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**MURDER AT THE DUDE RANCH**

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# Murder at the Dude Ranch

A comedy western mystery

by  
Craig Sodaro



Meriwether Publishing Ltd.

**Contemporary Drama Service**

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## *SYNOPSIS*

Sisters Lucky and Giggles Galore have barely opened their Big Bonanza Dude Ranch when troubles begin. Amos Slattery, a nearby rancher, demands they turn over their north forty acres that he claims he won from their grandfather in a poker game. With no evidence of the deal, Lucky and Giggles refuse, but Amos promises he'll do anything to get what's coming to him.

Although some of the guests arrive on time — Lila Phipps and her two very spoiled teenage daughters Brittany and Nicole, newlyweds Ronnie and Sally Burke, and old-timer Granny Harper — five ladies from England are missing. Fortunately they turn up, despite being haggard and tired after having gotten lost in the woods. They were saved by none other than Amos Slattery who takes a sudden shine to the leader of the Fab Five, Agatha Chatalot — and the feeling is mutual.

Bored out of their minds at the dude ranch, Brittany and Nicole have already plotted to have their boyfriends join them, unbeknownst to their mother. When the boys arrive, they have to play a hide-and-seek game with the rest of the guests and staff in order to remain unseen. Unfortunately, they hide out in an old shack rumored to be haunted by the ghosts of two outlaws who were hanged on the premises a hundred years earlier.

History seems to repeat itself when Ronnie Burke, the newlywed husband, is found dead in the lobby. In his hand is an ace of spades, the very card the victim a hundred years earlier had held in his hand. Ronnie's wife Sally disappears almost immediately, and clues are few and far between.

Sheriff Hannah Hammer and her deputy, Slim, are on the scene the following morning arresting the entire staff and all the guests on suspicion of murder. Agatha, however, manages to use her laptop to find out that there is no Ronnie Burke and that he was actually a small-time crook who was probably at the dude ranch to blackmail someone. That person decided it would be better to get rid of Ronnie than pay.

As the noose tightens around the killer, mistaken identities, disappearing kitchen appliances, line dancing, ghostly apparitions, and general chaos reign until the killer is finally caught in the act of committing a second murder.

*CAST*

GIGGLES GALORE

20s, owner of the Big Bonanza Dude Ranch

LUCKY GALORE

20s, Giggles's sister and business partner

AMOS SLATTERY:

50s, a nearby rancher

TEX

20s, a wrangler

KITTY

20s, the cook

TENNESSEE

20s, another wrangler

LILA PHIPPS

40s, a guest

BRITTANY

17, Lila's daughter

NICOLE

16, Lila's other daughter

RONNIE BURKE

20s, a newlywed guest

SALLY BURKE

20s, Ronnie's wife

GRANNY HARPER

70s, another guest

AGATHA CHATALOT  
40s, a British visitor

BELINDA  
30s, another British visitor

ASHLEY  
30s, another British visitor

GWYNETH  
20s, another British visitor

CHARLOTTE  
20s, another British visitor

BRANDON  
17, Brittany's boyfriend

CARTER  
16, Nicole's boyfriend

SHERIFF HANNAH HAMMER  
30s, the local law officer

DEPUTY SLIM  
20s, deputy law officer

## *PRODUCTION NOTES*

**Costumes:** Western outfits for Giggles, Lucky, Tex, Tennessee, Kitty, and Amos. Casual “city duds” for guests. Sally has a scarf belted around her waist. Granny wears a white wig and glasses throughout the play; in Act I she wears a shawl and sneakers, which she later trades for cowboy boots and a cowboy hat; in Act II she wears a button-down dress over a business suit. Brandon and Carter wear old-time cowboy outfits in Act II, Scene 2.

Hannah and Slim wear sheriff and deputy uniforms, respectively. Each has a belt with a holstered six-shooter. In Act II, Scene 2, Slim changes into a Hawaiian shirt, shorts, dark glasses, and hiking boots with no socks.

**Props:** Many suitcases; rifle; large knitting bag for Granny; 2 cookies; cell phones for Lila, Brittany, Nicole, Sally, Ronnie, Granny, Brandon, Carter, and Hannah; pots and pans; brochure; tiny book; pen and paper; 2 magazines; spray bottle of weed killer; can of men’s body spray; laptop; plastic bag; sweet rolls; CD player; plates, forks, and napkins; a pie.

**Setting:** The lobby of the Big Bonanza Dude Ranch, out west somewhere, early afternoon in June. Wing entrance Down Right leads to main entrance. Wing entrance Down Left leads to dining hall, kitchen, and back entrance. Large fireplace Up Center with an animal trophy head hanging above. Two wing chairs flank either side of the fireplace. Game table Down Left set with two or three chairs. Two comfortable chairs Right Center with a small table between them. Writing desk at Right. The room is decorated with old western paintings or photos, Native American artwork, anything that gives off a western feel.

### **Synopsis of Scenes:**

#### **ACT I**

Scene 1 — The lobby of the Big Bonanza Dude Ranch, an early afternoon in June.

Scene 2 — The same, several hours later.

Scene 3 — The same, that night.

#### **ACT II**

Scene 1 — The same, the following morning.

Scene 2 — The same, that evening.

Act I, Scene 1

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(*AT RISE, KITTY dusts the room, singing a country song very off-key.*  
*A moment later, GIGGLES and LUCKY enter Right, followed by*  
*AMOS. They are having a heated argument.*)

**GIGGLES:** You, Old Man Slattery, are a liar!

**AMOS:** Why, you ... ! I ain't old!

**LUCKY:** So you admit you're a liar!

**AMOS:** I don't admit no such thing! Your Grandpappy Galore lost the  
forty acres north of Bonanza Creek to me in a poker game, and  
I mean to collect!

**GIGGLES:** That had to be years and years and years ago!

**AMOS:** Was not! (*Removing his hat in reverence*) Just last spring, right  
before Grandpappy Galore passed on.

**LUCKY:** Right before he left the Big Bonanza Ranch to Giggles and  
me, his only living relatives, lock, stock, and barrel!

**AMOS:** He might have left you the lock 'n barrel, but no stock!

**GIGGLES:** (*With a sigh*) A real shame all the cattle had to be sold off.

**LUCKY:** But now the Big Bonanza's got a whole new lease on life!

**AMOS:** You call a dude ranch a lease on life? All them city slickers  
headin' out here ruinin' everything we built up?

**GIGGLES:** What've we built up? Five cabins? A lodge? An old shack  
out back and a barn?

**LUCKY:** On that north forty we're gonna put in a tennis court,  
swimmin' pool, skateboard park, and a dance hall!

**AMOS:** (*In pain*) Oh, if only the Calico Kid and Dingo Dan were still  
around. They'd plug you quicker 'n a leaky faucet!

**GIGGLES:** Is that a threat?

**LUCKY:** How can it be? Those two outlaws got hanged a hundred  
years ago right outside the door of this lodge!

**AMOS:** And you know why?

**GIGGLE:** 'Cause he shot Jack Darlin' in cold blood!

**AMOS:** No! 'Cause he cheated at poker! And you two are just as guilty  
as them! That north forty's mine, and I mean to lay my hands on  
it 'fore the summer's over!

**LUCKY:** And just how do you plan on doin' that?

**GIGGLES:** There's nothin' on paper that says that land's yours!

**AMOS:** Your grandpappy's word was good enough for me!

**LUCKY:** But it won't be good enough for any judge!

**AMOS:** Who said anything about goin' to a judge?

**GIGGLES:** How else are you gonna get that land?

**AMOS:** Openin' a dude ranch is mighty risky! What if nobody comes?

**LUCKY:** I'll have you know we've got all five cabins filled startin'  
today!

**AMOS:** Is that so?



1 GIGGLES: We got horses, canoes, the best cook this side of the  
2 Mississippi, and more country CDs than you can shake a  
3 polecat at!

4 LUCKY: We're gonna show our guests a good time! A real wild  
5 west howdy!

6 GIGGLES: Yahoo! Ride 'em, cowboy!

7 AMOS: More 'n one cowpoke fell off his horse!

8 LUCKY: What do you mean by that, Amos Slattery?

9 AMOS: Anything happens while those folks are here 'n word gets  
10 around 'n folks cancel their reservations 'n that land's mine!

11 GIGGLES: Is that a threat?

12 AMOS: More like a prediction!

13 LUCKY: Amos Slattery, you go on 'n git off this property!

14 AMOS: Who's gonna make me?

15 KITTY: (*Enters Left.*) You want the sawed-off shotgun or the double  
16 barrel, girls?

17 GIGGLES: Bring 'em both, Kitty! (*KITTY exits Left.*)

18 AMOS: No point wastin' ammunition now. But you haven't heard  
19 the last of Amos Slattery!

20 TEX: (*Enters Right.*) Say, Mr. Slattery, your horse just ran off like  
21 it's got a burr under its saddle.

22 AMOS: (*Calling Off Right*) Why of all the ... ! Annabelle! You get  
23 back here! How am I supposed to get home? (*AMOS races Off*  
24 *Right.*)

25 LUCKY: Thanks, Tex, for getting' us out of that!

26 TEX: Don't thank me. Thank the snake that cut across the grass.

27 GIGGLES: A snake! A rattler? That'll send everybody home before  
28 they even get here.

29 TEX: Naw ... little garter snake.

30 LUCKY: But Slattery's horse is too dumb to know the difference.

31 GIGGLES: Kind of like her owner!

32 LUCKY: None of our horses have run off, have they, Tex?

33 TEX: No, Ma'am! They're all in the corral waitin' for a trail ride  
34 soon as the greenhorns get here.

35 GIGGLES: Tex!

36 TEX: I know, Ma'am. Guests. They're guests.

37 LUCKY: That's right.

38 TEX: But they're still greenhorns!

39 KITTY: (*Runs On holding a rifle.*) Lucky! Giggles! There's a van  
40 pullin' up out front! Oh, by the way, I couldn't find the  
41 sawed-off shotgun, and this one's kinda rusty. You can't even  
42 pull the trigger! (*KITTY tries to pull the trigger, as others duck.*  
43 *Nothing happens.*) See?

44 TENNESSEE: (*Enters Right, carrying a lot of suitcases.*) Right in here,  
45 folks! (*BRITTANY, NICOLE, and LILA enter Right.*)

1 BRITTANY: Be careful with those suitcases!  
2 NICOLE: Any damage and you pay for it!  
3 LILA: Girls! (*TENNESSEE dumps the suitcases on the floor.*)  
4 BRITTANY: (*To TENNESSEE, angrily*) What did we say?  
5 NICOLE: I guess Jeremiah Johnson's got wax in his ears!  
6 LILA: Oh, my, but you're embarrassing me, girls!  
7 BRITTANY: Like, what else is new? (*BRITTANY and NICOLE high*  
8 *five.*)  
9 LUCKY: Welcome to the Big Bonanza Dude Ranch!  
10 GIGGLES: I'm Giggles Galore and this is my sister, Lucky, and —  
11 BRITTANY: Giggles?  
12 NICOLE: Lucky? Like, you've got to be kidding!  
13 LILA: Girls! I think they're very cute nicknames.  
14 LUCKY: Nope! They're on our birth certificates, official as can be.  
15 BRITTANY: I'm out of here!  
16 NICOLE: Me, too!  
17 TEX: It's a ten-mile hike back to town!  
18 TENNESSEE: And don't forget your luggage.  
19 LUCKY: I'm sure you girls are going to have a great time.  
20 BRITTANY: But this place is like ... old.  
21 NICOLE: And there's nothing to do!  
22 LILA: Now, we talked about that, girls. There's swimming and  
23 hiking and horseback riding and canoeing ...  
24 GIGGLES: And we have square dancing and sing-alongs around  
25 the campfire! (*BRITTANY and NICOLE scream and run Off*  
26 *Right.*)  
27 LILA: Oh, dear!  
28 LUCKY: Don't worry. They won't go far without their makeup.  
29 TENNESSEE: You sure?  
30 GIGGLES: Why don't you get the rest of the luggage, Tennessee?  
31 TENNESSEE: I'm gonna need help, Tex. This is only the tip of the  
32 iceberg! (*TENNESSEE and TEX exit Right.*)  
33 LILA: I guess you figured out I'm Lila Phipps, and those are my  
34 two daughters, Brittany and Nicole.  
35 LUCKY: Well, we're very glad you chose the Big Bonanza Dude  
36 Ranch for your vacation.  
37 LILA: Oh, this isn't a vacation. I'm trying to keep those girls from  
38 Brandon and Carter.  
39 GIGGLES: Brandon and Carter?  
40 LILA: Their boyfriends! My girls were perfect angels until they  
41 met up with those two! I was at my wit's end when I saw your  
42 ad in the Sunday travel section of the paper. This place is so  
43 far from anywhere that my angels will just have to learn to  
44 live without Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid!  
45 LUCKY: They're that bad, huh?

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