

IT WAS A DARK AND STORMY NIGHT

By Craig Sodaro

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Slaughter House ... the mansion of Sam Slaughter, the world's most successful, but most reclusive mystery writer and the studio of "It Was a Dark and Stormy Night," the most popular radio show of 1938 ... the place where fact and fiction mix into a deadly combination.

Not many people like Sam Slaughter. He's just fired Audrey Ross, aging star of his radio show. He's two-timing another star, Cleo Riviera, with a brainless showgirl, Molly Meade. He's yelled at his butler, his agent, and the show's producer.

To make matters worse, a woman from his past shows up with some incriminating evidence that Sam can't let anyone see. But before Sam can pay off the blackmail she demands, he is kidnapped and shots are fired in the night.

While Detective Samson begins to unravel the mystery of Sam's disappearance, Sam's publisher brings three winners of a "What Sam Slaughter Means to Me" essay contest for their prize – a weekend visit at Slaughter House. The three down-home ladies get more than they bargained for when the body of Sheila Sylvester literally falls out of nowhere during a rehearsal of "It Was a Dark and Stormy Night."

When a photographer for a tabloid magazine shows up and then apparently kills Detective Samson, the cast is left to its own devices – none of which are very effective.

Suddenly, Sam shows up and vows to tell all, but a poisoned dart silences the great and prolific writer, who's left scripts everywhere. One of those scripts, and an opportune visit by Sam's uncle, unmask the killer – on the air.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(7 M, 11 W)

CLEO RIVIERA: An actress in her 20s.

AUDREY ROSS: The diva of radio drama, a very demanding star, in her 40s.

CARTER LANE: Handsome star of radio drama; very cool, clever.

SAM SLAUGHTER: Highly successful writer of mystery/horror; a very unlikable character.

BARBARA PRESCOTT: Radio show director; flighty, scatterbrained.

MOLLY MEADE: 20s, an aspiring actress with little talent and less brains.

ESTHER CULPEPPER: Slaughter's meek secretary.

FIELDING: Butler, a perfect gentleman.

NORMAN GRIEVE: Klutzy sound effects man.

PETE WILSON: 40s, the producer of the popular radio show.

HILLARY DUNN: Sam's agent, a clever businesswoman who doesn't let anything get by her.

SHEILA SYLVESTER: A shady lady with a past.

DETECTIVE SAMSON: A cynical policeman who's seen it all and is totally unmoved by working with some great stars.

CLYDE FARRINGTON: Excitable owner of Slamden House Publishing.

WINNY GALLAGHER: One of Sam's greatest fans, a devoted contest winner.

LYDIA PRATT: Another fan.

ELLIE McDOOGLE: Another contest winner.

SNOOPY DORRANCE: A "photographer."

SIMEON SLAUGHTER: Sam's old "uncle." (Actually Det. Samson in disguise.)

TIME: An early spring evening, 1938.

PLACE: The parlor of Slaughter House Mansion, the remote seaside home of a successful mystery writer.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Act I

Scene 1: Early spring evening, 1938.

Scene 2: Later that night.

Scene 3: The following afternoon.

ACT II

Scene 1: Following day, mid-morning.

Scene 2: That afternoon.

Scene 3: That night, just before air time.

SETTING

The parlor is a large room, with a fireplace USC. The Slaughter family crest, consisting of various primitive weapons in a pleasing design, hangs above the mantel. DS of the fireplace is a sofa and two chairs.

At SR and SL are two windows covered with curtains. There is a bookcase USL and next to it a desk with a phone and paper and pen. At SR is a screen, a table for sound effects, and several chairs. There is a closet SR behind the sound effects table. A portrait (with a hole for the dart gun to pass through) hangs on the SL wall while several guns, blow-gun, battle-ax, thumb screws and bola hang as "decorations" on the other walls.

Three microphones stand at CSR and a fourth stands by the SFX table. Two chairs flanking a small table DSL.

ACT I
Scene 1

(BEFORE RISE: In the darkness we hear tense MUSIC, a CRASH of thunder. The effects are made by NORMAN.)

CLEO: "Hello? Mr. Ratfill? Are you home? It's Diana ... your secretary."

AUDREY: "Is that all you are, Miss Crustman?"

CLEO: "Mrs. Ratfill! You weren't supposed to be..."

AUDREY: "Home? I'm sure that's what Roger told you. 'Come over ... she'll be gone. We can have the mansion to ourselves!"

CLEO: "Yes ... but..."

AUDREY: "How did I know? *(A wicked laugh.)* You're not the first! My husband has had forty-two secretaries this year! One a week."

CLEO: "You're mad! Both of you!"

AUDREY: "And you're very, very foolish. Just like the others. You think you can get ahead by falling for the boss. But it never quite works out."

CLEO: "I want out of here! Unlock this door!"

AUDREY: "You see, Miss Crustman, my husband always brings his secretaries home to me."

CLEO: "That's sick! Stay away from me! Don't come any closer! You're horrible! You're terrible! You're a monster!"

AUDREY: "Now you're catching on!"

CLEO: "What are you doing?"

AUDREY: "I just hate wearing this mask!"

(NORMAN uses tape to make peeling SOUND.)

CLEO: "No! You're hideous! You've got three eyes!"

AUDREY: "All the better to see you with, my dear!"

CLEO: "And your ears ... they're furry and pointed!"

AUDREY: "All the better to hear you with, my dear!"

CLEO: "And what big TEETH you have!"

AUDREY: "All the better to EAT you with, my dear!"

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(CLEO screams. We hear GROWLS, more SCREAMS from the ACTRESSES.)

CARTER: "Well, darling ... how is she?"

AUDREY: "Oh, Roger ... you've got such good taste in secretaries!"

(MUSIC reaches a crescendo as the LIGHTS come up on Slaughter House, an early spring evening, 1938. AT RISE: SAM SLAUGHTER stands at one of the DS mikes. AUDREY, wearing a very conspicuous scarf, and CARTER stand at the other two. CLEO and MOLLY stand behind them. All have scripts in hand. NORMAN stands behind table, operating sound effects. BARBARA stands DSL, script in hand.)

SAM: "And that, gentle listeners ... concludes our story on tonight's episode of 'It Was a Dark and Stormy Night.' I hope that you've enjoyed my latest tale of the macabre and that it hasn't scared you too much. But remember ... tonight you'd better sleep with the lights on! Hahahaha."

(BARBARA signals cut. MOLLY moves to nearest mike.)

MOLLY: "And now a word from our sponsor, Pest Arrest ... the quickest kill on the market ... eliminates mice, rats, and bugs galore!"

(BARBARA again signals cut. ALL relax. FIELDING enters SL with silver tray with a single cup of cocoa and a small card.)

BARBARA: Great show, folks! But I think we're going to get a few comments on this one, Mr. Slaughter.

SAM: And why, Miss Prescott?

BARBARA: Do you really think our listeners are ready for a secretary-eating monster?

(ESTHER CULPEPPER enters SR with a stack of papers.)

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ESTHER: I don't know, Barbara. I've worked for a few of them.

NORMAN: Work is a relative term.

ESTHER: Keep your sound effects to yourself, Norman!
(SHE dumps the papers on table near SAM. To Sam.)
Your latest opus, Ogre!

SAM: Thank you, Miss Culpepper ... but I really wish you would treat my genius with greater respect.

ESTHER: I treat it with the respect it deserves. That's the most gruesome, disgusting story I've typed yet!

FIELDING: *(To SAM.)* Your cocoa, Mr. Slaughter.

SAM: *(Taking cup.)* Thank you, Fielding. And did you find the manuscript disgusting and gruesome?

FIELDING: I found it very ... well written.

ESTHER: Yeah, well, Fielding's hardly a judge of anything, and you know it, Slaughter. *(SHE moves to FIELDING, who stands and looks straight ahead.)* There's not an emotional bone in 'His Stiffness,' is there?

FIELDING: *(To SAM.)* Will that be all, Mr. Slaughter?

SAM: Yeah, Fielding, take the night off.

(FIELDING bows slightly, then moves SL. He stops.)

FIELDING: Oh, this is for you.

(HE again holds out the tray for SAM, who takes the note. Fielding bows, then exits SL.)

ESTHER: And may I have the night off, too, Mr. Slaughter?

SAM: Tell me you've got a date tonight!

ESTHER: Gosh, I didn't think you cared!

SAM: Of course I care. I'd like to believe in miracles again.

(ESTHER bursts into tears and races off SR.)

AUDREY: Well, I for one thought the show went very well, Mr. Slaughter.

SAM: I don't see how when your monster came off like the Big Bad Goldilocks.

End of Freeview

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