

MURDER IN THE ASYLUM

An absurd whodunit

by James Campbell

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MURDER IN THE ASYLUM

a play by

James Bentley Campbell

MURDER IN THE ASYLUM premiered Off-off Broadway at Stagelights II in New York City with Ray Hagen, Penny Pettis, Fran Berzanski and Saul Fredricks and directed by Jim Carroll.

CAST

MARIO VAN WODEN

Head of Saint Woden's Asylum

MATRON HOUGH

Asst. to Doctor Van Woden

MISS MANDABLE

A young, pretty nurse

CZAR NICHOLAS

A patient

MARTY

An Old School Chum

(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 a 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 commanding voice of MATRON HOUGH offstage.)

HOUGH

Doctor Van Woden! Doctor Van Woden! (HOUGH *enters* SL.)

VAN WODEN

Good morning, Matron, good morning. (*He hides the gun 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. 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 have that memo finished, or else. Understand?

VAN WODEN

I understand, Matron Hamma...ma...heeeuuu...

HOUGH

Three minutes! And make it snappy!

(HOUGH exits SL. VAN WODEN takes out a cassette recorder, 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 in 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 notices the mike is not plugged in. Panic creeping in. He plugs in the mike and repeats the entire memo faster.)

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

(He sees tape sticking out of the machine. He pulls at it. It is a hopeless tangle. He repeats again, even faster.)

...Matron Hough on the ground floor...Hough...Hugh...Hough!...

(He is drooling with anxiety. He takes out the revolver, waving the weapon and the mike in each hand. MISS MANDABLE enters SL, unnoticed, until, at the height of agitation, he sees her.)

VAN WODEN

Hello, Miss Mandable.

MANDABLE

Hi, Doctor.

VAN WODEN

You ok?

MANDABLE

Yeah.

VAN WODEN

Good.

BOTH

I just wanted to say...

MANDABLE

No, you...

VAN WODEN

No, you...

MANDABLE

I just wanted to say the police inspector has arrived.

VAN WODEN

Police inspector?

MANDABLE

He says he's your old school chum.

VAN WODEN

I don't have any old school chums.

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. (*She exits. The phone rings. VAN WODEN picks 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...?

(CZAR NICHOLAS *enters SL, followed by*
MATRON HOUGH. CZAR NICHOLAS *X's to the*
SR *door.*)

HOUGH

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

CZAR

Why not? It's my balcony!

HOUGH

There are Indians out there.

CZAR

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

(CZAR exits SR. A scream off right.)

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 picks up.)*

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. *(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 NICHOLAS *enters SL He is covered with soup and arrows.*)

CZAR

Nurse! Nurse!

HOUGH

Poor boy! What can I do for you?

CAZAR

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

VAN WODEN

What kind of soup is that?

HOUGH (*Tasting.*)

Minestrone.