any?

Lisbeth: No, all my money is in trust. I can't get to it until I'm 21 or my father dies.

Rodney: And how old are you?

Lisbeth: 19.

Pause. Sydney enters.

Sydney: Is everybody ready. (*Aggressively To Rodney*) To your place young man.

Sydney: I thought I told you to keep away from that boy.

Lisbeth: But Daddy we are to be married!

Sydney: Over my dead body

He looks at Rodney who shrugs his shoulders.

Sydney: But Daddy nothing. If he continues to pester I shall have him duffed up.

Lisbeth: (*Changing the subject*) You won't forget to nod your head when it's my turn will you Daddy?

Sydney: No sweetheart. 'Oooh, you are brave.' Now come along everybody we are about to go on air.

All enter and line up behind their microphones. Violet is still weeping and by now getting very drunk.

Lord Nigel: ***(To Sydney)*** Have you thought any more about the new lines?

Sydney: The answers no! Do it as it's written.

Lord Nigel: ***(Aside)*** Drat!

Lord Nigel moves away to study his lines.

Malcolm: ***(To Sydney)*** I say old bean, Where are the sound effects chappies?

Sydney: Drat! ***(He has a think. He talks into his microphone softly because it is not working)*** Ladies and Gentlemen. ***(Louder to cast)*** What's up with this microphone?

Lord Nigel: It doesn't appear to be plugged in.

Rodney: I'll fix it guv.

He picks up the loose lead and is about to plug it into the electricity socket.

Sydney: Not there that's the electricity. Plug it into the microphone socket.

Rodney does as he's told.

Sydney: ***(Into microphone, louder now as it's working)*** Testing, testing. Good.

Lisbeth: Daddy, the nod?

Sydney: Yes dear. Ladies and gentlemen. I'm afraid some of our special effects crew have been called up for warden duty tonight. Now we all no how important for moral the BBC is, so if we could have some volunteers to help with the special effects.

The 'extras' who are stage crew can call up the volunteers to their positions and give a brief explanation. Whilst this is happening Sydney needs to explain about the audience laughing and clapping when cued. An added task would be to get them to sing the theme song (Whatever music you choose - pre war obviously)

Violet: *(Approaching Sydney)* If I could have a word about Lady Bullivant? I will except lower fees

Sydney: It's too late now Violet. I can't change at this stage.

Violet: *(Begging desperately)* I'll do it for nothing. *(She clings to his side)* Please, please give me a chance I need this part.

Sydney: Look, you're a washed up old ham. I don't need you in my play anymore. Now go to your microphone.

Violet: *(Wailing)* You'll pay for this, you'll pay. *(Cries)*

Sydney: Places everybody please. We are on air. *(To microphone in posh BBC accent)* Ladies and Gentlemen, this is the BBC home service.

“The Mystery of the Mummy’s Curse”

Cast

Sydney Matthews	Producer/Narrator
Malcolm Gibbons	Professor Thompson
Violet Metcalf	Lady Bullivant
Lord Nigel Falconhurst	Basil Beedon
Rodney Foxley	Daniel McKenzie
Lisbeth Matthews	Veronica Yearsley
Jane Crowsford	Barbara Breslin

Cue Card: Theme music

Sydney: ***(Dramatically)*** Ladies and Gentlemen welcome to tonight’s enthralling episode of “*The Mystery of the Mummy’s Curse*”

Cue Card: Applause

Sydney: Last week we left our intrepid Professor Thompson locked inside the museum strong room.

Cue Card: Gasps.

Malcolm: Gad! I keep knocking but... ***(Pauses to look at sound effects)*** I keep knocking.... ***(Wait for knocks)*** no one is out there. There’s not much air left.

Sydney: Just then the muffled sound of an automobile

Effects

Malcolm: Help! Help! I say you out there!

Sydney: ***(Hand over microphone whenever talking off air. Stage whispers to effects people)*** Keep Knocking.

Effects

Sydney: ***(To effects)*** More Frantic. ***(Encourage them to go louder)***

Rodney: I say, Barbara, there appears to be a knocking coming from the strong room.

Jane: What?

Rodney: I said, there... *(Look disdainfully at effects)*

Sydney: *(To effects)* You can stop now.

Lisbeth: Oooh you are brave!

Pause. All look at Lisbeth amazed. It is nowhere near her cue.

Sydney: *(To Lisbeth)* Not now!!

Lisbeth: *(Into microphone)* Sorry. You will tell me when to come into won't you Daddy?

Sydney: Yes, yes, now come on!

Rodney: *(Puts his arm around Lisbeth)* Don't worry about it.

Sydney: You keep you're dirty East End paws off her.

Rodney releases her.

Rodney: There's a knock from the strong room.

Jane: Who could it be Daniel, the museums should be closed at this time of night:

Rodney: There's only one way to find out.

Lisbeth: Oooh you are brave!

Sydney: *(To Lisbeth but you forget to cover the microphone)* Not yet!! Er.. not yet was it time to open the door, er.. the keys *(Effects)* were nowhere to be found...

Lisbeth: Whoops I did it again, didn't I. Silly me. You will tell me?

Sydney: *(Getting stressed)* Yes.

Rodney: *(To Sydney)* What keys guy?

Sydney: Er... The keys were found and the door was opened *(Effects)* releasing fresh air into the strong-room. *(Effects)* The captive took a deep breath and collapsed on the floor *(Effects)* Later that evening at Broadfield Manor.

Cue Card: *Music.*

Violet: So Professor, you have no idea who could have locked you in the strong room?

Malcolm: I have no idea Lady Bullivant. The boundah had every intention to kill me though. Why if young Daniel hadn't arrived when he did I would have run out of air.

Lisbeth: Oooh you are brave!

Sydney: *(Shouts)* No!

Lisbeth: Whoops, Sorry.

Violet: *(Aside to Malcolm she is now getting very drunk as slurs her speech)* See what I mean. This play needs me.

Jane: *(To Microphone)* I think it was that monster Basil Beedon.

Cue Card: *Gasp*

Violet: Barbara, why would you suspect him?

Jane: He's a crook. All men are crooks *(Looks at Sydney)* Believe me, I know.

Sydney: Will you...

Jane: Besides, wasn't he the first one on the scene when the late Lord Bullivant was killed by that falling sarcophagus. He blamed it on the curse. Professor Thompson was.....

Violet: Shhh he's coming up the stairs now.

Effects

Violet: I'd recognise that limp anywhere.

Effects

Jane: Don't tell me he's brought that ghastly dog with him?

Effects

Violet: No, it's in the kennels.

Sydney: The door opened slowly (*Effects*) and in walked.... Basil Beedon

Cue Card: Booo

Sydney: (*Shouting to the audience*) It's not a pantomime.

Lord Nigel: (*Pronounce the underlined words a bit louder and make them definite. These are the secret code words you are trying to convey*) What are you all doing here it's Twenty Eight minutes past midnight?

These lines are not in the script and everybody is confused and look through the script. Sydney is particularly stressed.

Sydney: (*Aside*) I thought I said you weren't to change the lines.

Lord Nigel: (*Aside*) Sorry old bean I thought it made my character more aggressive.

Because of the pause Violet thinks it's her cue and opens her mouth to speak.

Sydney: No!!

All look at him puzzled.

Sydney &: Whoops Sorry.
Lisabeth

Sydney: In walked the evil Basil Beedon.

Violet: Basil, we weren't expecting you!

Lord Nigel: I have returned early, I saw no need to stay in Egypt any longer.

Jane: I think we had better be getting back to the hotel. Come along Rodney.

Sydney: Barbara and Daniel left the room, hurried down the stairs *(Effects)* Into the car *(Effects)* and drove away. *(Effects)*

Violet: I had better be going myself.

Lord Nigel: Now we are alone I would like a word with you about... The Diamond.

Malcolm: *(Aside to Sydney)* I say, old chap, should I not be out of the room now?

Violet: *(Aside)* See the man's so obsessed with killing me off and giving his daughter a part he's made a mess of the script.

Sydney: *(Aside)* That's not true. *(To microphone)* Taking the intimation, Professor Thompson made his excuses.

There is a pause. Sydney looks at Malcolm urging him to make up a line about excuses. Malcolm is not going to say anything. Sydney gesticulates wildly. Lisbeth thinks its her cue.

Lisbeth: Oooh you are br....

All: No!!

Sydney is tearing his hair out by now.

Sydney: Now Violet, er.. Lady Bullivant and Basil were alone. What was the evil man up to?

Lord Nigel: For goodness sake woman, I'm very across with you, what are you afraid of?

All lost as previously because this is not a line in the script.

Sydney: *(Aside)* What are you playing at?

Violet: I know what you're up to. I know about the diamond.

Lord Nigel: In that case I'm sure we can come up with some sort of deal.

Violet: The sort of deal you did with my Late Husband, Lord Bullivant? The sort of deal you did with Professor Thompson? If it wasn't for Daniel he would have been dead also.

Lord Nigel: That Daniel McKenzie was always an interfering brat just like his father.

Violet: I shall call a constable.

Lord Nigel: I'm six-pect you know too much and it's down to me what happens next!

All confused this was another line changed.

Sydney: What on... With that Basil pulled out a gun and shot Lady Bullivant.

Effects.

Violet: *(Determined not to be written out)* You missed me.

Sydney: *(Aside)* You're supposed to be dead. *(To microphone)* He shot again.

Effects

Violet: *(Aside)* I'll show you. *(To microphone)* You missed again... And that was you're last shot.

Sydney is red faced about to burst.

Sydney: Basil produced a knife and stabbed Lady Bullivant. *(Smirk)*

Look for effects. If they are not quick enough then continue, this must be fast paced now with all confused especially Sydney who looks as if he's about to have a seizure.

Violet: You don't think that will stop me. Six years in the desert made my skin like leather.

Lord Nigel: Eleven attempts have been made across your bows.

All are confused.

Rodney: Hold it right there, Basil, you swine! What dastardly deed have you done now.

Lord Nigel: You left a minute ago.

Rodney: I came back for Veronica Yearsley, your niece. Now hand over the gun.

All look to Lisbeth for her line. She looks at them blank.

Lisbeth: What?

Sydney: Just a minute Nigel, I know what you're up to. We might have had a deal. We might be in the same lodge but I would not stoop to that.

There is an air raid siren.

Sydney: ***(Composing himself he talks to the audience)*** Ladies, Gentlemen and listeners you are perfectly safe here but for security reasons we must have radio silence during a raid. Sound effects people if you could return to your seats. Everybody please stay where you are until the all clear.

All exit. (The excuse is it's procedure for them to sit down somewhere safe at these times.)

There is the sound of bombing becoming louder. Flashes can be incorporated. The lights go out. A shadowy figure enters and goes across to the microphone sockets. The figure is plugging the microphone into the electrical socket. (If the venue cannot go dark enough then the leads should go off stage and this event should be illusory.

The all clear is sounded. The cast all take their places.

Sydney: Sorry for that interruption. Ladies and Gentlemen. I have an announcement to make.

Sydney grasps his microphone. There is a cracking and flashing of lights. Sydney shakes or does a silly jig as he is being electrocuted. He collapses to the ground.

Inspector: Hold it! Don't touch him. I'm Inspector Foot of the Yard. I think you'll find he's dead.

All gasp and talk amongst themselves. Inspector Foot pulls the microphone lead out of the socket.

Inspector: As I suspected electrocuted. Some fiend has plugged the microphone into the electricity supply.

Rodney: Shocking.

All groan.

Inspector: Oh dear, I thought this would happen. Whenever I investigate a Murdernight one of the suspects has to come up with corny jokes. Well if he's not careful he'll find himself 'charged'. *(Laughs at his own joke)* Get it – 'Charged'. See I can do it too. *(Realises nobody is laughing at his unfunny joke he pulls himself together)*

Lisbeth: *(Running to Rodney)* Who would do this to Daddy?

Inspector: That's what I hope to find out. Ladies and Gentlemen due to the bombing our officers will be busy. Therefore I shall need your help in finding the culprit.

Malcolm: Jolly good show Inspector I shall get to it immediately.

Inspector: Not so fast! I'm afraid you six are all suspects and as such I cannot allow you to leave. I think we should give these people something to eat whilst we ponder this puzzle. In the mean time I would like you all to come with me. Ladies and Gentlemen we will return presently when you will be given the opportunity to question the suspects.

All exit.