

# DEADLY IMAGE

By Billy St. John

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PUBLISHED BY

**ELDRIDGE PUBLISHING COMPANY**

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## **STORY OF THE PLAY**

When powerful billionaire industrialist Wentworth Jefferson phones private investigator Joey Reynolds he's in for a shock: Joey is not, as he assumed, a man, but a female detective - and what a female! Joey, short for Jo Ellen, is a smart, attractive and self-assured young woman who is good at her work, and proud of it. Jefferson invites her to a party at his mansion where she meets, and secretly photographs, the people in Wentworth's life whom he suspects might wish to see him dead.

Frozen for a moment, as if caught on film, we meet the suspects: his flighty wife, Mamie; her children, playboy Sam Kane and sculptress daughter, Selena; his bitter ex-wife, Julia Jefferson; society columnist, Felica Phillips, whom he once jilted; Debra Mason, his spinster-ish personal assistant; and a senior executive in his firm, Paul Carter, and his genteel Southern wife, Mary Jane. Also present are a trio of servants who are not fond of their employer.

Before the evening is over, one of those present kills Jefferson. But which one? Joey, along with police detective Al Reynolds, her ex-husband, use her photos to uncover an important clue to solve the murder.

## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(5 m, 9 w, extras)*

**JOEY (JO ELLEN) REYNOLDS:** A private investigator.

**WENTWORTH JEFFERSON:** A billionaire.

**MAMIE KANE JEFFERSON:** His wife.

**SAM KANE:** Her son, a playboy.

**SELENA KANE:** Her daughter, a sculptress.

**JULIA JEFFERSON:** Wentworth's ex-wife.

**PAUL CARTER:** A senior executive in Wentworth's firm.

**MARY JANE CARTER:** His wife.

**DEBRA MASON:** Wentworth's personal assistant.

**FELICA PHILLIPS:** A society columnist.

**CHENOWETH:** The butler.

**BONNIE SIMMS:** The maid.

**MRS. FIELDS:** The cook.

**LT. AL REYNOLDS:** A police detective.

**EXTRAS:** Waiters.

### **MEN'S VOICES**

**TIME:** The present and recent past.

**PLACE:** The Jefferson mansion and other locations.

### **SOUND EFFECTS**

Bluesy music, telephone ringing, easy-listening orchestra music, fog horns, clanging of buoy bells, water lapping on pilings, gunshots, running feet.

## **SETTING**

The set is basically composed of platforms and steps painted a dark gray; furniture and set pieces will add color and define various locations. A tall flat with a set of double doors is USC. A four-foot high platform is USR, another is USL. Two-foot high platforms are DSR and DSL. Steps lead from the high platforms to the low ones. Also, there is a step from each low platform onto the main stage, and escape steps lead from both the high and low platforms into the wings.

## **PROPS**

JOEY: Phone, pin, 2 guns, handcuffs, trench coat, fedora hat.

WENTWORTH: Phone, wine glasses, wallet/bills, overcoat.

JULIA: Drink, purse, coat.

DEBRA: Cell phone, purse/document, eyeglasses, coat.

WAITERS: Trays with wine in glasses.

BONNIE: Trays with hors d'oeuvres, telephone, tray, cup and saucer.

MAMIE: Purse with pill bottle, blood, purse w/bill, coat.

MARY JANE: Glass of wine, purse, coat.

AL: Trench coat, pad, pen, 2 guns, envelope with 11 photos, paper with numbers, handcuffs.

SAM: Blood, handkerchief, overcoat.

FELICA: Purse with pad, pen, coat.

PAUL: Gun, coat.

CHENOWETH: Overcoat and hat.

SELENA: Coat, purse.

MISCELLANEOUS: Bottles of liquor, glasses, trays with hors d'oeuvres, wine, coffeepot, cups, saucers, croissants, candlestick.

## ACT I

*(AT RISE: Bluesy MUSIC fades in. A street LIGHT mounted high on the SL proscenium fades up. Standing beneath it DSL is a figure wearing a trench coat and a fedora hat. An area LIGHT from the front fades in, joining the light from above, to reveal JOEY REYNOLDS. She is an attractive woman in her late 20s, early 30s, smart and tough. She's all woman, able to take care of herself, and proud of it. She talks directly to the audience.)*

JOEY: The name's Joey Reynolds. I'm a PI - that's a private investigator, in case you didn't know. My dad and grandfather were PI's, too, so I came by the trade honestly. I make my living by sticking my nose into the business of people who don't do things honestly. It won't make me rich, but it pays the rent, and helps take some scum off the streets. Take my latest case, for example. One morning, a couple of weeks ago, I was just walking into the oversized broom closet I call my office when the phone rang. *(A PHONE rings off DSL. The MUSIC stops abruptly. The overhead street LIGHT fades out quickly, leaving only the DSL area LIGHT from the front on JOEY. She reaches off DSL and brings out a telephone receiver which she puts to her ear. As she does this, WENTWORTH JEFFERSON enters DSR by the proscenium. He wears an overcoat over a tuxedo, and is holding a telephone, the receiver to his ear.)* Joey Reynolds' Investigations - confidentiality guaranteed.

*(An area LIGHT comes up on WENTWORTH, DSR. He is a wealthy, middle-aged man who is powerful and knows it.)*

WENTWORTH: May I speak with Mr. Reynolds, please?

JOEY: It's Ms. Reynolds, and you've got her.

WENTWORTH: Ms ... ? I thought ...

JOEY: Yeah...yeah...that happens a lot. You want to discuss my gender, or tell me your problem, Mister ... ?

WENTWORTH: Jefferson ... Wentworth Jefferson.

JOEY: I've heard of you - the computer guy. You get your face on more magazine covers than the president.

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WENTWORTH: Then you know ...

JOEY: *(Cutting in.)* I know you own Techtronics. I use your Millennium 2000 model - nice little gadget. You've proved what you can do for me - so what can I do for you?

WENTWORTH: I suspect someone is trying to kill me.

JOEY: Really? There's a lot of that going around. It's a crying shame, but it keeps me in business. I take it you want me to find out who has the hots to put you in cold storage?

WENTWORTH: Uh ... that's one way to put it. Your agency came highly recommended by an old friend, and I always buy the best.

JOEY: A nice habit if you can afford it, and, Mr. Jefferson - I say this in all modesty - you're talking to her.

WENTWORTH: Good. Look, I don't like discussing this over the phone, and I don't want to take a chance on being seen coming into your office. If we can meet someplace private, I'll fill you in on some people who may or may not wish me dead.

JOEY: That sounds like a good idea - the meeting, I mean. Clancy's Bar in an hour? It's a little dive on Thirty-third; you wouldn't be likely to run into any other billionaires or jet-set types there. If Clancy's patrons get mentioned in the newspaper, it's on the crime page or obituaries, not in the society columns.

WENTWORTH: Clancy's ... one hour ... I'll be there.

*(HE hangs up. His area LIGHT fades out. He exits DSR. JOEY reaches the receiver out of sight DSL and brings back her hand, empty, which she uses to snap down the brim of her fedora as the street LIGHT overhead fades back in. She talks to the audience.)*

JOEY: We had our meeting, as planned. Mr. J. told me some interesting tidbits about those who were near and not-so-dear to him. We figured it would be a good idea if I met the cast of characters in this little drama right away, so he invited me to a party being held at his home the next Saturday. Did I say home? Make that mansion. Make that showplace. Make that a museum without the dinosaur bones. Anyway, in addition to computers for the home or office, Techtronics makes some specialized items for the government; you know, James Bond type doodads to play "I-spy" with.

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JOEY: *(Cont'd.)* He gave me a pin to wear to the shindig that's really a computerized camera. He suggested I take some candid shots of his might-be enemies without them knowing, that I could study later. Here's a rogues gallery of the prime suspects.

*(The CURTAIN opens a few feet in the darkness. A freestanding flat or screen is a foot or so UPS of the opening. The flat is tall and narrow, proportionate to an oversized photo. It is painted in shades of black and gray fading into one another, suggesting out-of-focus, indistinct shapes in the background of a photograph; it has a white strip around the edges for a border. The CHARACTERS will step from behind the curtain and take their place in front of the flat just before JOEY introduces them. Each actor will freeze as an area LIGHT DSC comes up on him or her. The "camera" will have caught them with unflattering - and funny - expressions on their faces, making photos they would gladly rip to pieces. The men wear tuxedos, the women gowns and jewelry, except for the cook and maid who wear uniforms. WENTWORTH enters, without his overcoat, and stands in front of the flat.)*

JOEY: The first shot I took was of my employer, Wentworth Jefferson. *(DSC area LIGHT fades up on WENTWORTH. He is holding two glasses of wine, offering one to the "camera.")* Mr. J. exuded power as well as the scent of Armani cologne which couldn't quite mask the smell of perspiration. Fear makes you sweat, and this billionaire was afraid that someone at this gathering wanted to see him dead. As it turned out, the man had every right to be nervous.

*(The DSC area LIGHT fades out. WENTWORTH exits. MAMIE KANE JEFFERSON enters and stands in front of the flat.)*

JOEY: *(Cont'd.)* Okay, look, I gotta tell you - taking pictures by pushing a button on a lapel pin is a little tricky; it isn't exactly like using a Canon Sure Shot, if you get my meaning. So what if my photos don't look like they were made in a portrait studio? My subjects don't have the types of faces you'd see in *People* magazine, either, for the most part.

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