

A Not So Dark and Stormy Night

A Play in One Act

EJ McFall

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A Not So Dark And Stormy Night

By EJ McFall

Characters:

- AGATHA GRIMES: A mystery writer, specializing in devious traps.
- MARTHA CHRISTIE: A mystery writer, specializing in fine poisons.
- JOHN MORIARITY: A mysterious traveler with car trouble.
- DRAKE JOHNSON: A mysterious traveler on a mission.
- MASON RICHARDSON: A mysterious traveler on a mission.
- THE AX-MURDERER: An unexpected guest, complete with ax.
- THE GHOST: An unexpected resident, complete with scary sheet.

Setting:

A resort cabin by a lake, on a bright and sunny day. A rustic interior: living room and kitchen, with an outside door and stairs leading to second floor. There is a pantry door in the kitchen, a linen closet in the hallway and the door to a secret passageway in the living room.

Time:

The present.

Stormy Night

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AGATHA and MARTHA enter carrying their laptops and other supplies necessary for a weekend getaway. They are dressed in casual –perhaps grungy—writing clothes. MARTHA drops off a carafe of wine and a bag of groceries in the kitchen. AGATHA goes outdoors briefly with a bundle, returns without it a moment later. The two meet in the living room, happily discuss their grand adventure.

AGATHA:

It's a dark and stormy night.

MARTHA:

And a lunatic is prowling the grounds.

AGATHA:

The cold-hearted patriarch's will has gone missing.

MARTHA:

And the crazy heirs are playing a lethal game of winner-take-all.

AGATHA:

While the cook's bastard son hides in the secret passageway, waiting to take his revenge.

Both laugh.

AGATHA:

Maybe we should check the library to see if there's a body on the floor.

MARTHA:

Or check outside to see if a giant hound is prowling the moors.

More laughter.

AGATHA:

We picked the perfect place to write our best-selling mystery novels.

MARTHA:

Atmosphere is everything, especially if you're writing a noir.

Stormy Night

AGATHA:
But I'm writing a cozy.

MARTHA:
Me too. Did you bring a teapot?

AGATHA:
Of course.

MARTHA:
And tea?

AGATHA:
Of course.

MARTHA:
Bag or leaf?

AGATHA:
(Hesitantly.) Bag.

MARTHA:
(Dramatically.) No leaf tea? That's it! You've ruined the entire writing weekend!

AGATHA:
(Dramatically): Oh, the horror! All is lost!

The two break out in laughter.

MARTHA:
Perhaps there's some hope still. Did you bring crumpets?

AGATHA:
(Looking at the floor in shame.) No.

MARTHA:
You fiend! You've destroyed both our writing careers! I won't rest until I've gotten my revenge!

More laughter.

MARTHA:
(Getting serious.) Ok, enough foolishness. We have Great American Novels to write. And only 48 hours before ye old landlord turns us out of our magnificent haunted house.

Stormy Night

AGATHA:

Haunted? I don't remember hearing anything about ghosts.

MARTHA:

But there must be a ghost. This place is 100 years old and is smack dab on a mysterious lake in the middle of the deep dark woods. You don't think anyone has drowned or been eaten by Sasquatch in all that time?

AGATHA:

Or been poisoned by rotten acorns?

MARTHA:

Acorns? Who eats acorns?

AGATHA:

Poisoned by wild mushrooms?

MARTHA:

Better, much better.

AGATHA:

You're the poison expert. There must be plenty of deadly plants around here.

MARTHA:

Sure. Foxglove, hemlock, deadly nightshade... There might even be some venomous snakes slithering about in the tall grass.

AGATHA:

(Shivering.) Snakes? No thank you. I didn't sign up for snakes.

MARTHA:

Ok, forget the snakes. We're on a lake, after all. All I'd have to do is lure you into the water for a swim –

AGATHA:

All I'd have to do is take you out on a rowboat and knock you overboard --

MARTHA:

(Laughs, then sobers.) Ok, Enough stalling. Let's write our masterpieces first. There'll be plenty of time to murder each other afterwards.

AGATHA:

And steal each other's masterpieces.

Stormy Night

MARTHA points at her watch significantly.

AGATHA:

Right. Time to get to work. I've got dibs on the kitchen table.

MARTHA:

(Glances at kitchen.) Why?

AGATHA:

(Ticks off points on her fingers.) Closer to the refrigerator. Better sunlight. Opportunity to duck out the back door for an unauthorized break without you knowing about it.

MARTHA:

That's why I want the writing nook in the living room. I can be out the French doors and down by the lake without you seeing a thing.

AGATHA:

Looks like we'll have to make checks on each other every half hour.

MARTHA:

Or take writing breaks every--

Loud, repeated knocking on door.

AGATHA:

Who's that? The postman?

MARTHA:

He only knocks twice.

AGATHA laughs and opens door.

AGATHA:

Hello. Can I help you?

JOHN:

Hi. I'm John Moriarity. My car ---

AGATHA and MARTHA:

Moriarity?

JOHN:

Yeah, yeah. I've heard it all before. My car --

Stormy Night

AGATHA:
The game's afoot, Watson.

MARTHA:
It's elementary, my dear Watson.

JOHN:
My car ---

AGATHA:
Who died and made you Holmes?

MARTHA:
Who died and made *you* Holmes?

AGATHA:
I look better in a deerstalker hat.

MARTHA:
And I look better in a houndstooth cape.

JOHN:
My car---

AGATHA:
Oh, sorry. Is there something wrong with your car?

JOHN:
It broke down three miles down the road. Can I use your phone to call my friend?

MARTHA:
Sorry, we don't have a phone.

JOHN:
No phone?

AGATHA:
We're here on a writer's retreat. There's no land line and we purposely left our cell phones at home, so we could get lots of writing done.

MARTHA:
Though I'm afraid we haven't got much done as yet so if you'll excuse us –

Stormy Night

JOHN:

How far is it to the next place?

MARTHA:

There's a little hunting and fishing store about five miles down the road. Go straight on the gravel road. You can't miss it.

JOHN:

Five miles?

MARTHA:

Maybe a little less. Maybe a little more.

AGATHA:

Don't be ridiculous. The poor guy has already walked three miles. You can't expect him to walk another five. We'll give you a ride to the store.

MARTHA:

Seriously? You're going to drive off into the sunset with a stranger? You don't know anything about him. He could be a serial killer. The Unabomber. An insurance salesman.

AGATHA:

Well, I'm not going alone. You're going with.

MARTHA:

Says who?

AGATHA:

It'll be a good writing break. We can pick up some junk food at the store.

MARTHA:

We haven't written a word yet. Why do we need a break?

AGATHA:

Because we ate all our treats on the way here. How are we supposed to bribe the Muse without treats?

MARTHA:

What happened to that unopened box of fudge cookies?

AGATHA:

Beats me. Maybe rats got them. Now, if you'll excuse me, I've got to change out of my writing clothes before we go on our errand of mercy.

Stormy Night

MARTHA:

We're not taking him to the store. And rats didn't eat all those cookies. Not unless they dragged crumbs all across your sweatshirt as they scurried away.

AGATHA:

(Going to stairs.) Rats can be pretty devious. Make yourself comfortable, Mr. Moriarity. It'll just take a couple of minutes to change, then we'll be off.

JOHN:

I really appreciate this. I swear I'm not a crazy serial killer.

MARTHA:

That's what they all say.

JOHN:

Seriously, I've had a crappy day. All I want to do is to get to a phone. Even if I were a serial killer, I wouldn't have the energy to wield a knife against you or your friend.

MARTHA:

Yeah, well just so you know –I've watched every cop show ever produced so I know every serial killer trick in the book. I'm also an expert in the fine art of poisoning. And I know karate.

JOHN:

I'm sure you do. I consider myself well warned. Just give me a ride to the store and I'll be out of your life forever.

MARTHA:

Ok, just so you know where you stand. Now, I better go change. Can't very well show up at the bait show in my writing clothes, now can I?

MARTHA goes upstairs.

JOHN:

(Stage whisper.) Crazy broad. Just wait until I get her and her friend alone in the car.

JOHN goes into kitchen. He sees a decanter of dark wine on the kitchen counter and pours some into a paper cup. He chugs his drink, starts to walk towards the hallway and falls over.

AGATHA comes downstairs, dressed in slacks and a fashionable blouse.

Stormy Night

Ok, I'm ready.

AGATHA:

Silence.

AGATHA:

Mr. Moriarity? What mischief are you up to?

Silence.

AGATHA goes to the kitchen, finds JOHN on the floor.

AGATHA:

Oh, my God!

AGATHA kneels next to JOHN, checks for pulse.

AGATHA:

Martha! Come here! Quick!

MARTHA:

(Offstage.) Hold your horses. I'm coming!

AGATHA:

Seriously! I need you now!

MARTHA comes downstairs, still buttoning her blouse and tucking it into her slacks.

MARTHA:

What's the problem?

MARTHA halts, looks at body.

MARTHA:

What the hell?

AGATHA:

I think he's dead.

MARTHA:

I can see that. What'd you do?

Stormy Night

AGATHA:

Nothing. I just came down and found him lying here.

MARTHA:

Hmm... I don't see any wounds. Maybe he fell and hit his head.

AGATHA:

But look at his lips. They're all blue.

MARTHA:

So they are. That's not a good sign.

AGATHA:

And I can smell bitter almonds. I think he's been poisoned.

MARTHA:

Yes, that's one of the tell-tale signs of cyanide.

AGATHA:

You think he's been poisoned?

MARTHA:

(Looking at decanter and cup.) It would appear he drank some of my special wine.

AGATHA:

What?

MARTHA:

I mixed up some arsenic and cyanide in a base of elderberry wine as research for my book. I wanted to see if they leave residue in the bottom of the decanter, have a smell, change the color of the wine... You know how readers complain if you don't get the details right. The poor bastard must have helped himself to a glass while we were upstairs.

AGATHA:

You left poisoned wine out on the counter? What if I drank it?

MARTHA:

Don't be ridiculous. You don't drink wine.

AGATHA:

But –

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MARTHA:

Anyway, it serves him right for sneaking a drink without being invited. People have no manners nowadays.

AGATHA:

Manners? The guy's dead.

MARTHA:

Kismet for being a thief. And probably a serial killer too.

AGATHA:

Would you get serious? The guy's dead! We have to call an ambulance.

MARTHA:

It's too late for an ambulance. That wine works fast. That's why it's such a great murder weapon.

AGATHA:

Then we have to call the cops.

MARTHA:

We can't do that.

AGATHA:

Why not?

MARTHA:

Well, duh. A guy comes into our place, drinks poisoned wine, and drops dead. And you want to call the cops?

AGATHA:

But it was an accident.

MARTHA:

(Acting.) Honestly, officer. We always keep lethal wine on the counter. We never use it. It was just one of those unfortunate events.

AGATHA:

Well, it was. We're mystery writers. We have to do research so we don't get nasty letters critiquing our crimes.

MARTHA:

You've watched at least a thousand police procedurals. Do you honestly think anyone is going to believe that?

Stormy Night

AGATHA:

Well...I don't know...Maybe not. Still –we've got to do something. We can't just leave the guy lying on the floor. Especially when it's not even our place.

MARTHA:

I agree. We've got to hide the body.

AGATHA:

Hide the body?

MARTHA:

Unless you want to get a few bottles of relish and eat it?

AGATHA:

Oh...gross...

MARTHA:

Then we either toss him into the lake or dump him in the woods. What's your pleasure?

AGATHA:

I don't know. Couldn't we put him in his car and stage an accident?

MARTHA:

His car. Damn. We have to get rid of that too.

AGATHA:

We don't even know where it is.

MARTHA:

It won't be too hard to find, Sherlock. There's only one road out here and he said he walked three miles.

AGATHA:

Right. We can push it into the lake. And then dump him in too.

MARTHA:

Maybe. We better put him someplace safe for the time being. Do we have an antique chest?

AGATHA:

I'm afraid not.

MARTHA:

An abandoned well?

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AGATHA:
Don't think so.

MARTHA:
Dirt floor in the basement?

AGATHA:
No basement.

MARTHA:
Unfinished attic that we can wall up?

AGATHA:
No such luck.

MARTHA:
Garden that needs fertilizing?

AGATHA:
No tomato plants to disguise the grave.

MARTHA:
Ok, well...I guess it's the lake then. We'll need something to weigh him down. Preferably something that can't be traced back to this place.

AGATHA:
The fireplace poker? The andirons?

MARTHA:
Too obvious. I'll check the trunk of our car. There's got to be something heavy in there.

AGATHA:
Not the spare tire or the jack. We might need them.

MARTHA:
We *do* need them. To make sure our friend sinks to the bottom of the lake.

AGATHA:
Yeah, but you know our luck. As soon as we toss the jack into the lake, we'll get a flat on the way home.

MARTHA:
You have something else in mind?

Stormy Night

AGATHA:

Rocks and rope?

MARTHA:

Too risky. The rope gets waterlogged eventually and the body pops up.

AGATHA:

Yeah, but we'll be long gone by then.

MARTHA:

It's still sloppy. I don't like a sloppy murder.

AGATHA:

You mean like leaving poison out for anyone to drink? That sloppy?

MARTHA:

I told you –that was his fault. I can't be expected to predict that some idiot is going to roam in off the road and help himself to whatever he can find in the kitchen.

Sound of car driving down road.

AGATHA:

Oh, my God! Who's that? The cops?

MARTHA:

Calm down. The police wouldn't have any reason to come here.

AGATHA:

Then who...?

MARTHA:

Stall them while I move the body.

AGATHA:

What?

MARTHA:

You heard me. Stall whoever it is. Unless you'd rather be the one to move the body.

AGATHA:

I'll stall.

AGATHA runs to door. MARTHA drags body into the pantry.

Stormy Night

Knock on door. AGATHA hesitantly opens it.

AGATHA:

Yes?

DRAKE:

Hello. I'm looking for a friend of mine. I saw his car down the road. I thought he might have walked here to use the phone.

AGATHA:

We don't have a phone. We're here to write without interruptions.