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# **The Devil is in the Details**

A short comedy

by Jill Elaine Hughes

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# The Devil is in the Details

By Jill Elaine Hughes

*Decalogue Commandment: "Thou Shalt Not Kill"*

## **CHARACTERS**

**LARRY;** *a mid-level L.A. gang executive. A very attractive, expensively dressed man in his late 20s.*

**SHEILA;** *a quirky young woman, early 20s, dressed like a well-to-do student. An artist, she is Larry's girlfriend and sometimes business partner.*

**STEVE;** *a wisecracking, sinister-looking corpse, early 20s, wearing rumpled and dirty street clothes*

## **SETTING**

*The dank and dirty basement of a Los Angeles drug cartel's warehouse headquarters.*

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*(AT RISE: LARRY and SHEILA in a cramped basement room. There are no furnishings except some old wooden crates and a battered chair along with some random trash scattered about. STEVE is lying still as death on the floor as SHEILA nervously watches LARRY, who paces back and forth while talking on his cell phone.)*

LARRY

*(On cell phone)* You didn't tell me there was gonna be other people there, man! I don't know. Twelve, maybe. Well, yeah, they all breathed it in too. How was I supposed to know Steve was having a party? I showed up at the appointed time. Huh? Jay—don't do this to me, Jay. Don't fucking do this to me, man. I know. Yeah, I know what happened over there! Well, Jesus H. Christ, Jay! I don't know what you're gonna do with twelve dead bodies, okay? That's not my fucking problem. You told me to take care of Steve and I took care of Steve. I did it quietly just like you said. I expect my payment. In full and on time. Yeah. Yeah, I have him. Aw, fuck you, man—

SHEILA

Larry, just hang up.

LARRY

*(Covers mouthpiece)* Sheila, no.

SHEILA

Larry—

LARRY

Sheila, shut up. *(On phone)* Yeah Jay, I'm here. Yeah. *(Pause)* You can have him when you pay me.

SHEILA

Remember to tell him cash.

LARRY

Fifty thousand, cash. Non-negotiable. *(Pause)* Well if he starts to stink I'll just cover up my fucking nose. You're not getting proof of kill until you pay up. That's how business is done, my friend. Well I don't care how much it's gonna cost you to get rid of all those other bodies, Jay. Like I said, not my problem. You still owe me fifty thousand, cash. Yeah, well you can fucking chalk it up to collateral damage, man. You pay me the fucking fifty thousand in full! Okay! Yeah, fuck you too. We're at the warehouse, basement room number three. Bye.

Is he gonna pay?  
SHEILA

No.  
LARRY

Are you sure?  
SHEILA

Yeah. Motherfucker's stiffing us right now.  
LARRY

Then what are we supposed to do?  
SHEILA

Wait.  
LARRY

For how long?  
SHEILA

Long as it takes. We'll stake him out with the body till he pays.  
LARRY

But you just said he's not gonna pay.  
SHEILA

He will. Eventually. He'll wanna see that body at some point.  
LARRY

When?  
SHEILA

I don't know.  
LARRY

You're really not making any sense right now, Larry.  
SHEILA

I told you Sheila, he'll want to see the body at some point.  
LARRY

At what point, exactly?  
SHEILA

LARRY

Eventually.

SHEILA

When is “eventually”? When his skin rots and his guts burst out? When the maggots have eaten out his eyes? When? When, Larry?

LARRY

I don’t know. But he will. Jay always comes around on these types of things.

SHEILA

Are you sure?

LARRY

I’m sure, Sheila. Me and Jay go way back. He’s a little mad now about the collateral damage—but he’ll get over it. He always does.

SHEILA

Well, he better, because if we don’t get paid I am gonna be seriously pissed at you, Larry.

LARRY

If you want to get paid we’re gonna have to sit here and wait for Jay.

SHEILA

For how long?

LARRY

I don’t know. Couple-three days. Maybe a week. There’s a bathroom down the hall where we can shower, we can order in some food—no problem.

SHEILA

If you think I am going to stay here in this filthy fucking hellhole and babysit a dead body for a week you have got another thing coming.

LARRY

Well, we’ve both got another thing coming, babe. It’s called fifty grand in cash. Do you want your cut or not?

SHEILA

I can’t wait here all week, Larry. I have a gallery opening in two days, remember? I need to get ready. *The Los Angeles Times* and *Art in America* are both coming to review the show. This is my big break, Larry. My art is finally getting noticed. I really don’t need this level of stress right now.

LARRY

Then why the hell did you agree to help me? Huh? You didn't have to do it. Nobody held a gun to your head and forced you to help me work a contract out on a guy.

SHEILA

I need the money. You know that. I need the money for my sculpture.

LARRY

What, are you like, making a sculpture outa dollar bills now or something?

SHEILA

No, Larry. I need to buy supplies. Steel and blowtorches are expensive. And it's not like you could have mixed up those chemicals yourself. You needed my expertise.

LARRY

I'm sure I coulda done it. I woulda figured it out.

SHEILA

Yeah, and you would have blown yourself sky high. You're pretty good with a gun Larry, but you've got a lot to learn about lethal gases. I swear, the things I do for the sake of our relationship—

LARRY

Well, like it or not, babe, you're in this as deep as I am. You know what's gonna have to happen now.

SHEILA

What?

LARRY

We're gonna hafta split. We're gonna hafta go underground.

SHEILA

Why? You kill people for a living and you never went underground before.

LARRY

Babe, I'm a hit man for the fuckin' Gangsta Kings. I kill people who are *expecting* to get killed. I ain't never accidentally killed twelve *other* people that I wasn't supposed to on a hit. Okay? There's gonna be some serious cop-sniffing around Steve's place, and we can't be around for it.

SHEILA

Well, I'm not going underground, Larry. I have a gallery opening in two days and I fully intend to be there. Now if you'll excuse me, it's late and I am going to try and get some sleep here.

LARRY

So I guess that means you’re gonna stay here with me and Steve?

SHEILA

I’ll stay until tomorrow night. Morning after tomorrow at the absolute latest. But that’s my final offer. And even if you have to stay here with that—*thing* all week by yourself you still better pay me, Larry. I did more than my share mixing up all those chemicals for you. Those are dangerous, you know—

LARRY

Sheila—

SHEILA

Just shut up, okay? We’ll talk more in the morning. Why don’t you go to sleep too? You’ve had a big day.

LARRY

Yeah, you’re right. You can have the chair. I’ll take the floor. Goodnight, babe.

SHEILA

Goodnight, honey. Love you.

LARRY

Yeah.

*(LARRY and SHEILA settle down to sleep. LIGHTS SHIFT to indicate a passage of time. STEVE sits up.)*

STEVE

You know the really cool thing about all this, is they think I’m dead. And I am, sort of. But not really. Have you ever heard of something called suspended animation, altered physical states? You know, the thing those guys in those old *Alien* movies did to make themselves sleep without aging for years while their ships traveled across the galaxy for decades? Well, that’s the closest thing I can think of to explain it. I don’t age, you see. Haven’t in centuries. They of course think I’m dead, and who could blame them for thinking so? I’m not moving. I have no discernible breath pattern. Not to mention a *very* low body temperature. But I’m not dead. I’m not even unconscious.

I feel bad for poor Larry and Sheila here. You have to give them credit for trying. I mean, you at least have to give Sheila here credit for mixing and distributing all those lethal gases from stuff she just had sitting around her art studio when Larry found out the Gangsta Kings wanted poor old Steve bumped off all nice and quiet-like, with no gunshots or yucky blood. Actually, quite beautiful work, if I must say so myself. The perfect crime, you might say. But not *quite* perfect. There was a little something they overlooked on their way down here.

*(STEVE returns to his corpse pose. LIGHTS SHIFT to indicate a passage of time. The next morning, LARRY and SHEILA wake up, stiff and rumpled from sleeping in their clothes.)*

SHEILA  
What time is it?

LARRY  
Mmmrggh?

SHEILA  
What time is it, Larry?

LARRY  
*(Looks for watch)* Uhhhhh—nine-thirty.

SHEILA  
How much longer do we have to wait?

LARRY  
I told you, we have to wait until Jay calls.

SHEILA  
Well, what if he called you during the night? He could have left you a voicemail.

LARRY  
Huh? Sheila—

SHEILA  
Check your voicemail, Larry. I’m gonna go pee.

LARRY  
You can’t go pee.

SHEILA  
What?

LARRY  
You can’t go pee right now.

SHEILA  
Excuse me?

LARRY  
I have to escort you to the bathroom. No women walking the halls without a Gangsta King. That’s the rule here.

SHEILA

Screw that. I’m going to pee right now—

LARRY

No. Sheila, seriously. This is a gangster building. I have to escort you to the bathroom. That’s the rule.

SHEILA

Well, *escort* me then. Escort me before I pee all over the place. Jesus—I don’t think I’ve ever had to pee so much in my life.

LARRY

Give me a minute, okay? I just woke up. Jesus. What day is it today, Tuesday?

SHEILA

Yeah, Tuesday. Larry, *I* just woke up too, and *I* know what day it is. And furthermore, I have to PEE. NOW.

LARRY

Okay, okay. Come on.

*(LARRY and SHEILA exit; LARRY dialing his phone to check voicemail. STEVE sits up.)*

STEVE

Like I said, there was a little something they overlooked. Well, more like there was a big something they overlooked. You see, today’s not Tuesday.

LARRY

*(Offstage)* WHAT THE FUCK??

STEVE

Ah, it begins.

*(STEVE reassumes his death pose just before LARRY and SHEILA enter. SHEILA is dancing up and down, trying not to pee.)*

SHEILA

You *said* there was a bathroom! Where’s the bathroom? Oh my God, Larry, I can’t hold it much longer—

LARRY

I swear, there’s always been a bathroom right down the hall—it was there last night! I don’t know—what the fuck can somebody do with a whole fucking bathroom in the middle of the night? And my goddamn phone has no signal—what the hell, man?

SHEILA

That’s it. I’m peeing in the hallway. I’m just going to pee in the fucking hallway.

*(SHEILA exits.)*

LARRY

You can’t do that! Sheila—

SHEILA

*(Offstage)* Yes I can. I’m doing it right now.

LARRY

Agghhh—Sheila!!

SHEILA

*(Offstage)* You pee in alleys after rock concerts all the time, so I don’t want to hear it.

LARRY

You’re gonna get us both in big trouble.

*(SHEILA enters.)*

SHEILA

I think we’re already in trouble.

LARRY

Yeah, I’m starting to think you’re right.

SHEILA

Is your phone working yet?

LARRY

Nope. Still no signal.

SHEILA

Are you *sure* there was a bathroom here, Larry?

LARRY

I’m sure.

SHEILA

Are you *positive*?

LARRY

I'm *positive*, Sheila! I've peed and showered in it a hundred times while I've waited here watchin' bodies after jobs. I've been working kills for the Kings for almost five years! I oughta know by now.

SHEILA

Are you sure this is the same building you always hide out in?

LARRY

I *passed* the bathroom on my way in yesterday. I'm telling you, it used to be there, but now it's just not.

SHEILA

Well, an entire bathroom just does not get up and walk away in the middle of the night, Larry.

LARRY

Well, I don't what happened, but it used to be there and it's not there anymore. We'll just have to pee in a bucket or something until Jay shows up. No more pissing in the hallway.

SHEILA

Well, I'm sorry Larry, but I can't wait here when I can't even go to the bathroom. I'm leaving. I have to get ready for my opening anyway.

LARRY

We agreed last night that you'd wait here for Jay for a while so you could get your cut. Do you want your cut or not?

SHEILA

All I know right now is I need to go somewhere with a bathroom.

*(SHEILA exits.)*

LARRY

*(Madly dialing and re-dialing his phone)* Jesus fucking H. Christ. Come on. Come on, goddamn it! Where's my goddamn signal? There is no signal. There is no fucking signal!!

*(SHEILA enters, distraught.)*

SHEILA

How the hell do you get out of this place?

LARRY

You walk down to the end of the hall and you go upstairs.

SHEILA

Well, I couldn't find the stairs. I walked down the hall, all the way, and somehow I ended up just going in some kind of circle or something because I never found any stairs. I just ended up back here.

LARRY

That's not possible.

SHEILA

Yes it is.

LARRY

There's no circle down here, Sheila. There's one hall, it goes in a straight line. Okay? There are four rooms and a bathroom. Well, there *used* to be a bathroom, but whatever. We're in room 3. The stairs are two doors down from room 3.

SHEILA

Nope.

LARRY

What do you mean, “Nope”?

SHEILA

I mean there are no stairs.

LARRY

There are stairs, Sheila. There are definitely some fuckin' stairs, because how else did we get down here last night? Huh? We dragged Steve's body down the fuckin' stairs together, do you not remember that?

SHEILA

I remember, Larry, but now there are no stairs.

LARRY

Okay, Sheila, let's just drop the joke bullshit. I'm sorry that the bathroom got boarded up or concreted over or whatever the hell happened, but now you're just shitting me or something--

SHEILA

I am not shitting you, Larry. There are no stairs. There is no way out of here. We're trapped.

LARRY

You are completely full of shit, Sheila. We are not trapped down here. You just got lost. Come on, I'll take you to the fuckin' stairs myself.

SHEILA

Well, okay, but I am telling you, *they're not there*.

*(SHEILA and LARRY exit. STEVE sits up.)*

STEVE

You know, this is the part that I love. No matter how many times I see it happen, I just love the hell out of it. The new inmates, they always just refuse to accept the truth. It's right there in front of them, they can see it, but they don't believe it. Probably because whenever folks end up in my neck of the woods, it always looks very familiar to them. Usually looks like the last place they were before—you know, before they got *here*. But there are just the slightest differences, you see. The slightest differences between the old familiar place and the new familiar place, but it's the *slightest* differences that make *all* the difference. You see, the devil is in the details, my friends.

LARRY, *Offstage*

WHAT THE—WHAT THE FUCK????!!!!!!!

*(STEVE returns to his corpse pose just before LARRY and SHEILA enter. They are both in shock.)*

LARRY

There's no stairs.

SHEILA

I told you. You didn't believe me.

LARRY

There's no stairs.

SHEILA

Larry, I know.

LARRY

There are no stairs, Sheila!

SHEILA

Larry—

LARRY

We're trapped down here, Sheila! We're fuckin'—we're fuckin' trapped down here!

SHEILA

Maybe—maybe not. Maybe there's another way out—

LARRY

*(Near tears)* What the hell is goin’ on, Sheila? Was there an earthquake last night or something? Did we sleep through a goddamn earthquake and now we’re fuckin’ buried alive or what?

SHEILA

Larry. Larry, sweetheart, let’s just calm down, okay? You’ve been through plenty of tough situations before. I’m sure we’re gonna find another way out of here and Jay will show up with the money and everything will be just fine—

LARRY

Man—oh, Jesus H. Christ, man! I can’t deal with this. Fuck—

SHEILA

Larry, you’ve killed over a hundred and fifty people in your life. You’re a professional assassin for God’s sake. I would think you’d be a little calmer in a crisis.

LARRY

Well, I’m sorry, Sheila. This is just a little out of my territory, okay? Just give me a second to think.

*(Silence for a few beats. SHEILA begins to pace. LIGHTS SLOWLY SHIFT to a dark red. LARRY stands up and sniffs the air.)*

LARRY

What’s that smell?

SHEILA

What smell?

LARRY

*That* smell. Do you smell that?

SHEILA

It just smells like a basement.

LARRY

Not that smell. The *other* smell. There’s another smell. Do you smell it?

SHEILA

*(Sniffing)* I smell burning leaves.

LARRY

I think it smells more like a cookout. Barbecue.

SHEILA

It’s getting stronger—oh my God, is the building on fire?

LARRY

Oh fuck. Oh fuckfuckfuck.

SHEILA

If there’s a fire and we can’t get out—Larry?

LARRY

What?

SHEILA

Larry, I think we’re gonna die. I seriously think we’re gonna die.

LARRY

I smell fire but I don’t smell any smoke. If there’s no smoke then we should be okay. Hey—hey, I saw in a movie once, they used a dead body to keep smoke from coming in a room during a fire. Maybe we could do that. We have a dead body.

SHEILA

But we don’t know where the fire is. And there’s no smoke.

*(LIGHTS SHIFT to a deeper red. STEVE stands up, slowly.)*

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