

MURDER IN THE ASYLUM

An absurd whodunit

by James Campbell

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(The office of MARIO VAN WODEN, MD, Phd, Saint Woden's Asylum. The office is furnished with baby furniture. A little white table and a little white chair and little red telephone on the little white table. The room is white, with two revolving doors, SL and SR. The Doctor sits at the little white table, playing Russian roulette with a revolver in a dreamy, absent minded way when we hear the voice of MATRON HOUGH off stage.)

HOUGH (Off.)

Doctor Van Woden! Doctor Van Woden!

(HOUGH enters SL.)

WODEN

Good morning, Matron, good morning.

(He hastily hides the revolver in his lab coat.)

And how is my lovely assistant this lovely morning?

HOUGH

Don't flatter me, Doctor. I'm a very busy woman. You're so inefficient, someone has to take charge around here. Have you finished that memo yet?

VAN WODEN

Memo Matron?

HOUGH

Don't get coy with me, Doctor. The memo about all these mysterious murders.

VAN WODEN

Oh, that memo. Yes, of course I remember the Murder Memo, Matron Hugh.

HOUGH

Hough.

VAN WODEN

Hough. Memo.

HOUGH

Right. I'll be back in exactly three minutes. And you better have that memo finished, or else. Understand?

VAN WODEN

I understand, Matron Hamma-ma---heeuuu---

HOUGH

Three minutes! And make it snappy!

(HOUGH exits SL. VAN WODEN looks at his watch. He takes out a cassette recorder and Dictaphone mike and dictates.)

VAN WODEN

From the desk of Mario Van Woden, MD, Phd, to the staff of Saint Woden's Asylum. Subject: Mysterious murders, increase of - Because of the increase of mysterious murders of late, the staff of Saint Woden's Asylum may expect many more visits from the police. All personnel are requested to remain calm, let no one in without a warrant and make reports to Matron Hough on the ground floor...

(He notice that the mike is not plugged in He looks at his watch. Panic creeping in.)

...Make reports to Matron Hough...Hugh...Hough...Hugh?...

(He plugs in the mike, begins again, faster.)

From the desk of Mario Van Woden, MD, Phd, to the staff of Saint Woden's Asylum, subject: Mysterious murders, increase of - Because of the increase of mysterious murders of late, the staff of Saint Woden's Asylum may expect many more visits from the police. All personnel are requested to remain calm, let no one in without a warrant and make reports to Matron Hough on the ground floor...

(He sees tape sticking out of the machine. He pulls at it. More and more comes out. It is a hopeless tangle.)

...Make reports to Matron Hough...Hugh...Hough...Hugh?...

(He repeats the memo, insanely fast, dictating into the tangle of tape.)

From the desk of Mario Van Woden, MD, Phd, to the staff of Saint Woden's Asylum. Subject: Mysterious murders, increase of - Because of the increase of mysterious murders of late, the staff of Saint Woden's Asylum may expect many more visits from the police. All personnel are requested to remain calm, let no one in without a warrant and make reports to Matron Hough on the ground floor...

MANDABLE
He's downstairs with Matron Hough.

VAN WODEN
Hugh...

MANDABLE
Hough...

VAN WODEN
Miss Mandable, I've got to ask you something.

MANDABLE
Yes, Doctor?

VAN WODEN
Are you on the Easter Picnic Committee? It must be fun.
Festoons of purple and yellow everywhere ... the egg hunt.
Do you have enough eggs? Last year there weren't enough
eggs. See me if you need eggs.

MANDABLE
Yeah.

VAN WODEN
What are you doing for lunch?

MANDABLE
I'm going riding.

VAN WODEN
Bon appetite, my sweet.

MANDABLE
Yeah. Tally-ho.

(MANDABLE exits SL. The phone rings.
VAN WODEN picks it up.)

VAN WODEN
Good morning, Saint Woden's Asylum, Mario Van Woden, MD,
Phd, this is the Doctor speaking. This is the Laboratory?
Ah, how is my experimental patient? You know, rides a
bicycle, speaks Spanish, imitated a schnowzer at the
Christmas show? Yes, that experimental patient. What? He
escaped? Disguised as a policeman? I'll call you back.
(He hangs up. Dictates.)

From the desk of Mario Van Woden, MD, Phd, to the staff of Saint Woden's Asylum. Subject: Experimental Patient, escape of. The Experimental Patient has escaped. Be on the lookout for a Spanish-speaking policeman on a bicycle who looks like a schnowzer. Make reports to Matron Hough on the ground floor...Matron Hugh on the...Hough...Hugh...!

(Frustrated, he repeats the memo as before, mumbling at high speed. While he struggles, CZAR NICHOLAS, a patient, enters SL, followed by MATRON HOUGH. CZAR NICHOLAS Xs to the SR door.)

HOUGH

Czar Nicholas! Don't go out on that balcony!

CN

Why not? It's my balcony!

HOUGH

There are Indians out there.

CN

This is Moscow, Russia. There are no Indians out there.

(CN exits through the SR revolving door. A long scream, OFF.)

HOUGH

I tried to stop him, Doctor.

VAN WODEN

Are there really Indians?

HOUGH

We were pretending. It was his birthday.

VAN WODEN

Why my balcony?

HOUGH

It overlooks the patients' cafeteria. He likes to watch them eat.

VAN WODEN

Isn't that strange? I do that too.

(Phone rings VAN WODEN answers.)

VAN WODEN

Saint Woden's Asylum, Mario Van Woden, MD, Phd. This is the Doctor speaking. What kind of soup is it? But today's Tuesday. You're supposed to serve chicken gumbo on Wednesday. It is Wednesday? I've been meaning to ask you something. Have you seen any policemen hanging around? Kind of Spanish looking? I'll call you back.

(He hangs up.)

That was the kitchen. Czar Nicholas fell in the soup.

HOUGH

Is he hurt?

VAN WODEN

They don't know. He's still in there.

HOUGH

Doctor, I want to report there's been another murder.

VAN WODEN

Who was it this time?

HOUGH

Little Arthur.

VAN WODEN

Little Arthur? What Little Arthur?

HOUGH

You know, blind, bald, walks with a limp? Laughs a lot? He imitated a salmon at the Christmas show.

VAN WODEN

Oh, that Little Arthur!

HOUGH

He was drowned.

VAN WODEN

The fish pond?

HOUGH

The men's room.

VAN WODEN

That makes four since January.

HOUGH

Doctor, what are you going to do?

VAN WODEN

I'm going to get to the bottom of this.

HOUGH

Good, Doctor. How, Doctor?

VAN WODEN

I have a theory. There is a root cause, an underlying malaise, a subconscious mob wish, a congenital compulsion...

(CZAR N enters SL, bursting through the revolving door. He is covered with hot soup and arrows.)

CN

Nurse! Nurse!

HOUGH

Poor boy! What can I do for you?

CN

I'd like to sit down, but the arrows are in the way.

VAN WODEN

What kind of soup is that?

HOUGH (Tasting.)

Minestrone.

VAN WODEN

Minestrone? Then it is Tuesday. But the cook said it was Wednesday.

HOUGH

But it is Wednesday.

CN

But there was no cook. Just some Indians and a policeman. He made us order everything in Spanish.

(Phone rings. VAN WODEN answers.)