

MURDER AT HENRY CABOT'S LODGE

By Gil Martin

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Why would Hollywood soap opera star Ava Eveready check into a decrepit inn like Henry Cabot's Lodge, located in the middle of nowhere on a dark and stormy night, when the phones are down, and the only road to town is soon washed out?

Because her calculating husband, Robert, planned it that way. He plans to poison her with a drug guaranteed to leave no trace in the bloodstream. Also along for the ride are Miranda, Ava's secretary, with whom Robert is involved, and Ava's identical twin sister, Eva. But everything about Robert's well-rehearsed plan goes wrong. And old Henry Cabot with his good buddy, bumbling Sheriff J.T. Malden, are right there to confuse the plot even more, especially when Malden falls for the sweet twin, Eva.

By morning one of the twins is dead. Which one is it? And is the survivor really herself or playing the role of her twin? Country simplicity goes head to head with pseudo-sophisticated greed to create plenty of humor in this mystery-comedy. A perfect choice for dinner and community theatre. One actress plays the roles of both sisters.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3 m, 2 w)

HENRY CABOT: Old man, owner of the lodge.

SHERIFF J.T. MALDEN: Middle-aged Sheriff of Meadowlark.

ROBERT HIGHSMITH: Ava's husband.

***AVA EVEREADY:** Middle-aged soap opera actress.

***EVA McGILICUDDY:** Ava's identical twin sister.

MIRANDA MORRIS: Ava's young secretary, Robert's mistress.

**Ava and Eva are played by the same actress.*

SETTING

The play takes place in the lobby of Henry Cabot's Lodge. There are three exits; one leading to outdoors, one to the adjoining kitchen, and the third to a staircase and the upstairs rooms. The lodge should be fairly run-down with signs of obvious neglect. There is a well-worn sofa, a few mismatched chairs, and a wood burning stove which serves as the only source of heat. A sign reading "No Refunds" hangs above a check-in counter. By the front door there is a coat rack and an umbrella in a stand.

TIME: The present.

SYNOPSIS:

ACT I: Lodge lobby. Late afternoon during a violent storm.

ACT II: Lodge lobby. The following morning after the storm.

PROPS

Pre-set: Coffee pot and cups, guest register book, water bucket by door.

J.T.: Raincoat, boots, watch, pan of biscuits, pistol, small revolver.

ROBERT: Vial, small bottle of Scotch, tray with six drinks.

AVA: Kitchen knife, eyeglasses, subdued dress.

HENRY: Raincoat, long underwear; nightcap; boots; log; dinner gong; breakfast tray with coffee, gravy; woman's handbag containing wallet, perfume, keys, address book, vial, cigarette lighter; police manual.

SOUND EFFECTS

Rain, lightning and thunder, frying pan hitting the floor.

ACT I

(BEFORE LIGHTS: HENRY sits on the unlit stage. J.T., wearing a raincoat over his uniform, walks through audience and makes his way to the stage.)

J.T.: Hi, folks. The name is Malden, J.T. Malden. My friends call me J.T., acquaintances call me John. You can call me sheriff, 'cause that's what I am, the Sheriff of Meadowlark County. This here is Meadowlark County. Actually, this here scene you're lookin' at is Henry Cabot's Lodge, smack dab in the middle of Meadowlark County. The population of Meadowlark County is 502 persons and 19,604 cattle, at last count. County seat for Meadowlark County is the town of Meadowlark, 25 miles east of this here lodge. The official township consists of two gasoline stations, one of 'em self serve only; two markets, one takes credit and the other one don't; two cafes, one with good food and the other with juicy gossip; one feed store; three churches; no taverns, thank the Lord; and the county courthouse. My office is in the county courthouse. Actually, my office is the county courthouse. To be honest, it ain't really a courthouse, it's only one room, and we ain't had a trial with a real sit-down judge and jury since 1963.

That was a murder trial it was, the first, and until now, the last murder ever committed in Meadowlark County. I was only a kid then, but I remember that trial like it was yesterday. That trial is what made me want to be a sheriff when I grew up. As soon as I turned 21 years old, I ran for the office of Meadowlark County Sheriff and I am proud to say I won the election in a landslide. They told me I ran unopposed, but some fella named "OTHER" got 56 votes to my 109.

I also serve as dogcatcher, health inspector, building inspector and in the mornings I deliver the mail. Late afternoons, such as this one, I usually drive over to Henry Cabot's Lodge and have a cup of coffee with my old friend Henry.

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J.T.: (*Cont'd.*) His lodge is the only resort in the county, except for a KOA Campground on the outskirts of Meadowlark, but that don't really count 'cause it's closed six months outta the year.

Well, I suppose that's enough background information, and we ought to be gettin' on with this. Just so ya don't suffer a big letdown, I ought to warn you this ain't really gonna be a fancy murder mystery like that *Murder She Wrote* on TV or anything like that. There ain't many suspects so you're probably gonna figure out who done it right off the bat. Looking back on it, I admit I didn't, but I'm sure you will. But what the heck, I figure telling a story is like going to Disneyland: gettin' there is more fun than being there. No more of my gibberish, let's start this, what do ya call it, re-enactment, of the second murder ever to take place in Meadowlark County.

(J.T. walks onto the stage and joins HENRY. We hear the SOUND of rain.)

J.T.: Afternoon, Henry.

HENRY: Afternoon, J.T.

J.T.: It's rainin' cats and dogs out there. (*Takes off HIS raincoat and hangs it up.*)

HENRY: That time of year I reckon.

J.T.: How's the coffee today?

HENRY: Just the way you like it, hot as a pistol and thick as pea soup.

J.T.: (*Pours coffee.*) You must have a boarder today. That's a pretty fancy car parked out front.

HENRY: Yup. Party of four what checked in not 10 minutes ago. And get this, they all took separate rooms. First time I've been booked up since back in '84 when them college types had that wild mushroom seminar.

J.T.: Oh yeah. As I remember, they all got sick from your cookin', didn't they?

HENRY: Wasn't my fault. It was them mushrooms they made me put in the gravy.

End of Freeview

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