

# BOX OFFICE POISON

By Sam Craig

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### **STORY OF THE PLAY**

When April McKay inherits the Smuggler's Little Theatre, her dreams of launching a career on stage come true. But no sooner does April arrive at the small tourist town to open her box office, when the dream turns into a nightmare. Her boyfriend, Grant, wants her to return to New York where he works on Wall Street. The owner of an auto repair shop wants the Little Theatre demolished so he can expand. A mysterious teenager appears and disappears at the back of the house. During the first night of try-outs for the season opener, one of the actors drops dead. Fortunately, April has plenty of help in solving the murder: a little old lady who invests in the show, a feuding couple who work for the auto repair shop, a pushy schoolteacher, a chivalrous old gentleman, a sheriff who's trying to quit smoking, his doting wife, and a tough old caretaker. The trouble is, they're all suspects—except the ones who become victims! Suspense rules the stage as the audience wonders who will be next. Easily produced on a bare stage with few props and stand-up panels.

## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(6 M, 10 F)*

**APRIL MCKAY** - Graduated with a performance degree, but has been working in New York as the manager of a gourmet food shop. Her aunt has recently died and has left her a theatre located in the Eastern resort city of Smuggler's Cove. This is April's big chance to change her life and do what she wants. She moves to Smuggler's Cove and prepares a gala opening of the theatre with a production of *The Sinister Smuggler*.

**GRANT CLAYCOMB** - April's fiancé, a Wall Street broker. He's a bit older, loves New York, likes April working steadily. He's into security and investments for the future.

**BITTY KNUDSON** - An old caretaker of the theatre. She knows just about everything there is to know about Smuggler's Cove.

**TINA HURLEY** - A teenage actress who hasn't any friends. She's often depressed, moody, and unfriendly, but has great talent.

**ANDREA CICHON** - An actress of some reputation on Broadway. She agrees to help open the theatre because she feels guilty—she's made a living acting, and her "best friend" April did not.

**CLIFTON HARPER** - An older man who is very amiable and laid back. Has known Agatha longest of anyone.

**LILA MERALI** - A young woman who owns a local aerobics studio. She loves to overact.

**ROCKY MERALI** - Her husband, a very tempestuous, jealous man who thinks everybody is after Lila.

**MARYELLEN PURVIS** - The local drama teacher who brings a secret to the production. She's a very dramatic type.

**AGATHA GATES** - A kind woman who blusters about trying to help everyone. She's an avid gardener.

**OLIN BLAIR** - An older performer who arrives one stormy night to fill the last male role. He is a stranger in town.

### **CAST OF CHARACTERS--continued**

**SHERIFF CHIP LOCKWOOD** - He's trying to quit smoking. He's

got his mind on other things, and leaves much of the work to his assistant.

**BETTY HOTCHKISS** - Sheriff Lockwood's assistant.

**FRAN LOCKWOOD** - The sheriff's wife. She plays a part in the new play.

**CONNIE CARTER** - About twenty-five. A complete mystery!

**LESTER RANK** - Wants the theatre condemned so he can expand his auto repair business.

### **SETTING**

The play takes place in the Smuggler's Cove Little Theatre, a charming old theatre from the days when summer meant tourists from the city filling the seats knowing this wasn't Broadway—and glad of it. The stage of the Smuggler's Little Theatre, once the most fashionable preview theatre on the East Coast, has recently fallen into some disrepair, but still exudes charm. The old gilt proscenium speaks of an era gone by. The curtains hang neatly and well.

### **SYNOPSIS OF PLAY**

#### **ACT I**

Scene 1: Smugglers Cove Little Theatre

Scene 2: Following night at half past six

Scene 3: Short time later

Scene 4: The following night

#### **ACT II**

Scene 1: Following night

Scene 2: Late that night

Scene 3: Following night

**ACT I**  
**Scene 1**

*(As the audience enters, a GHOST LIGHT sits lit on stage. A chair or two sits here and there. The stage is bare. The floor has been swept meticulously, and a few colorful flats lean idly against the back wall lit by a few soft blue scoops. A script sits on small table near the ghost light. AT RISE: APRIL MCKAY, suitcases in hand, scripts tucked under her arm, enters at back of theatre and moves down toward stage. When she reaches halfway down the aisle she breaks into a run and races up on stage. BITTY, in old dress, apron, and hair-tie, follows April.)*

APRIL: *(At CS)* This is mine! All mine! My very own theatre!

BITTY: LITTLE theatre.

APRIL: Big, little, what's the difference? It's MINE!

BITTY: I guess Miss Audra knew what she was doin' willin' YOU this place.

APRIL: Poor Aunt Audra. I guess it's wrong to feel so happy about something when she's dead.

BITTY: Bet she don't care one lick.

APRIL: You're right! She knew all I needed was a chance, and now she's given it to me!

BITTY: You really mean to open the place up again?

APRIL: Why not? Smuggler's Cove fills up with tourists every summer, doesn't it?

BITTY: Gettin' harder 'n harder to find a parkin' space. And you'd better get your groceries 'fore three in the afternoon, 'less you wanna spend a half hour in the checkout line!

APRIL: And what do all those people do at night?

BITTY: That ain't none of MY business!

APRIL: Nothing, most likely. There isn't a movie in town—there isn't anything for them to do.

BITTY: What makes you think they'll come here?

APRIL: Nobody can resist the power of a live show on stage—all singing, all dancing, all talking!

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BITTY: You never met my Harvey. He gets on that couch of his with that remote in his hand 'n he can resist the Second Comin'!

APRIL: What do you want to bet your Harvey will be here opening night?

BITTY: Now I KNOW you're crazy! First you're gonna open THIS place 'n then you bet my Harvey's gonna give up *Home Improvement* reruns to sit here on opening night!

APRIL: What do you bet?

BITTY: Five bucks.

APRIL: That's all?

BITTY: Miss McKay, I don't think you're gonna have THAT much shirt left by the time you open up.

APRIL: You can't scare me off!

BITTY: I guess I can't. So, what show are you thinkin' 'bout doin'?

*(APRIL shows BITTY scripts.)*

APRIL: *Wait Until Dark?* *(BITTY shakes her head.) I Hate Hamlet?* *(BITTY shakes her head.) Lend Me a Tenor?* *(Again, BITTY shakes her head.)* Those are some GREAT shows audiences would love to see!

BITTY: And who's going to pay for 'em?

APRIL: Royalties? I've got SOME money saved up.

BITTY: Last show Miss Audra did here cost her \$75 a night.

APRIL: That's not bad.

BITTY: In advance. 'Fore she opened, she paid out three thousand clams.

APRIL: Oh. Well, if they charge in clams, we'll just go spend some time at the beach. Actually, I'm sure the companies will let me put on the shows on credit. And I'll pay them back once the audiences come.

BITTY: I know you're educated real swell—

APRIL: Theatre degree from Northwestern University two years ago.

BITTY: Then how can you be so dumb?

APRIL: Dumb! That's terribly rude!

## **End of Freeview**

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