



A Dinner Theatre Murder Mystery
by
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Curiosity Killed the Caretaker

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About the pack

The full pack should provide everything you need to produce your very own murder mystery event. *Curiosity Killed the Caretaker* is intended to be used at a sit down meal where the cast will act out a set of events for the assembled guests.

This murder mystery is a **scripted performance**; the cast have set lines to learn or read, which contain the information the audience will need to work out whodunit!

Structure

The full murder mystery pack contains:-

- The **Organiser's Overview** [*Extract here.*]
- The **Script**, including the denouement, in which the murderer is revealed [*Extract here.*].
- **Accusation Sheets** for the audience to enter their solutions.

The Organiser's Overview includes:

- An overview of **Plot** and **Characters**.
- **General Staging Notes** on how best to plan and stage your murder mystery event.
- **Production Notes** - Set, Costume, Props, and Sound Effects.

Plot Overview

The year is 1953, a week after the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth the Second. The Jubilee Hotel for Retired Gentlewomen is reeling from the shock of a murder on its premises. Mr Billy King, the caretaker, has been found dead in his workshop at the rear of the hotel. He appears to have been bludgeoned to death with a blunt instrument. Detective Inspector Daniel Prince of the Plodshire Police has been sent in to investigate the murder.

In charge of the hotel is the very respectable Mrs Daphne Duke, aided by her Cockney maid Queenie Squires. The guests include the confused Miss Pamela Earl, the effete Lady Hilary Highcastle, the sinister sisters Lottie and Dottie Knight, and the ebullient Bunty Bashford-Noble. Into this mix comes Mrs Duke's ne'er-do-well brother Raymond Lord and, once the murder has been discovered, the irritating journalist Charlie Crown.

Inspector Prince will expose the not-so-respectable backgrounds of guests and staff alike, in the hope of discover the motive, opportunity and method for the murder.

Character Overview

Detective Inspector Daniel Prince – Professional, investigative and tenacious.

Daphne Duke – Pretentious and parsimonious. Much given to malapropisms.

Queenie Squires – Maid. Cockney, cheeky. Uses Cockney slang.

Pamela Earl/Pearl – A hotel resident. Absent minded, dithery.

Raymond Lord – Daphne's brother. Smooth talker, charmer.

Lady Hilary Highcastle – A hotel resident. Effete, exhausted.

Lottie and Dottie Knight – Residents. There is little to tell these sisters apart. Both are malicious.

Bunty Bashford-Noble – Resident. Robust, energetic. outdoor type.

Charlie Crown – Newspaper reporter. Cockney, avid for a story.

Kenny Royle – Plumber. Terse, surly.

General Staging Notes

Please rehearse, even if you are going to read the script as opposed to memorising it. If performers are familiar with their characters, it will help to make the production run much more smoothly.

There is no inbuilt 'question and answer' session with this production, so it is not necessary for the performers to ad lib. Performers can, if they wish, provide backstories or fill in their characters, but these do not form part of the script.

The script takes the form of a conventional play, with entrances, exits and other basic stage directions included. The audience are invited to consider the motives of and evidence against the characters involved. The case can be discussed during and after the various courses of the meal; the Inspector can announce this before the food is served and time should be allowed for this.

It is not planned that items of evidence be handed out for the audience to consider, but the Accusation Sheets should be supplied for each table, together with pens or pencils. The audience must name who they think is the killer, and detail the evidence which led them to this conclusion. In the case of two or more tables correctly identifying the murderer, it is the one with the clearest analysis that is the winner. The sheets are collected during the coffee break and then, following performance of Scene 4, a designated person - perhaps the Inspector, the play's director, or the group's chairperson - will announce the winner.

Suggestions for a welcoming atmosphere

- A greeter at the main entrance.
- Pre-dinner drinks.
- Flowers, tablecloths and candles on tables, all perhaps with a Coronation theme.
- Introductory music, played before the performance and during the meal break. Early 1950s music can be played just before the curtains open.
- A short welcome from the chairperson, including an explanation of the structure of the evening. The floor is then given to the Inspector and the performance follows.
- At the end of the evening's entertainment, the audience can be thanked for attending and invited to remain until the bar closes!

Suggested Timing Guide

- 7:00 pm - Guests arrive and are seated.
- 7:15 pm - Scene One
- 7:40 pm - Main course
- 8:00 pm - Scene Two
- 8:15 pm - Dessert
- 8:30 pm - Scene Three
- 8:40 pm - Coffee; Accusation Sheets to be filled in and collected.
- 8:50 pm - Scene Four, followed by announcement of the winning team.
- 9:00 pm - Finish.

Production Notes

Set Description

The set represents the reception area of the Jubilee Hotel for Retired Gentlewomen.

Upstage Right is a reception desk. Downstage is a door leading to the lounge, stairs to the boxroom and outside workshop.

Upstage Left is the door leading to the hall, stairs to the bedrooms, kitchen and front door. Downstage of this are two low armchairs with a coffee table.

The decor is dated and slightly shabby.

Costume Suggestions

Inspector – Smart suit with dark overcoat. His outfit speaks of efficiency.

Daphne – Smart dress with too much cheap jewellery. Neat hair.

Queenie – Slovenly maid's uniform. Untidy hair.

Pearl – Haphazardly and drably dressed; cardigan incorrectly buttoned, droopy flowered dress. Hair in a messy bun.

Raymond – Sharp suit with fake public school tie. Brylcreemed hair. When he becomes the new caretaker, flowered pinny and pink rubber gloves.

Hilary – Bohemian in loose flowing kaftan, trailing scarves, chunky jewellery. Wild hair.

Lottie and Dottie - The two sisters are dressed alike in twinsets and pleated or straight skirts in colours of black and grey, with strings of pearls. Their similarity of dress belies their toxicity to each other.

Bunty – Gymslip-type skirt, knee-high socks, cricket jumper. Hair in plaits.

Charlie – Unkempt in trench coat, trilby, crumpled suit, scruffy shoes.

Kenny – Boiler suit, checked shirt.

Curiosity Killed the Caretaker

[Script Extract]

Scene 1

(Enter Inspector Stage Left.)

Inspector: Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen, and welcome to our Murder Mystery, entitled Curiosity Killed the Caretaker. The year is nineteen-fifty-three, a week after the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth the Second. The Jubilee Hotel for Retired Gentlewomen is reeling from the shock of a murder on its premises. Mr Billy King, the Caretaker, has been found dead in his workshop at the rear of the hotel. He appears to have been bludgeoned to death with a blunt instrument. I, Detective Inspector Daniel Prince of the Plodshire Police, have been sent in to investigate the murder. I shall carry out a series of interviews with the staff and residents of the hotel in order to flush out the killer. But before I do so, let us join everybody in the run-up to the discovery of the murder. (Exit Stage Left.)

(SFX: Phone rings.)

(Enter Daphne Stage Right. She picks up the phone.)

Daphne: Hello, this is the Jubilee Residential Hotel for Retired Gentlewomen. Mrs Daphne Duke, appropriator speaking. How may I help you? Oh no Madam, I'm afraid I have no vacancies at present, but if you would like to give me your details, I can add you to my waiting list. (She writes.) Thank you so much. I would like to point out that I run a very receptacle establishment and don't take any old riff-raff. Yes, I'll contact you as soon as a room becomes available. (Sotto voce.) When one of the old bats kicks the bucket. (Aloud) Goodbye.

(Enter Queenie Stage Right.)

Queenie: I 'ope that wasn't another Artful Dodger wantin' to come 'ere; I'm run off me plates of meat as it is.

Daphne: None of your business, Queenie. And do try to speak the Queen's English.

Queenie: What am I givin' 'em for their tea?

Daphne: Fish paste sandwiches.

Queenie: What, you mean them ones left over from the Coronation party?

Daphne: It's only been a week. They are perfectly indelible.

Queenie: It's a wonder that fish paste hasn't got up and walked off.

Daphne: Fish can't walk.

Queenie: Neither can I with my feet.

Daphne: See to the tea, and can you get five pots out of the same tea leaves instead of four? I'm sure it won't defect the flavour.

Queenie: What flavour? (Exit Stage Left.)

(Daphne consults the paperwork on the desk.)

(Enter Pearl, Stage Left, clutching her handbag.)

Daphne: Good afternoon Pearl, and where are we off to today?

Pearl: Why, Church of course. I always attend the three o'clock service.

Daphne: But Pearl, it is Thursday, not Sunday.

Pearl: Are you sure?

Daphne: Yesterday was Wednesday, so I'm quite sure that this is Thursday.

Pearl: That's all right then. I'll go to Church tomorrow instead.

Daphne: You do that. Now why don't you go and have a nice sit down in the lounge until teatime?

Pearl: What a lovely idea. A sit-down in the lounge. Yes, that would be nice. (She goes to exit Stage Left.)

Daphne: No dear, it's this way.

(Daphne turns Pearl around.)

Daphne: Yes, that's it.

(Exit Pearl, Stage Right.)

Daphne: It's the room with all the chairs in.

(Daphne shakes her head then busies herself with paperwork.)

(Enter Raymond Stage Left.)

Raymond: Well, well, well, if it isn't my dear, devoted, divine and delicious sister.

Daphne: Raymond! When did you get... here?

Raymond: Well, just now of course. My, my, you have done well for yourself. Considering.

Daphne: What do you want?

Raymond: Booze, food and shelter. In that order.

Daphne: You can't stay here. This is supposed to be a refutable establishment.

Raymond: If you say so.

Daphne: What are you incinerating?

Raymond: We both know certain things, don't we Daphne?

Daphne: I'm not having you ruining everything.

Raymond: That's not a very good welcome for a long-lost brother. And who's going to find out?

Daphne: Billy King for a start. If there's ever anything to find out, he's the man for it.

Raymond: And who, may I ask, is Billy King?

Daphne: My caretaker.

Raymond: Well, he doesn't sound like anyone to be worried about. A caretaker indeed!

Daphne: Don't undereducate him; I think in a former life he was a ferret.

Raymond: How does he find out things?

Daphne: He's in people's rooms a lot. I strongly suspect he goes through drawers, cupboards and wastepaper bins.

Raymond: Well, he won't find much out about me. I carry nothing incriminating.

Daphne: He studies old newspaper articles at the library.

Raymond: Tricky. Does he know about you?

Daphne: I think he's got wind of it. He's asked for money a couple of times.

Raymond: Where does he live?

Daphne: Out there. **(Points Stage Right.)** Through the lounge doors. He's got a room at the back of his workshop.

Hilary: **(Offstage)** I say, I say, is there anybody there?

Daphne: Lady Hilary! That's all I need. Quick, out of sight!

Raymond: Why? Where? When?

Daphne: My peace of mind. Boxroom upstairs. **(Points Stage Right.)** Now!

Raymond: Okay, okay. You win. Lady, eh?

Daphne: None of your dirty tricks here. Follow me.

(Daphne and Raymond exit Stage Right.)

(Enter Hilary Stage Left.)

Hilary: Oh, isn't that just typical of this low-class establishment? No one here when one needs them.

(Enter Queenie with tea tray Stage Left.)

Queenie: What's up with your boat race?

Hilary: There's a blockage in the bathroom sink again. Where is that little caretaker man?

Queenie: Dunno.

Hilary: This place is falling apart. No service worth mentioning. One should never have allowed oneself to sink to this level. Everything reeks of desperation and cabbage.

Queenie: Cor, you're 'avin' a right old Darby and Joan today, ain't yer?

Hilary: Are you listening to a word I say?

Queenie: Yes, yer Ladymuckship.

Hilary: Good. I'm glad I've got that off my chest. Are we all right for the darts match tonight, Queenie?

Queenie: Time we give them men a thrashing down the old rub a dub. Ooh, I'd better warn yer.

Hilary: Not the fish paste sandwiches again? They must be curling up.

Queenie: Don't you worry lovey, I've flattened 'em out.

Hilary: What with? The rolling pin?

Queenie: Nah. Put 'em through the mangle.

Hilary: Oh, Queenie, you would make one laugh if one wasn't so exhausted.

Queenie: They're as curled up as my Auntie Maud's curling papers. But I think it's their last outing.

Hilary: That swell, as those Yanks used to say.

Queenie: They was 'appy days, wasn't they, dearie?

Hilary: I don't know what you're talking about.

Queenie: 'Course you don't.

(Queenie and Hilary laugh and exit Stage Right.)
(Lottie and Dottie enter Stage Left.)

Lottie: Yes you did, you borrowed my purple hat in nineteen-thirty-six and it's never recovered.

Dottie: Purple is just not your colour dear; you're more bottle-green.

Lottie: At least you can't borrow my shoes, given the huge size of your feet.

(Enter Queenie, Stage Right.)

Dottie: Is Mr King around, Queenie?

Queenie: Dunno. **(Exit Stage Left.)**

(Enter Daphne, Stage Right.)

Daphne: Ah, the Miss Knights. Do we have a problem?

Lottie: Cracked mirror. Couldn't take the strain. It's that face of hers. **(Indicates Dottie.)**

Daphne: I'll get Mr King to take a look. There's fresh tea ready in the lounge. Please prevail yourselves.

Dottie: Lottie dear, nice cup of arsenic?

Lottie: Thank you, Dottie dear. One spoonful of strychnine or two?

(Lottie and Dottie exit Stage Right.)

Daphne: What's up with those two? They're being nice to each other.

(Enter Raymond Stage Left.)

Raymond: All clear?

Daphne: No it isn't! And how did you get round that side?

Raymond: Oh, just decided to take a saunter around the old estate. Must be worth quite a bit. How much do you charge these old biddies?

Daphne: Not enough, that's why they all stay.

Raymond: I bet they wouldn't if they knew.

Daphne: Well, they don't. Now make yourself scarce.

Raymond: Any of them rich?

Daphne: I doubt it, given the difficulty in getting them to pay their fees. So don't get any ideas.

Bunty: **(Voice off.)** View halloo!

Daphne: Bunty Bashford-Noble! Raymond out! **(Points Stage Right.)**

Raymond: Adieu then for the present, sweet sister. **(Exit Stage Right.)**

(Enter Bunty, striding in Stage Left swinging a tennis racquet.)

Bunty: Ah, there you are, Mrs Duke.

Daphne: Before you go any further, Miss Bashford-Noble, where is your rifle?

Bunty: Left it in the porch, old thing. Unloaded this time. **(Snorts)**

Daphne: Good. And you can pay for that hole in the roof.

Bunty: Where is your little man who does the clever stuff with screwdrivers?

Daphne: Mr King? Why do you need him?

Bunty: Bedsprings.

Daphne: What is the matter with them?

Bunty: Gorn.

[Continued in the full script...]