

ALMOST WANTED: Dead or Alive

By Craig Sodaro

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STORY OF THE PLAY

When a bunch of temperamental artists seeking quiet at Rancho Artisto encounter the fun-loving college workers, watch out! After an episode of the popular TV show, "Most Wanted: Dead or Alive," the kids suspect one of the guests, a little old lady who specializes in American primitive, is really Granny Ghoul. And it's just too coincidental that the nervous host of the show is found knocked out cold and stuffed in the lobby closet! Add an overbearing mother, an insistent art critic, and art thieves for an aerobically-paced comedy.

SYNOPSIS

ACT I

- Scene 1: A spring afternoon at the TV studio.
- Scene 2: The following day at Rancho Artisto.
- Scene 3: A short time later.
- Scene 4: Late that night.

ACT II

- Scene 1: The following morning.
- Scene 2: That night.

SOUND EFFECTS

Effects include thunder, phone ringing and eerie hypnosis music.

COSTUMES: See end of script for costume notes.

CAST OF CHARACTERS (6 M, 12 W)

BEULAH WITHERSPOON: 60s, widow and owner of Rancho Artisto, an artists' retreat.

"CAP" FLEMMING: 60s, a fisherman pursuing Beulah.

LINDA WITHERSPOON: 21, Beulah's niece, a college student majoring in criminology, working at the retreat for the summer.

CANDY BARR: 19, Linda's friend, a ditzzy college student who loves Elvis.

JEFF TUTTLE: 21, law school student. He plans to marry Linda so she can catch them and he'll defend them.

GARY HAGEN: 20, a college student who wants to be a dentist. Unfortunately, he looks a lot like Elvis.

LORI GRIDLEY: 20, a college student who will work as the retreat cook. She's prone to be a health nut and cooks with tofu, bean sprouts, and sunflower seeds.

CHERYL DUNN: 19, another student and friend of Candy's who works as a maid at the retreat.

CORLISS CUSHING: 50s, a famous art critic seeking peace and quiet as she works on her biography of the great Slavonian artist, Mikas Wikas.

VIRGIL BLAND: 50s, Corliss' henpecked secretary.

HARRY GRIMES: 50s, notorious art thief who steals treasures by hypnotizing the owners. Nick-name is "Hypnomaniac."

TRUDY GRIMES: 30s, Harry's wife and partner in crime.

MABEL HATCH: 60s, artist specializing in American primitive.

TONY GRITT: 20s, glamorous TV host of "Most Wanted - Dead or Alive," but extremely conceited - and cowardly!

FRANKIE FOOS: 20s, Tony's assistant and cameraperson who keeps him afloat because she loves him despite his faults.

EULALIE TUTTLE: 50s, an overprotective mother looking out for her little "Jeffy."

MADAME KLOTCHSKI: 50s, a Slavonian princess who dabbles in art collecting.

DARLENE EVERSMEAR: 30s, producer of the TV show, "Most Wanted - Dead or Alive."

THE SETTING

Scene 1, the television studio, is played before the curtain. Nothing is required, but a logo for the show "Wanted - Dead or Alive" can be used behind Tony Gritt as he wraps up this segment. The rest of the play takes place in the lobby and connecting garden of Rancho Artisto, a retreat for artists somewhere in the Southwest. About two thirds of SR forms the lobby, which is a rustic old room featuring southwestern furniture and rugs. Main door is DSR while an arched entrance USR leads to other rooms. A fireplace spans upstage wall, decorated with unusual sculptures. At left of fireplace is small closet. A couch sits DSC, flanked by a chair and small table. At left sits the desk counter with telephone and guest register. Above the desk hangs one dramatic, colorful abstract painting. On the other walls hang a series of dismally childish drawings in elaborate frames. A television sits DSR with the screen facing UPS. A suggestion of a wall separates the lobby from the patio-garden just beyond the French doors. A lawn chair or two grace the patio which is decorated with several flower pots. Trees and bushes large enough to hide behind are UPS.

For the paintings: Select several prints of famous paintings (preferably on fabric). Draw slightly larger childish pictures which can be framed over the actual prints. It's a good idea to actually use canvas stretched over a frame. The line identifying the famous paintings should, of course, be adjusted to identify the paintings actually used in your production.

PROPS

Microphone; video camera or facsimile; suitcases; picture of Elvis; fake mustache and beard; spirit gum and brush; blanket; dust cloth; pen; extension cord; trench coat, dark glasses, fedora for Tony; guest register; three flashlights; book; large purse; oversized plastic mallet; rope and gag; exacto knife and staple remover; facsimile laptop computer; guns for Harry and Mabel; phone; newspaper; pen; poster of Hypno Harry; plates, glasses and trays; raincoat for Gary; pencil; strobe light; and comb.

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: TV studio played in front of the curtain. TONY GRITT stands with microphone before FRANKIE FOOS who holds a video camera.)

TONY: *(Smiling broadly.)* And there you have it, America. Another criminal behind bars - and all thanks to you. Creepy Krandall won't swindle any more widows or orphans now that he's behind bars. And remember, if you have any tips that can turn the tables on treachery, phone us at our toll free number 1-800-555-2828. Until next week this is Tony Gritt signing off for "Most Wanted - Dead or Alive."

(TONY holds smile until we hear claps from DARLENE EVERSMEAR, the producer who enters SL.)

DARLENE: Excellent, Tony. Absolutely a winner.

TONY: *(Bitterly.)* Glad you approve, Darlene. We wouldn't want our producer unhappy.

DARLENE: Do I detect a touch of testiness?

TONY: It's not a touch, Darlene! It's a full-blown epidemic!

FRANKIE: *(Trying to change the subject.)* Mr. Gritt, we'd better get going.

DARLENE: Exactly. We've got eight more episodes to shoot before we wrap up this season.

TONY: No! I track down one more case for "Most Wanted" and they'll put up MY picture at the post office!

DARLENE: Oh, Tony, Tony, Tony ... the pressure getting a bit too much for you?

TONY: That and a paycheck that looks like I ought to be living on tips.

DARLENE: Your contract comes up for renewal soon, darling. Whoever would have guessed that our little show would have become such a hit. And, of course, we'll take that into account in our negotiations.

TONY: Look, Darlene ... without me, you don't have a show.

FRANKIE: Tony, I don't think ...

DARLENE: It's all right, Miss Foos. Go pack up your camera or something. *(FRANKIE reluctantly exits SR.)*
And as for you, Mr. Gritt, you've got a contract to stick to, or you'll end up as one of our suspects instead of our host!

TONY: Don't bet on it, Darlene. *(TONY moves SR.)*

DARLENE: I hope you're going to investigate the case of the Winnipeg Wiener Snatcher.

TONY: You go solve the Hot Dog Caper. I'm going someplace for some peace and quiet before I have a full-blown nervous breakdown. *(TONY exits SR.)*

DARLENE: Tony! You're going to Winnipeg, you hear! I've got your tickets right here! Tony! *(DARLENE exits SR as LIGHTS go down.)*

END OF SCENE

Scene 2

(AT RISE: The lobby and garden of Rancho Artisto. LINDA and CANDY enter SR carrying suitcases.)

LINDA: Aunt Beulah?

CANDY: Your darling niece and her best friend are here, Mrs. Witherspoon!

LINDA: Your staff has arrived!

CANDY: Gosh, she said she'd be here, didn't she?

LINDA: Of course. The season opens tomorrow and everybody working at Rancho Artisto is as green as grass this year.

CANDY: Green as grass? That's dumb. We're just college students, Linda.

(JEFF, GARY, LORI and CHERYL enter SR carrying suitcases.)

JEFF: Hey, Candy, where do you want the rest of your luggage?

CANDY: Oh, gosh, just set it anywhere.

LINDA: I can't believe you brought seven suitcases!

CANDY: I only brought what I needed. For everyday of the week.

LORI: This is quite a place, Linda.

LINDA: Aunt Beulah's really worked hard fixing it up. *(CHERYL has moved to French doors.)* When she inherited it from her half-brother, Fast Freddy, it was just a real dump.

GARY: Fast Freddy?

LINDA: Yeah, he was kind of a bad egg, but he never cracked. Always stayed just this side of the law. Everybody thought there was always something fishy going on with him. Anyway, Aunt Beulah always wanted to make up for whatever her half-brother was doing, and so when my uncle died, she decided to take Fast Freddy's money and sponsor artists.

JEFF: No wonder you want to be Dick Tracy, Jr., Linda.

End of Freeview

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