



A Dinner Theatre Murder Mystery
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Customer Taster

A Chicken Fried Murder

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A CHICKEN FRIED MURDER

About this pack

A Chicken Fried Murder is a scripted murder mystery performed as dinner theatre, with opportunities for audience interaction (not least because the audience includes four suspects). The whole entertainment - including pre-dinner drinks and the meal - lasts approximately two hours.

Structure

The full murder mystery pack contains:

- **The Organiser's Overview** [*Excerpt here*]
- **The Script** [*Excerpt here*]

Organiser's Overview Contents

- Synopsis
- Character Descriptions
- General Staging Notes
 - Estimated Show Timings
 - Brief description of each step of the production
- Character Briefs for Audience Suspects
- Production Notes
 - Props List
 - Sound Effects

Synopsis

Lionel Twain, an investor/developer from New York City, and his wife Candy blow into town on a foul wind. He has one week to sell his investment scheme to the townspeople of Canyon City. But to build his huge chicken processing plant, he needs the prime piece of real estate located on the river right in the middle of the town's historic district. It means the destruction of several old buildings and, some say, the heart of Canyon City.

As the weekend approaches, Twain invites the whole town to a fried chicken dinner at the best local restaurant. It will be an interesting evening, as the town is divided into two camps. Half want the project to go ahead; after all, jobs for the town's young people will keep more of them from fleeing as soon as they finish high school. The other half want to preserve the historic downtown. All they can see is more traffic, crime and an ever-present smell of dead chickens. Naturally, the local press is on hand to interview as many people as possible and make the story bigger.

After dinner, as Twain exits to prepare himself to present his proposal, there is a sound of a shot. When Twain returns to the dining room, he falls dead. Not to worry - among those in attendance are the County Medical Examiner, Police Chief, the Mayor and their spouses, not to mention the world-famous French detective Jacques Poulet and his able assistant Dr Welsummer, who are fortuitously vacationing in Canyon City to take the waters.

Poulet decides to take over the case and uncovers motives for murder among the audience members themselves! He grills everyone whose background check revealed an important clue. In his words, "Someone weel fry for zis."

Character Descriptions

(8M, 5F)

Roscoe Dorking - an aggressive TV Reporter who will do anything for a story.

Ole Orloff - a videographer/photographer who's in everyone's face.

Lionel Twain - pompous, rich developer who's less than honest.

Candy Twain - Lionel's childish trophy wife.

Jacques Poulet - French Detective, world famous in his own mind, on vacation here.

Dr Douglas Welsummer - Overworked and underappreciated assistant to Poulet.

Angela Orpington - Mayor of Canyon City, eager to advance her political career.

Tom Orpington - Mayor's chicken farmer husband, who will profit from Twain's factory.

Dr Pam Sebright - physician and County Medical Examiner.

Ronald Sebright - owner of prime real estate, the planned site of Twain's factory.

Claudia Campine - President of the Historical Society, opposed to building the factory.

Chief James Campine - Chief of Police, trying to keep the peace in a divided community.

Vicky Stapleton - restaurateur and hostess, who makes the best fried chicken in town.

General Staging Notes

The play is meant to be staged as theater in the round or dinner theater performed by an amateur or professional theater group. The setting includes dining tables and chairs to accommodate the audience and cast at a sit-down meal and an area designated as a bar. These are located around a central stage area. On stage are a VIP dining table set for two and six chairs to be used as a waiting area.

Actors are seated among audience members, and can participate in the meal and mingle between scripted sections. Actors seated with the audience may share true or false information about themselves when not on stage.

Before the play begins, four audience members are designated as suspects. If they agree to take part, these 'suspects' should be given copies of their character descriptions (later in this document). At the start of Act 2, these suspects are interviewed by Detective Poulet.

You may also give audience members the opportunity to guess the identity of the murderer before the truth is revealed. An individual or an entire table may be awarded a prize.

Costumes are casual dinner dress, except for Mr and Mrs Twain, who overdress in formal attire and appear out of place in the small community restaurant setting.

Suggested Timings

- 7:00 Meet and greet. Audience volunteers are selected to act as suspects and are given their character descriptions. Drinks may be served. (Audience members are given tickets indicating if they are for or against building the Chicken Processing Plant.)
- 7:30 Play begins with Introduction and Act 1 Scene 1.
- 7:45 Salad is served, and after a few minutes, Act 1 Scene 2 begins.
- 8:00 Dinner is served.
- 8:15 Act 1 Scene 3.
- 8:30 Dessert and coffee.
- 8:45 Act 2
- 9:00 Play ends.

(Optional awarding of any prizes may follow.)

Character Briefs for Audience Suspects

It's recommended that you print a copy of this page and cut out each brief individually, to be given to a member of the audience you believe fits the character description.

Suspect #1: You have a past relationship with Twain that ended badly. You pretended to accept his rejection, but you never married and still hold a grudge. Your motive for murdering him is revenge. The only way to convince Poulet that you didn't do it is to come up with an airtight alibi. Better start working on that now.

Suspect #2: You are the realtor of Ronald Sebright, the owner of the land where the proposed factory is to be built. But Sebright cut you out of the deal in order to secure a bigger piece of the pie. You may not want to admit that you were in cahoots with them. You better have a really good alibi for the time Twain was shot!

Suspect #3: You attended college with Candy Twain, you even signed her yearbook, and Poulet is going to make you read what you wrote. As a married man, you will probably have a lot of explaining to do after tonight. You better have an alibi for the time of the shooting and some really good answers for your wife.

Suspect #4: You are Twain's lawyer. When asked, you can always say 'no comment' - though that's unlikely to suffice as an alibi. Poulet will accuse you of helping Twain to dodge taxes by setting up a business he intends to have fail. You can claim attorney-client privilege but Poulet has signed documents as proof of your complicity. You were helping to throw the whole community under the bus, and this won't go down well when everyone finds out.

A CHICKEN FRIED MURDER

Script Extract

Before Dinner

(Reporter Roscoe Dorking and videographer Ole Orloff circulate among the arriving audience members, interviewing and photographing potential suspects. Audience members are given tickets indicating if they are for or against building the Chicken Processing Plant. Audience Suspects are given character descriptions to use when they are interrogated. After drinks, the audience members enter the dining area and are seated at dining tables. Certain seats are reserved for the cast at tables with audience members. There is a central open area with several chairs, that is a waiting area for unseated cast members. A reserved dining table for two is set in this area which also functions as the stage.)

Vicky: Good evening, I'm Vicky Stapleton, your hostess. Welcome to our production of *A Chicken Fried Murder*. Please feel free to participate in tonight's performance by talking with the press and cast members and don't be afraid to become a character yourself. Be sure to let the cast know your feelings about building the Poultry Processing Plant here in Canyon City. And keep your eyes on the cast. You may be asked to provide one or more of them with an alibi. Come to think of it, and this is very important, you'll need an alibi yourself. Be prepared to say where you were when you heard the shot. And now, let me introduce the Master of Ceremonies for tonight's event - our own Tom Orpington.

Act 1

Scene 1

(Tom enters.)

Tom: Thanks to Vicky for allowing us to gather here at her wonderful restaurant. Nobody fries chicken like Vicky. Let's give her a big hand. As you know, our community is divided on the issue of whether Mr Lionel Twain should be allowed to build his Poultry Processing Plant in the middle of our historic district. Mr Twain and his lovely wife Candy will be joining us tonight. He will present his plan and answer all your questions. Let's be sure to give him a real South Dakota welcome!

(Roscoe and Ole enter. Roscoe and Ole wear badges identifying them as members of the press. Ole carries video and still cameras, hung around his neck. He films every aspect of the event.)

Tom: Well, I see the press has arrived. Roscoe, Ole, try to stay out of everybody's way.

(Mayor Angela Orpington enters and begins to circulate among the audience members, campaigning.)

Tom: Let's welcome the Mayor of Canyon City, Her Honor Angela Orpington, my lovely wife.

(Roscoe and Ole approach the mayor. Roscoe shoves a microphone in her face.)

Roscoe: Roscoe Dorking, ECHO TV. Your Honor, the community wants to know your position on the proposed Poultry Processing Plant.

Angela: My position is neutral until I have heard all sides. That includes Mr Twain's presentation tonight.

Roscoe: Your Honor, isn't it true that you and your husband stand to profit from building Twain's Chicken Processing Plant, because you own one of the largest chicken farms in the state?

Angela: Yes, that is true.

Tom: True enough. I'll save money on every chicken I send for processing. I support the project.

Roscoe: And those savings will be passed on to your loyal local customers?

Tom: Why... yes. Certainly. Of course.

Roscoe: Given that, how can you expect us to believe *you* would remain neutral, Your Honor?

Angela: Look, my first duty is to my constituents, the community. I'll support what's best for my voters. I will put aside the potential for personal gain, unless it coincides with their benefit.

Roscoe: But Your Honor, not everyone here voted for you.

Tom: The majority did. Let's hear it for Her Honor, the Mayor.

(Angela reacts to cheers and boos from the audience and continues to mingle before taking her seat at a dining table.)

(Pam and Ron enter the dining room.)

Vicky: Welcome Dr Sebright, Ron. Your table will be ready in a few minutes. Please have a seat. Would you like something to drink?

Ron: Old Speckled Hen. A pint, please. Seems appropriate for tonight. Sure you don't want something, honey? It could be a long night.

Pam: No, thanks. I'm on call.

(Before Pam and Ron can sit down in the chairs on stage, Roscoe catches them. Ole films and snaps still photographs.)

Roscoe: Dr Sebright, what are the public health issues associated with the proposed Poultry Processing Plant?

Pam: I'm the County Medical Examiner, not the Public Health Officer, but as a physician, I have concerns about the environmental impact. I'll have some specific questions for Mr Twain.

Roscoe: About the river?

Pam: Especially about the river.

Roscoe: The riverbank where you own property in the historic district.

Pam: It's *his* family that owns the property.

Roscoe: So, Mr Sebright, your family, that is you, plan to sell the property to permit the plant to be built.

Ron: Certainly, it's good for the community.

Pam: And the water quality?

Ron: Now, Pam, let's not air our dirty laundry in front of the press.

Pam: We won't be washing it in water that comes out of the river if that plant gets built.

Ron: For the record, Mr Dorking. I do plan to sell my family's buildings in the historic district.

Roscoe: And you've made appropriate conservation plans?

Ron: Well, of course. Mr Orpington and I are working closely together for progress.

(Vicky returns with a pint of beer.)

Ron: Pam may not agree right now, but she'll come around. Right, honey?

Pam: Give me a sip of that beer.

(Chief and Claudia enter. Claudia carries a large handbag.)

Tom: And just coming in, our Chief of Police Jim Campine and his wife Claudia. Good evening, folks. Please have a seat until your table is ready.

Chief: Thanks, Tom. Quite a turnout. Hoping to get everyone on board with you?

Tom: Just wait, you'll find out how many already are!

Chief: Good evening, Vicky.

Vicky: Good evening, Chief Campine, Claudia. Your table is just about ready.

Chief: No problem. Can I get a drink? I believe I'm going to need something strong tonight.

Claudia: Now, Jim.

Chief: I'll have Scotch on the rocks.

Claudia: Make that two.

(Roscoe and Ole approach them, shoving cameras and microphone in their faces.)

Roscoe: Police Chief Jim Campine, what do you see as potential impacts from the development of an industrial plant in the heart of Canyon City?

Chief: Well, Roscoe, there will be good things along with some ba... I mean some challenges.

Claudia: I'll say!

Roscoe: We've been assured of good things like new jobs. What are the, uh, challenges?

Chief: Well... I hate to...

Claudia: The challenge is the destruction of the heart of our city! Our very heritage is located on the proposed site of that plant.

Roscoe: You seem to have an issue with the proposal, Mrs Campine.

Claudia: You bet I do! I'm the president of the Canyon City Historical Society. I am mandated to protect the historical artifacts of Canyon City and that includes the buildings.

Roscoe: Are you planning to chain yourself to the place to prevent demolition?

Claudia: I will if it comes to that.

Chief: Don't give her any ideas!

Claudia: Well, someone here must do something. Or I will. You know I mean it, Jim.

(Vicky enters with two drinks.)

Vicky: I made yours a double, Claudia.

Ole: Photo op!

(Ole snaps Claudia's picture as she swills the drink.)

(Claudia drinks her drink in one gulp and hands Vicky the empty glass.)

(Chief conceals his glass behind his back, so it won't be seen in the photo.)

Tom: Well, Jim, I hope I can count on you to support me on this.

Claudia: If he does, I'll be here to cancel out his vote.

(Poulet and Doug enter with a flurry and approach Vicky.)

Poulet: Come along, Welsummer. Do not dawdle. You always dawdle. Especially whenever Poulet is pressed for time and running late. Our reservation, it was made as I ordered?

Doug: Yes, Poulet, as you ordered. Reservation for Douglas Welsummer, please.

Vicky: There will be a few minutes' wait.

Poulet: Welsummer! You informed me our reservation was for 7pm promptly. It is now...

Vicky: A few minutes' wait. Please have a seat and a drink on the house.

(Ron turns to Pam.)

Ron: So, all we do is behave like a jerk and drinks are on the house?

Poulet: Madame, Jacques Poulet does not dull the sharpness of his brain with strong spirits.

(Poulet takes out his huge pipe and prepares to smoke it.)

Doug: I'll have a glass of Chardonnay, please.

Vicky: Certainly. Ron, Pam, your table is ready.

(Vicky addresses Poulet.)

Vicky: And Sir, this is a non-smoking restaurant.

(Vicky exits.)

(Poulet puts his pipe away.)

Poulet: Zis is reedicrous. Poulet does not *wait*.

Doug: Please, Poulet. Try to be patient.

Roscoe: Welcome to Canyon City, stranger.

(Ole snaps a photo, Poulet postures for the camera.)

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[Continues in the full script.]