

THE MARQUIS CROSSING LADIES SOCIETY'S FIRST ATTEMPT AT MURDER

By Pat Cook

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STORY OF THE PLAY

You think it's easy to write a murder? Just ask the Marquis Crossing Ladies Society for the Arts. They decided to do just that, especially when they found out they had to pay royalties to do someone else's play. "Anybody can write a murder," Emma tells the others, and Opaline immediately begins to try to strangle the other members "just to figure out how to do it."

The ladies soon find themselves writing an "operatic murder mystery dinner theater with possible audience participation, providing no one sells fruit to the audience." When two actual convicts arrive on the lam, they decide the best place to lay low is with the ladies, who then drag them into the play.

What is part of the play and what is really happening? Find out for yourselves in this wise-cracking farce where no one can tell the loaded guns from the unloaded ones. "All we really want to do is throttle a congressman," Audrey tells the others. Well, you can't blame them. After all, this is the Marquis Crossing Ladies Society's First Attempt At Murder.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS
(3 m, 6 w)

EMMA THORTON: A slightly daffy older lady with a warm heart.

AUDREY KESSELRING: Emma's best friend, a sarcastic lady, middle-aged.

MIDGE DODGE: A small but energetic woman also middle-aged.

BERYL OVERTON: A rather dim woman, also middle-aged.

OPALINE JONES: A pushy, suspicious woman, also middle-aged.

JOAN PARNELL: A young and pretty neighbor of Emma's.

MAD JACK PARKER: A rather crude convict, a bit homicidal.

TERRY HOPKINS: Emma's young, handsome nephew.

OFFICER KERNS: The epitome of the dumb, clumsy cop.

TIME: The present.

PLACE: Emma's living room.

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SETTING

The setting for this little intrigue is the living room of Emma Thorton. It is a fastidious, old-fashioned room of long ago, with overstuffed chairs and wooden tables, ornate vases and floral paintings.

There are three doors to the floor plan. The first or front door is located SR and is flanked by two large curtained windows. The second door, which leads to the kitchen, is located UPS, and the third door, which leads to the bedrooms, is located on the SL wall.

A large, floral couch resides almost in the center of the room and is accompanied by a coffee table. Behind it is a sofa table on which rests a telephone. Two chairs, one with an ottoman, sit near the fireplace on the SR wall. An old typewriter sits on a small table against the UPS wall and a piano resides on the SL wall, DS of the door.

PROPS

cup of tea
2-4' pieces of rope or cord
3 pamphlets or play books
several magazines
an old portable typewriter
typing paper
2 pistols
2 sandwiches
floral print dress and several other dresses
purse containing lipstick and rouge

SFX: Doorbell and telephone.

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ACT I

(AT RISE: EMMA is sitting on the sofa, sipping a cup of tea. She then leans over and turns a magazine page which is resting on the table in front of her. She smiles and takes another sip. Then, unseen by her, the kitchen door opens and a hooded FIGURE approaches with a piece of rope. The figure looks around and then holds the rope as if ready to strangle her. She continues to sip her tea. The figure creeps slowly up behind her. Then, just as the figure raises the rope high over her head, Emma looks up. She quickly turns around, but too late to see the figure drop down behind the couch. She shrugs and looks back at her magazine. The hooded figure looks up, just enough so that its head is above the couch. It then raises up to its full height again and stretches the rope. Just then the DOORBELL rings.)

EMMA: Well, it's about time. *(The FIGURE frantically looks around and then disappears back into the kitchen, unseen by EMMA. She blithely rises and moves to the door.)* Just a moment. *(SHE opens the door and AUDREY enters, carrying a few pamphlets.)*

AUDREY: Good evening, Emma. And how are you this blustery evening?

EMMA: How am I always? You know me. Nothing much ever happens around here. Did you get the books? Oh, I see you did. *(THEY move to the couch.)*

AUDREY: This is going to be a bit harder than we had first thought.

EMMA: Is it? Well, let's see. *(SHE picks a pamphlet and thumbs through it.)*

AUDREY: Well, you know we've never tried anything like this before.

EMMA: Yes, but I don't think that's any excuse. We only learn by doing. That's what my father always used to say.

AUDREY: Yes, but did he ever try to murder anyone?

EMMA: Not as far as I remember. But you know him. He never talked much at the dinner table.

AUDREY: I like the idea of a government official.

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EMMA: As what?

AUDREY: The victim. We snuff out a politician.

EMMA: "Snuff out?" Where do you get your phrases?

AUDREY: Excuse me, murder a politician. Now that's
something I think everyone would enjoy.

EMMA: Certainly has mass appeal.

AUDREY: Right. How many of us have always wanted to
do that?

EMMA: Still, how can we eat with something like that going
on?

AUDREY: We eat before. Then we do the murder.

EMMA: I suppose.

*(The hooded FIGURE appears again through the UPS door
and looks at the couch.)*

AUDREY: We'll have to figure out some way to creep up
behind him, though.

EMMA: Without him seeing what's going on.

AUDREY: That would help.

*(The FIGURE looks at the LADIES, holds up two fingers and
shrugs. It then stretches out the rope again.)*

EMMA: They're not as stupid as they seem, you know.

AUDREY: I've heard that. Also, I think we should avoid
bloodletting if at all possible. *(The FIGURE creeps up
behind THEM.)*

EMMA: Mm, that goes without saying. Now here. *(SHE
holds out a pamphlet.)* This one seems relatively neat.
Someone strangles someone else with a piece of rope.
(The FIGURE nods.)

AUDREY: Oh, that would never work. *(The FIGURE stops
and drops its arms as if listening.)*

EMMA: Why not? *(The FIGURE nods in agreement with
HER.)*

AUDREY: Because then you have the old problem of having
to move the body. *(The FIGURE silently snaps its fingers
and then puts both hands on its hips.)*

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EMMA: Well, maybe the victim won't be very fat.

AUDREY: A politician? Well, we can always try, but the odds are against us.

(Using the rope as a tape measure, still some distance behind the two ladies, the FIGURE measures AUDREY'S shoulders and then holds it vertically to get a lengthwise reading.)

EMMA: We'll just make sure the victim is where we want him first.

AUDREY: And then snuff him out?

EMMA: Precisely.

AUDREY: But you like the idea of strangling?

EMMA: Yes, I think that's just what the doctor ordered. Very neat, as I said, and no fear of fingerprints on the rope.

(The FIGURE then makes a circular motion with one hand as if saying, "Come on, get on with it!")

AUDREY: Well, let's see what the rest of the girls think. They should be here any minute. *(The FIGURE quickly looks at the front door.)*

EMMA: Oh, don't go by what Opaline says.

AUDREY: Why not?

EMMA: She's all for using an ax.

AUDREY: Well, you know her. Always very melodramatic, you know. *(SHE leans in, confidentially.)* You know, her uncle was a writer.

EMMA: No!

AUDREY: Well, her family doesn't talk about him at all.

EMMA: I should hope not.

(The DOORBELL rings. The FIGURE quickly scampers out the bedroom door.)

AUDREY: There's someone now. *(EMMA rises and feels the back of her neck.)* Something amiss?

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