

PRIME SUSPECT

By Sam Craig

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STORY OF THE PLAY

When Letha Gordon keeps an appointment with her ex-husband, she suddenly finds herself the prime suspect in his murder. But who would want to kill the headmaster of a prestigious New England prep school? Perhaps his neighbors, Matty and Chandler Davis who have had their eyes on his property. Maybe Michael Morton, the family lawyer. Could it be Mrs. Thatcher, the embittered housekeeper whose son was expelled from the school and ended up running into scrapes with the law at every turn? Perhaps it's her son, Brad, hiding out at the school because he hasn't anywhere else to go. Maybe it's the police sergeant who attended the school and learned to hate the place. What about the music teacher who lives in a dream world of fear and fantasy? Or could it be the victim's second wife, Letha Gordon's own sister, Carrie, a nervous, frail woman who couldn't hurt a fly. Detective Tris Cirillo finds her reputation on the line as she tries to untangle the dangerous spider's web of intrigue at Salem Academy.

SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY

ACT I

Scene 1: The present - in the evening.

Scene 2: An hour later.

Scene 3: Later that night.

ACT II

Scene 1: The following morning.

Scene 2: The following night.

Scene 3: The following evening.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(5 M, 6 W)

CHANDLER DAVIS: A wealthy, retired country gentleman who dabbles in many personal interests, enjoying life as never before.

MATTY DAVIS: His wife, a hypno-therapist who equally enjoys the good life.

CARRIE GORDON: In her 30s, the nervous, delicate wife of the headmaster of Salem Academy.

MICHAEL MORTON: The Gordon's family lawyer and friend.

MRS. THATCHER: 60s, a grim, angry woman who keeps house at the Academy.

BRAD THATCHER: Early 20s, her son, a young man with a past riddled with run-ins with the law.

LETHA GORDON: Carrie's sister and the first Mrs. Gordon. in her late 30s, a woman whose life has been spiraling out of control.

TESSA NELSON: Late 50s, the music teacher at the Academy, who lost her grip on reality many years ago.

TRIS CIRILLO: 30s, a detective from Boston who sought relief from gruesome crime by heading north to the country.

T.J. McCABE: 20s, local man, a sergeant overlooked when Cirillo was hired, bearing a grudge against the woman.

NEAL GORDON: 30s, the victim, a man driven by dreams and the need to do what is right.

TIME: The present.

PLACE: The lobby of Salem Academy, an exclusive prep school.

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SETTING

A fireplace dominates USC with the school emblem and motto, "Strength Through Knowledge" above it. Wing entrances DSR and DSL lead to other rooms on main floor. A small stairway USL leads to the Gordons' apartment. A large window, SR, overlooks the grounds. A chair grouping sits CSL. USR sits a desk with a telephone. Bookcases edge the room and within one of them is a small stereo system. Arched entrance USR leads to hall and entrance from outside.

PROPS

MRS. THATCHER: Tray, glasses.
LETHA: Coat, telegram, purse, apple, paring knife.
CARRIE: Robe and towel, syringe.
TRIS: Notebook, walkie-talkie, several checks, purse in plastic bag, cassette (pre-set on stage).
MISS NELSON: Cup of cocoa.
NEAL: Coat, a check, small bag.
BRAD: Business card, gun.
MATTY: Coat, tray of sandwiches and drinks.
CHANDLER: Coat.
T.J. : Handcuffs.

SOUND EFFECTS

Screech of car brakes and thud, car doors
open and feet crunch on gravel
Gunshot
Knock at door
Cell door opening
Cell door closing
Thunder
Loud knocking at door
Knock on door
Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries"

ACT I

Scene 1

(AT RISE: It is night. A raucous laughter bursts forth as the curtain opens. This from CHANDLER DAVIS, who stands at fireplace. MATTY DAVIS sits in chair opposite CARRIE. MICHAEL sits at desk telephoning.)

CHANDLER: *(Still laughing.)* And that isn't the WORST of it! The mechanic finally turned to him and said, "What are you feeding this engine? Sunflower seeds?" *(HE bursts into further laughter, which MATTY finds infectious. CARRIE makes a vague attempt at joining in the fun.)*

MATTY: Well, darling, it WAS running on squirrel power!

(MICHAEL hangs up and rises.)

CARRIE: Do they know where Neal is?

MICHAEL: Afraid not, Carrie.

MATTY: Oh, don't be so worried, Carrie. You know how Neal is.

CARRIE: *(Worried, to HERSELF.)* Yes, I'm afraid so.

CHANDLER: I'm sure he's had a breakdown somewhere. You did say his car's gone, didn't you?

CARRIE: No ...

MICHAEL: It's in the garage.

CHANDLER: Well, then, he's on his way home in a taxi.

MATTY: Or off in one of the far reaches of this labyrinth of a school trying to fix up this or that.

CHANDLER: I've never seen anyone so dedicated to a building before.

CARRIE: Oh, it's not just the building that he loves.

CHANDLER: Well, of course not. But it is holiday break! Time to make merry and enjoy the good life! Not time to be worrying about the furniture in the dorm rooms. In fact, I was hoping we'd get a chance to discuss an idea I had about this old place.

CARRIE: An idea?

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CHANDLER: Business, you know. Something to benefit us all.

CARRIE: I'm sure Neal will be disappointed. He's always interested in ways to improve things.

MATTY: Really ... such a shame he missed a lovely dinner.

CHANDLER: You outdid yourself, Carrie.

CARRIE: I'm afraid Mrs. Thatcher outdid herself.

CHANDLER: You know, that's the nice thing about being married to a hypnotherapist. Matty can hypnotize me and I get to enjoy the meal all over again!

(MATTY and CHANDLER laugh, while CARRIE moves to window and looks out.)

MICHAEL: Carrie ... would you like us to look for Neal?

CARRIE: Oh, no ... I'm sure Matty's right...he said something earlier about needing to find some papers or something. He probably got so involved in his search he didn't realize the time.

MATTY: Well, I wouldn't mind looking through every nook and cranny of this ol' place.

CHANDLER: I've heard it's haunted.

MICHAEL: There are always stories attached to these old buildings, but they're never true.

MATTY: Never say never!

CHANDLER: There was something about a student who hung himself up in the attic.

MICHAEL: You see? That's impossible.

MATTY: I don't know. When I was in school, there were a couple of times I wouldn't have minded doing myself in.

CHANDLER: Oh, darling ... then where would I be?

MATTY: As you keep telling me ... a lot richer!

MICHAEL: There isn't any attic.

CHANDLER: What?

MICHAEL: The story about the student? It's not true because there isn't any attic!

CARRIE: Our apartment's upstairs and there's just a little crawl space above that.

End of Freeview

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