

THE MYSTERY MAZE

By Billy St. John

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*Dedicated to John G. Griffin, former theatre instructor
at Austin Peay State University, Clarksville, Tennessee.
Teacher, inspiration and friend.*

Billy St. John

STORY OF THE PLAY

THE MYSTERY MAZE is more than a play, it's a show that takes members of your audience on a treasure hunt, and keeps them one step ahead of a murder!

The event begins in your theatre which is supposed to be the theatre of Pendleton Academy. Its founder, Anthony Pendleton, has passed away, and his lawyer has gathered Mr. Pendleton's heirs for the reading of his will. The heirs learn that the late Mr. Pendleton has left instructions for his banker to plant clues to something of great value which can be found at the academy. If any of the heirs can find the hidden treasure by ten o'clock, he or she will inherit all of the millionaire's worldly possessions.

Then comes even more startling news - an autopsy reveals that Anthony Pendleton was poisoned. Chances are that one of those present killed him, and might kill again to eliminate his or her rivals for the man's fortune. With this in mind, the heirs and your audience leave the theatre and split into three groups to search for clues.

Members of the audience must choose whom they wish to follow. Scenes will be enacted simultaneously in three different classrooms, English, math, and science. Two more sets of simultaneous scenes are enacted before the evening is over. Regardless of which scenes the audience sees, the entire story will be revealed to them after a frantic dash through the corridors to reach the theatre before the final curtain.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(Flexible cast of 13 speaking parts plus Monitors)

***LEE UNDERWOOD:** 60s, Pendleton's lawyer, successful, well dressed, polite, but remote.

MR. DETWEILLER:..The academy's head custodian, a cantankerous, old man.

MILLIE PENDLETON:..80s, Pendleton's sister, feisty, a former stage performer.

LILLIE PENDLETON:..80s, another sister, almost a carbon copy of Millie.

SUSAN PENDLETON:..17, a student at the Academy, Pendleton's great-great-niece.

RON GANNAWAY:..17, Susan's boyfriend, also a student.

***PAT DE LA CRUIZ:**..40s, a flaky archaeologist, Pendleton's great-nephew.

***LESLIE WORTHAM:**..50s, a physician, thinks highly of himself.

BARBARA COOPER:..30s, a nurse, haughty.

EDWARD MENDOZA:..30s, a flamboyant Hollywood film producer, another great-nephew.

DOLLY ROMAINE:..20s, movie starlet, cute, sexy, very country.

CHARLES KILLIBREW:..30s, a roughly handsome policeman.

DIRECTOR:..Can be real director or a narrator. Introduces play.

MONITORS:..Three or more needed to assist audience.

**FLEXIBLE CASTING - The roles of Leslie Wortham, Pat de la Cruz, and Lee Underwood could be played by women. In addition to pronoun changes, you might have to make a few minor changes in dialogue as well. For instance, in Episode 4B, Lillie would drop her line, "When there's not a man around," and Pat would change her line, "I always fancied Mae West myself," to "I always fancied Cary Grant myself." Lillie's response would be, "Cary was such a charming man. I adored him." Also, in Episode 4C, Ron would not physically charge at Leslie.*

Time: The present.

Place: Pendleton Academy.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

Episode 1: The school theatre with the cast.

Concurrent Scenes:

Episode 2A: Math class with Detweiller, Ron, Susan, and Leslie.

Episode 2B: Science class with Edward, Dolly, and Barbara.

Episode 2C: English class/school theatre with Millie, Lillie, and Pat.

Episode 3: The school theatre with the cast.

Concurrent Scenes:

Episode 4A: Math class with Millie, Edward, Lee, and Barbara.

Episode 4B: Science class with Pat, Susan, Detweiller, and Lillie.

Episode 4C: English class with Ron, Leslie, Dolly, and Charles.

Episode 5: The school corridors/outside the school with the cast.

ACT II

Episode 6: The school theatre with the cast.

Concurrent Scenes:

Episode 7A: Classrooms and corridors with Susan, Ron, and Dolly.

Episode 7B: Classrooms and corridors with Millie, Lillie, and Pat.

Episode 7C: Classrooms and corridors with Leslie, Barbara, and Lee.

Episode 8: The school library with the cast.

Episode 9: The school theatre with the cast.

SETTING

The event begins in the school auditorium. The curtain is open when the audience arrives, and the stage lights are on, as well as the house lights. The stage looks as if most of a play set has been struck recently. A few flats remain; pieces of furniture, props, lighting instruments, and such are scattered about. One piece of furniture is a large cabinet or crate - big enough for someone to hide in. Traces of blood in front of it and a phone receiver with traces of blood is placed next to it in Episode 2C. Some costumes are placed on hangers, dress dummies and/or mannequins which are placed at various locations about the set. There needs to be several so that one key costume will not stand out so prominently. This costume is a grim reaper outfit that is on a mannequin (*Or at least a dress dummy with a styrofoam wig head attached.*); it is SL. The outfit consists of a floor-length black robe with a hood that covers the head. If a mannequin is used, skeletal gloves are on its hands; if a dummy is used, the gloves are pinned to the sleeves. A skull mask covers the face. (*If it glows in the dark, so much the better.*) At the moment, the mannequin is angled almost UPS so that the face is barely visible. A long-handled scythe is in the mannequin's hand or is leaning against it. A small phone table is SL. A semi-circle of folding chairs, or perhaps a variety of chairs such as might be used in various productions, faces the audience. Two extra chairs are USR. There is a typical stage ghost light; a low-wattage bulb on a metal pole with a base; it is unlit at the moment, and is placed DSL.

See additional production notes at the end.

ACT I

(The play's DIRECTOR, or a NARRATOR, enters from the wings. The house LIGHTS dim.)

DIRECTOR: Good evening. Welcome to THE MYSTERY MAZE, our murder mystery event. *(The NARRATOR can introduce himself or herself.)* THE MYSTERY MAZE is called an "event" rather than a "play" because it takes place at various locations. It is an example of environmental theatre. That doesn't mean that it's about water pollution or protecting our forests, although they are worthy subjects to think about; rather, the term "environmental theatre" refers to the fact that the story is enacted in a real environment - in our case, a school. Since participating in a theatrical "event" will be a new experience for most of you, before we start I need to establish a few ground rules. The first episode - or "scene" - will take place here on the stage. When the characters in our story leave the stage, they will go in small groups to various rooms and locations within the school where they will have other encounters. You are to pick whichever character you wish and follow him or her to the new location. Be aware that while you are watching an episode in one room - the science classroom, for example - two other episodes with other characters will be taking place at the same time in two other locations - the math and English classrooms. When an episode ends and the character you have been watching leaves the room and comes upon other characters, you have the option of continuing to follow the character you began with, or you can follow someone else to their next encounter. Obviously, if you attend just this performance of THE MYSTERY MAZE, you will witness only one-third of the classroom episodes. That's okay - you'll see an entire story by the time the event is over.

(If THE MYSTERY MAZE has more performances to present, the DIRECTOR will say:)

If you choose to return *(Give future performance dates.)* and follow other characters to their episodes, you will, of course, see the story told from a different perspective. If you do come back, we trust you will enjoy listening to the other members of the audience discuss their deductions and suspicions without revealing what you know about the show.

DIRECTOR: *(Continues.)* Please follow a few simple rules. The actors will perform their scenes as if you are not there. Do not talk to them or try to catch their eye. Be invisible observers, as it were. If you see that they are about to move where you are standing, quietly step aside and let them proceed. You may sit if seats are available, or stand to the side along the walls while the episodes are taking place. Please be sure NEVER to stand in front of a door. This is also very important - when characters leave a room and close the door, you may not follow them; if the door is left open, you may go with them. You must stay with one group or another; none of you may roam about the school alone.

I think that covers all the bases. Get ready to play detective, to gather clues, to search for a hidden treasure, and to figure out who is going to murder whom, but as you do so, be careful; after all, this is a MYSTERY MAZE!

(DIRECTOR nods a bow and leaves the stage to sit in the audience. The stage LIGHTS lower.)

EPISODE 1
The School Theatre

(After a beat, the stage LIGHTS come back up. LEE UNDERWOOD is onstage. He stands at the table SL, his briefcase open on the table before him. MR. DETWEILLER, the school's head custodian, enters from off SR. He is a white-haired old man, cantankerous and unwilling take any gruff off anyone. At times HE can appear slightly sinister.)

DETWELLER: Mr. Underwood?

LEE: Yes, Mr. Detweiller?

DETWELLER: You told me to let you know when the others started to arrive. I'm letting you know.

LEE: I see. Thank you. You can unlock the doors and let them in. You have your keys?

DETWELLER: Do I have my keys? I let you in, didn't I? 'Course I have my keys. I can still do my job!

LEE: I'm sure you do your job quite competently, Mr. Detweiller. I wasn't thinking.

DETWELLER: That's understandable. If I was a big city lawyer like you and got paid lots of money when I did think, I wouldn't think for free neither.

LEE: *(Coolly.)* Please let them in.

DETWELLER: I can do that; it don't require no thinking at all.

(HE exits off SR taking a ring of keys from his belt. LEE takes a will from the briefcase and scans it. HE says to himself:)

LEE: You were one of the most interesting clients I ever had, Anthony. One thing is for sure - your heirs will never forget the legacy you left behind.

(VOICES are heard from off SR. LEE replaces the will in the briefcase and closes it.)

MILLIE: *(Off SR.)* Hello? Anybody home?

LILLIE: *(Off SR.)* That sounds silly, Millie. How can anybody be at home? We're not at a home, we're at the Pendleton Academy.

MILLIE: *(Off SR.)* I know that, Lillie, but what did you expect me to say? "Anybody school?"

LEE: *(Crossing to SR.)* In here, ladies.

(MILLIE and LILLIE PENDLETON enter from off SR. Sisters of the late Anthony Pendleton, THEY are a feisty pair of little old maids. They have a habit of completing each other's sentences. LEE shakes hands with each.)

LEE: Miss Millie...Miss Lillie...won't you sit down?

MILLIE: *(Crossing to DSC.)* In a minute, Lee. Look, Lillie, we're on a stage again. Lordie, it's been years since we were -

LILLIE: - on a stage. *(Crossing to MILLIE.)* The Majestic Theatre...Boston...19__ *(Subtract twenty years from current year.)* Our swan song. Do you remember it?

MILLIE: Of course I do.

(SHE begins to sing or hum "East Side, West Side" or a similar old song in the public domain. She goes into a simple soft-shoe routine and LILLIE joins her, singing and dancing. LEE watches from the side. When they finish the song, they curtsy to Lee and then to each other. NOTE: A different song can be sung and danced at each performance.)

MILLIE: I think I'll take that seat now.

(LEE crosses to them and escorts THEM to the chairs at the SL side of the semi-circle. MILLIE puts her purse on the floor at her feet. At some point during Episode 1 she will open it and take out her handkerchief. When she does this, a pill box with several compartments falls out of her

purse onto the floor. None of the CHARACTERS present will notice this, apparently, though the audience might.)

LEE: That was very entertaining, ladies.

LILLIE: Thank you, Lee, Millie and I always figured, if you got it...

MILLIE: ...flaunt it!

LEE: I'm sure you brought a lot of enjoyment to many, many people during your career.

MILLIE: Everyone loved our performances - except Anthony. Our brother refused to have anything to do with Lillie and me when we went into show business. But you know that, of course.

LEE: Yes, Miss Millie. It was his loss.

LILLIE: Well, we never regretted our choice for a minute! Millie and I have had a wonderful life.

Lee, I'm going to ask you point-blank, before the others arrive - why did you ask us to come here? Did Anthony have a change of heart before he died and decide to include us -

MILLIE: - in his will? It's not that we need anything from him. We're quite happy at the Actors' Retirement Home. It's just that it would be nice to know he forgave us for "disgracing" the family -

LILLIE: - as he put it -

MILLIE: - before he passed away.

LEE: Apparently he did...well, in a way...you'll see what I mean when the will is read. How did you get here, by the way?

MILLIE: Our great-niece, Susan -

LILLIE: (*Cutting in.*) Our great-great-niece, I believe, dear.

MILLIE: Whatever, dear. Anyway, our late brother Wentworth's great-granddaughter, Susan, and her beau were kind enough to bring us.

MILLIE: They let us out near the door before parking -

LILLIE: - the car. You haven't met Susan, have you, Lee?

LEE: I've been in touch with her parents, of course, on business for Anthony, but I haven't had the pleasure of meeting Miss Pendleton.

SUSAN: (*Entering from off SR with RON GANNAWAY.*) The pleasure is mine.

(*LEE turns and crosses toward SUSAN, meeting HER and RON CSR. They shake hands.*)

SUSAN: I'm Susan Pendleton. You must be Mr. Underwood.

LEE: Lee Underwood, Miss Pendleton.

SUSAN: This is my boyfriend, Ron Gannaway. (*LEE and RON say hello and shake hands. SUSAN is an attractive, intelligent young woman, and Ron is an outgoing, pleasant young man.*) I thought it would be all right if I brought Ron with me. We're classmates here at the academy.

LEE: That's fine. Won't you sit down?

(*THEY cross and sit beside the SISTERS.*)

SUSAN: I see you found the stage.

MILLIE: It was no problem. We just followed the smell -

LILLIE: - of the grease paint. It's the perfume of the thespians!

PAT: (*From off SR.*) My word! How very interesting!

(*PAT DE LA CRUIZ enters from off SR. An archaeologist in his forties, he wears a khaki safari jacket and shorts, knee socks, lace-up shoes and a pith helmet. He also wears glasses and is carrying a large magnifying glass through which he is examining a dagger with a jewel-encrusted handle.*)

PAT: A Byzantine dagger...about 500 A.D., I'd say...in remarkably good condition.

SUSAN: That's a prop...for a play? It was used in a production that Pendleton Academy presented last year.

End of Freeview

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