Murder at the Book Club

By Sam Havens

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Dedicated to my talented, gorgeous wife —
wit, writer, editor, teacher, best friend, love of my life —
Gretchen Havens, otherwise known as My Sweet Gretchy.

STORY OF THE PLAY

This is one club where members' lives are not an open book! Tonight's meeting of the Queen Anne Murder Mystery Book Club takes a dark twist when a threatening telephone call sets the group on edge. Suddenly all the lights go out and gentle Nellie is murdered. But who is the killer…and why? Do those eerie masks mounted on the wall or that unusual hanging mobile mean anything special? And then a rock with a message attached is thrown against the house jolting everyone even further. Inspector McAdoo follows the clues but soon another murder takes place. Accusations and tensions escalate leading to a thrilling climax.

Colorful characters and sparkling clues ingeniously hidden in plain sight will keep your audiences enthralled until the final reveal.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(Cast of 10: 5 m, 5 w)

ROGER ALMQUIST: Black jacket and pants. Cynical.
LIVIA CHAMBLISS: Hat, scarf, mismatched socks, sandals. Eccentric.
NELLIE MERTZ: Modest clothing. Prim.
GLADYS DAVENPORT: Revealing dress. Romantic.
PAULY SMITHERS: Bold jacket. Joker.
JAY BABCOCK: Neutral clothing. Glasses. Anxious.
WANDA GORKA: Slacks, blouse. Blunt.
DOMINIKA GORKA: Slacks, blouse. Blunt.
KENNETH SPELVIN: Coveralls, work boots. Rustic.
INSPECTOR MCADOO: Uniform, wig. Offbeat and intense.

The characters' ages are mixed, 30s to 60s.

TIME

An evening in fall, 1947.

SETTING

Livia's home in the affluent Queen Anne neighborhood of Seattle. The living room has several chairs and a sofa, a desk, lamps, and small tables. There is a bar with a small refrigerator, brandy, and forks, plates, glasses etc. One wall is decorated with about 12 somewhat creepy masks. Collection should include Pierrette and Pierrot masks and a bejeweled Harlequin mask with three emerald stones on the forehead. The other masks vary, such as clown, witch, animal and Commedia dell'arte. However, each gives the impression that they are staring. There is also a hanging mobile of objects incorporating a vampire bat, a model airplane, and a wax carrot. On the walls are at least four paintings including a fairy from "A Midsummer Night's Dream," a sports painting with a baseball bat, a nature painting with a bird, and finally a painting with a bicycle. A coat rack is near the French doors. A tall, filled bookcase swings out like a door, revealing a secret passage behind it.

PROPS

8 copies of the book: *Murder Every Friday*
push scooter
cake
big knife
cups of coffee
eye glasses for Jay
raincoats and umbrellas
telephone
refrigerator with sodas
small brown vial of vanilla
3 flashlights
knife in Nellie's chest
stack of towels and twine
Livia's rings
book on jewelry
magnifying glass
black overcoat
binoculars / opera glasses for McAdoo
sandwiches and coffee
rubber boots
larger rock with a note
brown grocery bag with crackers/cheese, sardines, and salami
a length of wire
lamp rigged to fall
note pad for Roger
pistol for Kenneth
handcuffs for McAdoo

EFFECTS

Various thunderstorm sounds and lightning throughout
Telephone ringing
Door shutting
Howl
Large crash
Lamp that falls and crashes from shelf

ACT I

(AT RISE: ROGER ALMQUIST, alone in the living room, reads aloud from the novel "Murder Every Friday.")

ROGER: "So, as if on cue, the clock struck midnight and Lady Angelica pulled the lever opening the secret trap door...and Sir Tobias Beck plunged to his death on the jagged rocks below."

(SFX: A sudden boom of thunder and crack of lightning. LIVIA CHAMBLISS enters on her push scooter.)

LIVIA: Just now finishing tonight's novel, Roger?
ROGER: Re-reading the final paragraph. I always like it when the central character is triumphant.
LIVIA: As do I.
ROGER: I also like secret doors and aristocracy.
LIVIA: Who doesn't? *(SHE moves to a cake on the table, slices it.)*
ROGER: That knife looks sharp.
LIVIA: And...?
ROGER: You could easily murder me.
LIVIA: My motivation?
ROGER: Just for fun.
LIVIA: Don't you want a slice of cake?
ROGER: Did you lace it with poison?
LIVIA: You are devilish, dear boy.
ROGER: I try.

(SFX: Another crack of lightning and a roll of thunder.)

LIVIA: Goodness, a storm is coming.
ROGER: Yes, the sky is darkening.
LIVIA: Perfect atmosphere for our little group of bibliophiles.
ROGER: Indeed.
LIVIA: Roger, I think you arranged this weather.
ROGER: Oh? You think I have such powers?
LIVIA: Perhaps.

ROGER: Dear Livia, always wearing a hat and scarf.
LIVIA: A hat is my signature; the scarf is my trademark.
ROGER: As you might recall in “Murder at the Dude Ranch,” Melanie DeVore was strangled with a scarf.
LIVIA: Melanie deserved to be murdered. I don't.
ROGER: Will you present that line of reasoning to your adversary?
LIVIA: I have no adversaries.
ROGER: We all have adversaries.
LIVIA: Although, I must confess this hat is a bit peculiar.
ROGER: Livia, all of your hats are peculiar.

(NELLIE MERTZ and GLADYS DAVENPORT enter from the hallway with cups of coffee.)

NELLIE: Was that thunder?
GLADYS: No, it was Gene Krupa playing the drums.
NELLIE: Who?
LIVIA: Gladys is teasing, as usual.
NELLIE: I was hopeful it was cannon fire and we would discover a body.
ROGER: And where would we find the body, Nellie?
NELLIE: Over there by the torchiere.
ROGER: Murdered indoors by a cannon ball? Intriguing but unlikely.
NELLIE: “If you can't convince them, confuse them.”
GLADYS: That's what Harry S. Truman says.
ROGER: Truman also says: “If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen.”
NELLIE: Please let's leave our president out of this and stick to mysteries.
ROGER: Harry S. Truman is a mystery.
LIVIA: My favorite mystery is “The Greenhouse Murders” in which the vicar is killed by a falling pane of glass.
ROGER: A falling pane of glass or a deliberately dropped pane?
NELLIE: As we know, the Vicar actually died of a heart attack.
LIVIA: That's a dull way to die in a mystery novel.

End of Freeview

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