



A Dinner Theatre Murder Mystery

by

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Customer Taster

Death By Paintbrush

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About the Pack

Death by Paintbrush is a scripted murder mystery that will also require the cast to answer questions put to them by their audience. A full script is provided, as well as “accusation sheets” for the audience to write their answers.

Death By Paintbrush is set over two acts with approximately sixty minutes of scripted dialogue. The murder evening is designed to be played by nine actors in a hall with a stage or suitable acting area, with tables around the hall for your audience. The actors perform Act One in three scenes, which is followed by an interval, and a second act with two scenes. The audience, divided into teams/tables, are then invited to ask the suspects questions, and are given time to solve the mystery before the guilty party is revealed.

The script contains appropriate intervals to allow the audience to enjoy a meal and/or drinks. as well as the opportunity for audience questions and deliberation before the final scene.

Structure

This murder mystery pack contains:-

- **The Organiser’s Overview** [Extract here]
- **The Script** [Extract here]
- **The Accusation Sheet** - for the audience to enter their solutions

Organiser’s Overview Contents

- Plot Overview
- Character Descriptions
- General Staging Notes
 - Brief description of each step of the production
 - Event Guide and Suggested Show Timings
- Production Notes
 - Set Descriptions
 - Costume Suggestions
 - Props List

Plot Overview

It is the winter of 1923 and the provisions of the Late Lord Ernest Rothersfield's will, which includes a generous allowance for his two children and instructions for the disposal of the estate upon his wife's death, are only valid until the Christmas following her eightieth birthday.

With that event only weeks away, the family and close friends of the Dowager Lady Dorothy Rothersfield gather at the family house for pre-Christmas drinks, when she announces a change in the will which could leave both her children disinherited. By the following morning, the family gather for a portrait. Before Lady Dorothy arrives they decide that something needs to be done, but are any of the odd-ball family actually capable of planning, let alone carrying out a murder?

During the sitting an unexplained death occurs. The police are called and in attendance are the newly appointed Inspector Harry Moody, and local Police Constable Joe Sullen, who, despite their own peculiarities, are tasked with muddling their way through the odd family and find the culprit!

Characters

The Dowager Lady Dorothy Rothersfield - An elderly lady but still very astute and spritely for her age of eighty years. She has quite set ideas of family values and has the utmost faith in her staff, most of whom have been in the family employ for years.

Lord Anthony Rothersfield - Anthony is a meek and mild character, who is overshadowed by his rather dominant wife. He gets confused and flustered very easily, and is easy to manipulate, hence his involvement in his late father's company is usually at a social level rather than a business level.

Lady Kathleen Rothersfield - A glamorous lady, and very forthright. She is younger than Anthony and is the driving force in the marriage. She tolerates her husband's family in the anticipation of the privileges which will come her way when Lady Dorothy dies.

Annabel Rothersfield - Annabel was always a 'Daddy's girl' and got anything she wanted from her father, so she is quite spoilt. She tends to flit between the latest trends and has never married because she cannot keep to anything for any length of time, including her relationships.

Pip Cheverton - A close friend of Annabel. She is a mediocre artist based in London who has more money than talent, and she doesn't have that much money. She is a bit melodramatic and speaks with a very shrill and overly posh voice.

Mr Butler, the butler. The Butlers have been house staff to the Rothersfields for nearly a century. He is completely devoted to his job and to Lady Dorothy.

Mrs Cook, the cook. Like the Butlers, the Cooks have also been in the employ of the Rothersfields for many years. She is a bubbly character who everyone loves.

Inspector Harry Moody - A new Inspector on his first murder case, eager to resolve the case quickly, but he appears to be a bit out of his depth.

PC Joe Sullen - The local constable and Moody's right hand man, although he seems to be distracted easily.

Optional extras - party guests and waiting staff for the party, as space allows on stage.

General Staging Notes

Allow just over two hours for the show. Consider beforehand how you want the audience participation segment to work - it is usually better to divide the audience into teams or tables if your venue is suited to this. If you are including audience interrogation then make sure you provide paper and pens to your audience at the start of the evening. You may also want to explain before the show starts that there will be a chance for one question per team later in the evening, so that the audience can formulate their questions during the performance.

During the audience interrogation, only the murderer should be allowed to lie. All other characters should speak the truth as they know it. Once audience questions are complete, announce that there will be approximately ten minutes for deliberation.

Accusation sheets should be distributed by a member of the cast at this point. At the end of the allotted time, the accusation sheets should be collected by a crew or cast member. Ensure that the winning team has been established prior to Act Two Scene Two, as this will be announced by Joe as part of the character's dialogue. All the accusation sheets should be given to Joe before the start of the scene as he will be bringing them on to the stage.

Suggested Timings

7:00 pm	Guests arrive and are seated
7:05 pm	Act One
7:40 pm	Interval - meal is served
8:20 pm	Act Two, Scene One
8:35 pm	Audience Interrogation (optional)
8:45 pm	Completion of accusation sheets
8:55 pm	Act Two, Scene Two - Solution and winning team revealed

Production Notes

Set Description

The play is set in a grand house. Any background set, if available, could include panelled walls for example, maybe with a family portrait picture, or a fireplace. You may also wish to have an ornate rug on the floor. As it is set around Christmas time you will need to consider some decorations for the room. In the 1920s, decorations in such a grand house were quite natural, e.g. holly/mistletoe/ivy as well as paper garlands. If you are using a Christmas tree it would have elaborate paper decorations, large and bright coloured baubles/hanging ornaments, tinsel, a treetop fairy and multi-coloured lights.

Upstage, on set, should be a table. The table should always have a tray with a decanter containing brandy-coloured liquid and four cut glass tumblers. Any other decorations or table contents are at your own discretion but should be in keeping with the period.

Up to five chairs are also required in various scenes:

Act 1, Scene 3: 1 chair

Act 2, both scenes: 5 chairs

These should be dining or similar type chairs, again in keeping with the time period. If you do not have that type of chair available, consider covering other chairs and decorating with ribbon or Christmas garlands to disguise.

Act 1, Scene 3 also requires an artist's easel, with canvas.

Death By Paintbrush

Act One

Scene One

(Lights on. Curtain remains closed.)

(Enter Harry and Joe, front of curtain, Joe is trailing behind, reading from a small note book.)

Harry: So, we have a body, PC Sullen, with a room full of suspects, and no immediately obvious motive. Are you thinking what I'm thinking?

Joe: I think so Sir. Do you want sugar in your tea?

Harry: What? No, I wasn't talking about tea, Constable! I was talking about the body.

Joe: Yes Sir. Of course Sir. Sorry Sir. **(Pause)** What about the body Sir?

Harry: It has to be suicide.

Joe: Are you sure Sir? **(Checking his notes.)** The butcher was found chopped to bits. A grizzly sight.

Harry: The butcher?

Joe: Yes Sir. **(Re-checks his notes.)** Oh hang on Sir. My apologies that was my wife's shopping list. I have to go to the butchers to get some chops and make sure there are no grizzly bits in sight.

Harry: Concentrate on your job Sullen! We could be talking murder here.

Joe: Yes Sir. You've obviously heard about my wife's cooking.

Harry: I'm not interested in your wife's cooking Sullen.

Joe: Me neither Sir.

Harry: In order to get to the bottom of this, we need to go back to the party yesterday evening and find out exactly what happened and how we ended up with a dead body today. This way Sullen **(points off stage)** let's start rebuilding the scene. **(He exits in the direction in which he has just pointed.)**

Joe: **(Looking at the curtain.)** Yes Sir, it does look a bit basic at best. You can't get the scene builders these days. **(Exits same direction as Harry.)**

Scene Two (Lady Dorothy's party)

(Lights on, Curtain opens.)

(Onstage are the party guest extras and waiting staff extras - as space available at back of the stage. Lady Dorothy is onstage, talking inaudibly to some guests.)

(Enter Butler.)

Butler: Excuse me your Ladyship, Miss Annabel has arrived and she has her artist friend, Miss Cheverton, with her.

Dorothy: Her friend?

Butler: Yes Madam. Miss Pip Cheverton.

Dorothy: Oh, I wasn't questioning the name Butler. Just that Annabel has managed to keep a friend longer than a piece of string. Thank you Butler, please show them through.

(Butler goes to the edge of the stage, near the entrance.)

Butler: **(To Annabel and Pip, off stage.)** This way please Miss Annabel, Miss Cheverton.

(Enter Annabel and Pip. Annabel goes over to greet Dorothy, Pip stays beside her, partly hidden from Dorothy.)

Annabel: Mummy! You look delightful! **(She gives Dorothy a hug and a peck on the cheek.)** You remember me telling you about Pips?

Dorothy: Of course I do, and I always make sure I take them out of the oranges before I eat them. Why?

(Pip steps forwards to greet Dorothy who is clearly taken by surprise at Pip's appearance.)

Pip: Good evening, Lady Rothersfield. I am Pip Cheverton, the artist. I expect a woman in your position has heard of me?

Dorothy: Why does my position make a difference? Do the sound waves from your voice not reach anyone sitting down? **(She goes to move away, but is stopped by Pip who holds on to her arm.)**

Pip: I have heard so much about you Lady Rothersfield.

Dorothy: **(Looking up and down at Pip at how she is dressed.)** And in that Miss Cheverton, you have the advantage, as my daughter clearly omitted certain facts about you to me. Tell me, are you related to the Hampshire Chevertons?

Pip: Yes Lady Rothersfield. My grandfather owned Cheverton Hall but I haven't been there for many years now.

Dorothy: No, I don't suppose you have. The Late Lord Rothersfield spent many summers near Cheverton Hall and he never mentioned anything about fancy dress parties.

Pip: Fancy dress?

Dorothy: Yes, that is what you're wearing I presume?

Annabel: Mummy!

Dorothy: Well why else would a woman be dressed as a man?

Annabel: **(To Pip.)** I'm sorry Pips. Mummy doesn't understand.

Dorothy: Mummy may not understand Annabel, but I'm not deaf!

Annabel: It's a statement Mummy.

Dorothy: The statement being something like - my legs are not good enough to wear a dress. We shall discuss it later Annabel. Mingle with the guests, make yourself useful for once. **(Exits)**

Pip: I knew this was a mistake Belly. Your Mother won't understand my artistic nature. Are you sure you want me to paint the family portrait?

Annabel: Absolutely! Mummy can be a bit stuffy at times, but she's no angel herself. She and Daddy eloped which was something unheard of in the Rothersfield family history at the time. It took Daddy years to get back into favour with my Grandfather, just like you.

Pip: Well, by the look on her face she probably thought I *was* more like your father than her.

Annabel: Don't be ridiculous Pips... Daddy never fancied women!

(Pip has a puzzled look on her face at that comment.)

Annabel: Come on, let's mingle. **(Pointing to a guest.)** Look, Will Hope.

Pip: We'll hope for what?

Annabel: No, silly. Will Hope from the village, not we'll hope for anything. Honestly Pips, keep up!

(Annabel and Pip move away to talk inaudibly to some of the extras.)

(Enter Cook.)

Cook: Mr Butler. May I have a word please?

Butler: Certainly Mrs Cook. **(He moves over to where Cook is standing.)** How about synonym?

Cook: Oh that's a good one Mr Butler, but maybe a bit complicated for some. Could you think of an alternative word for it?

Butler: I'm sure I can Mrs Cook.

Cook: Thank you Mr Butler. Anyway, it's about those cakes you asked me to make for the party. There was a bit of a problem with one of the kitchen girls and I had to remake them.

Butler: You had to remake the kitchen girl?

Cook: No Mr Butler. The cakes! So they're won't be ready for a while. Luckily I found some old ingredients at the back of the pantry which I think will do. Right next to the rat poison, but I think it's fine. It's never killed any of the rats anyway.

Butler: That's fine Mrs Cook. Mr Anthony isn't here yet. Maybe you could make the cakes to have with the sitting tomorrow?

Cook: Mr Anthony late again? That man will be late for his own funeral. Right, I'd better get back to the kitchen. Those cakes don't make themselves.

(Exit Cook and Butler.)

Pip: Was that your Mother's cook Belly?

Annabel: Well, she's put a bit of weight on since I last saw her.

Pip: No, I meant you Belly. Was that lady your Mother's cook?

Annabel: Oh right. Yes that was Mrs Cook with Butler.

Pip: Wait. Your Mother has a cook called Cook and a butler called Butler?

Annabel: Yes. Convenient isn't it? The Cooks and the Butlers have worked for the Rothersfields for years. We used to have a gardener called...

Pip: **(Interrupting her.)** Gardener?

Annabel: You knew him?

Pip: I was just thinking it is just as well George Ballsover doesn't work for your Mother!

(Enter Kathleen and Anthony, with Butler close behind.)

Kathleen: **(Very loudly.)** Please tell Lady Dorothy that we have arrived.

Butler: **(Talking to himself to one side.)** I would think the people in the next village know you have arrived with that voice.

Kathleen: What was that?

Butler: Nothing Madam. I shall inform Lady Rothersfield at once.

Kathleen: I am Lady Rothersfield. You are to inform the Dowager Lady Dorothy we are here.

Butler: Yes Madam. **(Speaking as he exits.)** I shall inform Lady Rothersfield.

Kathleen: **(To Anthony.)** He does realise that sooner or later, and preferably sooner, I will be the Lady of the house and then his days will be numbered.

Anthony: I think they are already my dear. I'm pretty sure he uses one to thirty-one most months like the rest of us.

Kathleen: I don't mean on a calendar you idiot! I mean the number of days he will have left in this house will be limited.

Anthony: Yes my dear. But they have been working for my mother for many years, it is bound to take them a while to get used to you as Lady Rothersfield.

Kathleen: Your father has been dead for nearly fifteen years! And I have been a Lady since then!

Anthony: Really? **(Sounding confused.)** You mean you were a man before then? But we've been married twenty years, I'm sure I would have noticed.

Kathleen: Oh good grief. I wonder why I married you sometimes.

Anthony: Fifteen years. Poor Father. His heart just couldn't take any more.

Kathleen: More like his liver couldn't take any more.

(Enter Dorothy behind Kathleen.)

Kathleen: That man put away more whiskey than a medium sized distillery.

Dorothy: Anthony, I see you still have a problem with umm...

Anthony: **(Interrupting her.)** Shhh Mother! She will hear you!

[The drama continues - but only in the full murder mystery pack.]