



THE MAPLE CREEK INN

Abbott and Costello Short Story

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FADE IN:

EXT. MAPLE CREEK INN - DAY

The Maple Creek Inn stands stoically, weathering the elements (and neglect) in the heart of rural Kansas. It's a two-story wooden structure, faded red paint peeling like an old sunburn, with a porch that sags precariously under the weight of an ancient, perpetually rocking chair. A sign, half-obscurd by an overgrown honeysuckle bush, reads: "Maple CREEK INN – Vacancy (Probably)."

Driving up is a beat-up sedan that looks like it's won a demolition derby against a car more its age. Out clamber two figures.

BUD ABBOTT, trim in a perpetually slightly-too-tight suit, surveys the scene with an air of weary resignation. His brow is furrowed, a roadmap of a thousand headaches.

LOU COSTELLO, round and flustered, trips over a loose plank on the porch, barely catching himself before face-planting. He wears a tie that's askew and a hat that's too small.

COSTELLO (Wincing) Woah! This place has got more bumps than my last movie premiere!

ABBOTT (Sighing) That's because our last movie premiere *was* ninety years ago, Lou. And it was for "The Bathtub Monster," which was less horror, more... plumbing incident.

COSTELLO But the critics said I was terrifying!

ABBOTT They said you looked like a terrified man in a bathtub. Big difference. Come on. Six months, Lou. Six months away from Hollywood. No more calls from agents asking if we can play "disgruntled lamp posts." This is it. Our big comeback... to management.

They were, indeed, Abbott and Costello. Once moderately famous for a string of low-budget "horror" comedies where the monsters were always either invisible, off-screen, or clearly crew members in rubber suits, they'd long since faded into obscurity. Their latest gig? Running a motel for a mysterious owner who'd simply sent a terse letter and a surprisingly large advance, stating he was off to "discover himself... and possibly a new species of lichen."

INT. MAPLE CREEK INN - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

The lobby is a monument to dust and forgotten dreams. A grand, but rickety, staircase dominates the room. The air smells of mothballs and despair. Abbott straightens his tie, trying to look professional. Costello immediately eyes a taxidermy squirrel with a suspicious glint.

COSTELLO Ya know, Bud, this place gives me the creeps. What if there's... a phantom bellhop? Or a g-g-ghost who wants extra towels?

ABBOTT (Opening a dusty guest ledger) Lou, the only thing we have to fear is a lack of paying customers. Now, let's see... owner said there was just one guest already checked in. Mr. Smith, Room 13.

Costello's eyes widen to saucers.

COSTELLO Thirteen?! He's gotta be a m-m-monster! Or a vampire! Only a vampire wants Room 13! He probably sleeps in a coffin in the closet!

ABBOTT He's probably a salesman who likes an odd number. Now, let's go check out our new domain.

They explore the motel. Each room is a time capsule of questionable interior design. They discover a laundry room that looks like a forgotten dungeon, a kitchen with a stove from the Mesozoic era, and a flickering neon "Vacancy" sign that spells out "VCANCY" half the time.

INT. MOTEL ROOM 13 - LATER

Abbott and Costello are on a "meet and greet" tour. Abbott knocks. A long pause. Then, a low, gravelly voice.

MR. SMITH (O.S.) (Muffled) Who is it?

ABBOTT Hotel management, sir. Abbott and Costello. Just wanted to introduce ourselves.

Another pause. The door opens a crack. A single, wary eye is visible through the narrow slit. The rest of the face is obscured by a fedora pulled low and a trench coat collar turned up high.

MR. SMITH (Whispering hoarsely) Management, huh? You're new. Where's... old Mr. Henderson?

ABBOTT He's... on sabbatical, sir. Finding himself.

MR. SMITH (Muttering) Lucky stiff. Look, just... leave me alone. No maid service. No disturbances. I pay cash. Upfront. Every week. And I don't want any... *unannounced visitors*. Understand?

Costello gulps.

COSTELLO (To Abbott) See? He's in hiding! He's a spooky-ooky ghoul!

ABBOTT (Forcing a smile) Perfectly understood, Mr. Smith. Enjoy your stay.

The door slams shut.

COSTELLO (Grabbing Abbott's arm) He's a mobster, Bud! Or a spy! Or a mobster spy who's also a vampire! He's got the whole outfit on! The coat, the hat... he even whispered! Only mobsters and vampires whisper!

ABBOTT Lou, he's a paying customer. He's probably just a private man. We're in the middle of nowhere. Who's going to find anyone here?

INT. LOBBY - DAYS LATER

Life at the Maple Creek Inn falls into a bizarre routine. Abbott valiantly tries to manage, albeit with the help of a ledger held together with duct tape. Costello, meanwhile, has taken on the role of amateur detective, convinced Mr. Smith is the key to some grand mystery.

Costello is seen peering through a keyhole to Room 13, a magnifying glass clutched in his hand. Abbott finds him.

ABBOTT Lou, what are you doing?

COSTELLO (Jumping, dropping the magnifying glass) Shhh! I'm investigating, Bud! I heard something! A faint... *clink*.

ABBOTT A clink? That could be anything. His teeth chattering. The ice machine.

COSTELLO No, it was a *mob* clink! Like a safe opening! Or a... a guillotine!

Days turn into weeks. Mr. Smith remains an enigma. He only leaves his room after dark, a newspaper always held up to obscure his face. He orders room service twice a day but only picks at the food, leaving most of it. Costello is convinced the leftovers are part of a secret code.

COSTELLO (Poking a half-eaten sandwich) See? Two pickles, one tomato, and an empty space where the cheese should be! It means: "The cheese is out of town, but the two pickles are watching you!" It's a message to his gang!

ABBOTT It means he doesn't like cheese, Lou.

One evening, Mr. Smith's phone rings persistently. Costello, being "on duty," answers the switchboard.

COSTELLO (Into phone, whispering) Maple Creek Inn, Costello speaking. Can I help ya? (His eyes widen. He clutches the receiver.) Yeah? Room 13? Uh-huh. (He puts a hand over the mouthpiece.) Bud! It's them! The mob! They asked for Smith... and they talked about a "package"!

ABBOTT (Taking the phone) Hello? This is the manager. (To Costello) They just want to confirm a delivery for him. A package of... (He winces, trying not to laugh.) ...of extra-strength prune juice.

Costello's jaw drops.

COSTELLO Prune juice?! Then he's not a vampire, he's just... constipated!

MID-STORY CLIMAX: THE CLOSE CALL

One blustery afternoon, a new guest arrives. A burly man in a rumpled suit, with a five o'clock shadow and eyes that dart nervously. He asks for Room 13.

Abbott, seeing a potential customer, starts to hand him the key. But Costello, remembering his "vampire" theory, intervenes.

COSTELLO (Blocking the key) Whoa, whoa, whoa! You don't want Room 13, mister! That room is... c-c-cursed! It's got creaks, and groans, and... and a phantom bellhop who folds towels into menacing shapes!

The burly man raises an eyebrow.

BURLEY MAN Look, pal, I just need a room. The name's Malone. And I was told to pick up a... package. From a Mr. Smith in Room 13.

Costello gasps. "Package!" He remembers the prune juice. This has to be the mob!

COSTELLO (Whispering frantically to Abbott) He's the hitman, Bud! He's here for the prune juice! I mean, for Smith! Don't give him the key!

ABBOTT (Sighing) Mr. Malone, I assure you, our phantom bellhop is quite harmless. (To Costello, under his breath) Lou, stop it, you'll scare him off!

Costello, in a fit of misguided inspiration, decides to "protect" Mr. Smith. He grabs a fire extinguisher from the wall.

COSTELLO (To Malone) You won't get him! Not while I'm the... the guardian of the prune juice!

He accidentally triggers the extinguisher, blasting a cloud of white foam across the lobby. Malone, startled and covered in foam, retreats backward, slipping on the slick floor and landing in a heap.

MALONE What the —?! Are you people insane?!

Abbott rushes to help Malone, muttering apologies. Costello, convinced he's foiled a mob hit, puffs his chest out.

MR. SMITH (O.S.) (From Room 13, muffled but frantic) What was that?! My cover! Oh, for the love of...

Malone, sputtering, decides he's had enough.

MALONE You know what? Forget it! This place is a madhouse! I'll find Smith elsewhere! He can keep his prune juice!

He scrambles out, leaving a trail of foam and a bewildered Abbott behind.

COSTELLO (Triumphantly) See, Bud? I saved him! That Malone fella was clearly a henchman! He wanted the prune juice! I mean, he wanted Smith!

Abbott just stares, open-mouthed, at the empty doorway and the foamy lobby. Unbeknownst to them, Mr. Smith, peering through his peephole, had seen the whole spectacle. He had thought Malone was a genuine threat, and these two bumbling idiots had, in their own incompetent way, saved his skin. He needed to make a move. Fast.

THE ESCALATION: GETTING OUT OF TOWN

The next morning, Mr. Smith emerged from his room, looking even more dishevelled than usual. He had a small, worn suitcase.

MR. SMITH (Whispering to Abbott) I need to check out. Immediately. And I need... discretion.

ABBOTT (Nodding gravely) Understood, Mr. Smith. We pride ourselves on discretion here at the Maple Creek Inn. (He glances at Costello, who is currently trying to communicate with the taxidermy squirrel.)

COSTELLO (To the squirrel) And then the cheese was OUT OF TOWN! Get it?

MR. SMITH (Rubbing his temples) Right. Look, I'll need a taxi. Or a bus. Anything that goes *away* from here.

Just then, a sleek, black limousine pulls up outside, windows tinted. Four large men in dark suits step out. They look like they've just walked off a movie set... a very serious, menacing movie set.

Costello, seeing them, lets out a yelp that could shatter glass.

COSTELLO (Pointing a trembling finger) Bud! The mob! They found him! They came in a big, black coffin on wheels!

Abbott, seeing the professional demeanour of the men, starts to worry too. Mr. Smith, meanwhile, has gone ash-white.

MR. SMITH (Eyes wide) Oh, no. They found me. This is it. The big boys.

COSTELLO (Grabbing Mr. Smith) Don't worry, Mr. Prune Juice! I mean, Mr. Smith! We'll save ya!

Before Abbott can react, Costello shoves Mr. Smith behind the front desk.

COSTELLO (To Abbott) Quick! Divert them! Tell them we're closed for... for a monster convention!

The four men enter the lobby. Their leader, a stern man with a scar above his eye, addresses Abbott.

SCARRED MAN We're looking for a Mr. Smith. Staying in Room 13.

Abbott clears his throat, remembering the "discretion."

ABBOTT (Nervously) Mr. Smith? Room 13? Never heard of him! We, uh, we just have a... a very private gentleman in that room. He, uh, he prefers to be called... "Mr. X." Yes. Mr. X. From... Xanadu.

Costello, meanwhile, has dragged Mr. Smith through a back door and into the laundry room.

COSTELLO (Whispering to Mr. Smith) They won't find ya in here! It's too... *smelly*!

MR. SMITH (Panicked) They're gonna kill me! I overheard too much! The numbers! The offshore accounts!

COSTELLO (Patting his shoulder) Don't worry! I'm a pro at hiding from monsters! Remember "The Invisible Ghoul"? He never caught me... mostly 'cause I was standing right in front of him.

Back in the lobby, the Scarred Man is not amused.

SCARRED MAN Look, pal, we know he's here. Just cooperate. It'll be easier for everyone.

ABBOTT (Trying to bluff) Cooperate? Sir, this is the Maple Creek Inn! We adhere to the highest standards of guest privacy! We don't just give out information about our... uh... prune juice connoisseurs.

Suddenly, a loud crash comes from the laundry room. Costello, in his haste, has knocked over a mountain of laundry baskets.

The Scarred Man raises an eyebrow.

SCARRED MAN Sounds like someone's in the laundry room.

Abbott gulps.

THE CLIMAX: THE GREAT ESCAPE (AND REVEAL)

Abbott, thinking quickly, points to the back of the lodge.

ABBOTT That's just our... our resident ghost! He likes to do laundry! Very clean ghost, that one. Likes his whites *white*.

The four men slowly advance towards the laundry room. Abbott, desperate, grabs a bucket and mop.

ABBOTT Gentlemen! Perhaps you'd like a complimentary floor waxing on your way out? We're very hygienic here!

He sloshes soapy water directly in their path. The Scarred Man curses as his polished shoe slides.

Meanwhile, Costello and Mr. Smith are scrambling through the back exit of the laundry room. They burst out into the motel's overgrown backyard. A rickety fence stands between them and freedom.

COSTELLO (Struggling to climb the fence) This is just like "The Haunted Chicken Coop"! Remember, Bud? I fell into the manure pile!

MR. SMITH (Frantically trying to pull him over) I'd rather fall into a manure pile than face them! Just push, you idiot!

Back in the lobby, the Scarred Man has pushed past Abbott, who is still vainly trying to mop.

SCARRED MAN Enough with the Parlor tricks! Where is he?!

As the mobsters storm towards the laundry room, a small, beat-up bus pulls up outside. It's the local shuttle service.

Costello finally yanks Mr. Smith over the fence. They land in a heap just as the bus doors hiss open.

COSTELLO (Pointing frantically at the bus) Get in! Quick! That's our getaway car!

They scramble onto the bus, breathless. Just as they do, the Scarred Man and his crew burst out of the motel's back door, looking around wildly. They see the bus pulling away, but they see no sign of Mr. Smith.

INT. BUS - CONTINUOUS

Mr. Smith is hyperventilating. Costello, elated, pats him on the back.

COSTELLO We did it! We escaped the mob! You're safe, Mr. Prune Juice!

MR. SMITH (Taking a deep, shuddering breath) I... I can't believe it. Those two idiots... they actually saved me. (He looks at Costello, a strange mixture of gratitude and disbelief in his eyes.) You know, I'm not really "Mr. Smith." My name is Stanley. Stanley "Squeaky" Smith. And I'm not just "in hiding." I'm a mob accountant. I... well, I skimmed a little too much, and then I saw some things I shouldn't have. I was meant to meet my contact here at the Inn to get me out. But they found me.

COSTELLO (Gasps dramatically) So you *were* a mobster! I knew it! Even prune juice can't hide a dark secret!

MR. SMITH / STANLEY (Shaking his head) Not a mobster. Just... a numbers man who got in too deep. But those guys... they weren't the mob.

Costello blinks.

COSTELLO They weren't? Then who were they?

STANLEY (Peeking out the back window) They're... my divorce lawyers. And that "package" Malone wanted? It was the final settlement papers. They've been trying to serve me for months. My wife wants every penny I ever skimmed.

Costello stares, open-mouthed, then bursts into laughter.

COSTELLO (Wiping a tear from his eye) You mean all that running, all that hiding, all that prune juice... it was just for a divorce?!

STANLEY (Sighing) She's relentless. Far more terrifying than any mob boss. But thanks to you two... they won't find me for a while.

The bus pulls into a small, dusty bus station. Stanley stands up.

STANLEY (Reaching into his trench coat pocket) Look, I don't know how to thank you. You two were spectacularly incompetent, but you actually saved my bacon. He pulls out a thick wad of cash. This should cover your... *services*. And maybe a little extra for the next six months. Don't tell Abbott where it came from. Just say it's a... bonus from the owner.

He hands the money to Costello, who stares at it with wide eyes. Stanley "Squeaky" Smith tips his fedora, then disappears into the bus station, truly free for the first time in months.

INT. MAPLE CREEK INN - LATER

Abbott is still trying to clean up the foam and apologize to the owner of the bus company who had called to complain about Costello's "enthusiastic" boarding.

COSTELLO (Waving the money) Bud! Look! Mr. Smith... he left us a tip! A really, really big tip! He said it's a bonus from the owner!

Abbott, exasperated, snatches the money. His eyes widen as he sees the amount.

ABBOTT (Stuttering) Lou... this is... this is more than we'll make in six months!

COSTELLO (Grinning) See? I told you he was a good guy! He wasn't a mobster, he wasn't a vampire, he wasn't even constipated! He was just a fella who needed our special kind of... *help*.

Abbott stares at the money, then at the foamy lobby, then at his partner, who is now trying to teach the taxidermy squirrel how to play poker.

ABBOTT (Muttering) What a business. We come here to escape Hollywood, and all we get is more slapstick. And a fortune from a man who was running from his divorce.

COSTELLO (Holding up a playing card for the squirrel) And now we're rich, Bud! We can buy all the prune juice in the world!

Abbott sighs, a faint, almost imperceptible smile touching his lips. Maybe this motel gig wouldn't be so bad after all. As long as the next guest wasn't running from their dry cleaner.

FADE OUT.