

Death on Delivery



By
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Customer Taster

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Death on Delivery

A Murder Mystery

By Richard Adams

About the Murder Mystery Pack

The full pack provides the full script and guidance to enable you to produce a successful murder mystery event. The mystery is scripted, but allows for a brief interrogation of the cast by the audience (without revealing new information).

The mystery is intended to be presented on a formal stage (it needs three entrances/exits and it is intended that some action away from the main set is indicated by lighting).

Death on Delivery was written for a Drama Group which has staged a number of such events and the usual format, including a light supper, is given below. The author has no objection to this format being changed to suit, for instance, a three course meal with courses served before the play begins, between Acts One and Two, or any other variation. Chief Inspector Cleveleys' dialogue may be added to or amended to accommodate any changes.

The Pack Contains:-

- A producer's guide [Extracts in this taster]
- The Full Script [Extract in this taster].
- Accusation sheets for the audience to formulate their suspicions.

The Producer's Guide Contains:-

- Suggested event format and timings [in this taster]
- Character List [in this taster]
- Plot Overview [Extract in this taster]
- Preparation Guide [Extract in this taster], including a guide to adjudicating the audience's accusations, and tie-break questions
- A set description [in this taster]
- A properties list
- A sound effects list

Suggested Event Format

- Introduction by Chief Inspector Cleveleys (partly scripted, partly improvised to suit the circumstances).
- Act One.
- Act Two (including an opportunity for the audience to question the cast).
- Interval and light supper (the audience complete their Accusation Sheets which are then collected and assessed by the acting company).
- Act Three.
- Presentation of certificates and prizes to the winning team.

Approximate Timings

Act One: 20 minutes

Act Two (scripted) : 15 minutes

Act Two (audience interrogation) : 10 minutes

Interval/Supper: 30 minutes (of course this is highly dependent on the complexity of the catering)

Act Three: 12 minutes

Epilogue: 5 minutes for prize-giving and closing announcements.

Characters

Ada Parsons - a widow in her late sixties, early seventies

Annie Smith - a spinster, Ada's sister, in her late sixties, early seventies, excitable

George Pearson - a delivery man from Tesco's, twenties/thirties, a little bit gormless

Rose Spencer - Ada's daughter, thirty plus

Rita Reynolds - Rose's friend, thirty plus

Geoff Spencer - Rose's husband, thirty plus, a bit underhand

Charles Robinson - A creepy solicitor, forties, early fifties

Ben Cleveleys - A Detective Chief Inspector. He also serves as host for the evening and frequently addresses the audience directly, either as scripted or ad lib.

Plot Overview

On the death of her husband, Ada Parsons has sold up and moved in with her excitable sister Annie. They are inundated with mysterious deliveries of groceries which they have not ordered. Why, and from whom? Ada is in the process of making her will, and employs a solicitor who is not averse to re-directing the proceeds of Ada's estate to his own advantage and involving his secretary Rita in the chicanery with a view to a romantic holiday for two in the Bahamas.

Ada's daughter Rose learns from Annie that her mother is not intending to include her in her will and is angry. Her husband has recently been made redundant and they are finding it hard to make ends meet. By the end of Act One, no one is dead, but possibilities are accumulating which Detective Inspector Cleveleys – who acts as host for the evening as well as being the investigating officer – sums up as follows:

For the moment, like me, you may be compiling a list of suspects, and you may have decided on a motive for the crime, and chosen one of the characters to be the victim. Does someone want to kill Ada before she cuts her daughter out of her will? Could it be Geoff, Ada's son in law or Rose, the daughter herself? Does Ada want to kill her sister Annie because she's such a pain to live with? Does Annie want to kill Ada, because she bosses her about in her own home, or is Annie so unstable she might just take a knife to anybody? Is Charles an honest solicitor, or could he be up to some mischief we don't yet know about? And where does Rose's friend Rita come into it? Was the meeting at the bus-stop just a coincidence, or could there be something sinister going on? And what of George, the delivery man, with his unexplained boxes of groceries, and the inclusion each time of a bottle of port? Suspicious? We shall see.

Preparation

Learned lines or rehearsed reading?

The play will work best if lines are learned. This gives the actors more freedom of movement and interaction with one another. It will be difficult, for instance, for Annie to look convincingly dangerous with the knife if she has a script in her other hand. George and Geoff will similarly struggle with carrying grocery boxes if handling a script.

However, Chief Inspector Cleveleys has a number of very long speeches which include references that need to be delivered clearly and smoothly to the audience. Provided he is sufficiently familiar with his lines, so as not to be glued to the script, it might be helpful to have the speeches in his notebook, to which he would then appear to be referring quite naturally as a detective would in the course of his investigation.

If it is decided to perform the play as a rehearsed reading, this should be made clear in the publicity and reflected in the ticket prices. **Note that even if it is a rehearsed reading you need to purchase a Performance Licence from the Lazy Bee Scripts web site.**

Interrogation

The script allows for interrogation of the cast by the audience. This is, of necessity, improvised. It may clarify the scripted clues, but it is not intended to reveal anything new.

The rules are:

- The murderer may lie, but everyone else should tell the truth (not necessarily the whole truth).
- Responses should be based on the script. There is no information needed by the audience that is not in the script, although some information is made more specific in Act Three (after the interrogation).
- The audience may ask questions that go beyond the script. The cast may make up answers, provided that these do not have material influence on the plot! There is an option to answer “I don’t think that’s relevant” or for Cleveleys to step in with “That’s not a line of enquiry we are pursuing at this time.”

The cast should prepare for and practice this interrogation, particularly dealing with difficult and irrelevant questions.

Creating (mutually agreed) back-stories for the characters may help, however these need to avoid details that might confuse the plot.

Production Notes

The Set

The stage is divided into three, each space capable of being lit independently, so that scene changes can be made quickly and smoothly by cross-fades. If lighting arrangements will not allow for this, the stage should be fully lit and scene changes denoted by linking music.

Stage right – about half the playing space - is the living room of Annie and Ada with a small dining table, two easy chairs, a couple of dining chairs, and any other items of furniture that will serve to dress the space without cluttering it, one of which needs to have a phone on it and possess a drawer to accommodate Ada’s documents and writing things and Annie’s pills. Three doors serve the entire space – two in the back wall (one Upstage Left leading to the kitchen, the other Upstage Right to the stairs) ; the third may be downstage left (leading to a vestibule and thence to the front door). This last will also serve as the door to the pub and the solicitor’s office as necessary in later scenes. The pub and the solicitor’s office may be simply served by a table and two chairs with backboards wheeled on and off as appropriate to indicate place, and props changed as appropriate – two beer mugs for the pub, and for the solicitor’s office, books, papers, files etc. and a phone and intercom system. The bus stop (Act One, Scene 2) may be brought on and taken off well down-stage left. If preferred this space could accommodate the pub table, leaving more room for the solicitor’s office upstage. The action may be played against black curtains with the minimum of constructed set.

Death on Delivery

Prologue

(FX - A brief snatch of music. House lights fade. Spotlight on Detective Inspector Cleveleys.)
(Cleveleys welcomes the audience and makes any necessary announcements ad lib, including...)

Cleveleys: Good evening and welcome to our Murder Mystery – *Death on Delivery*. I'm Detective Inspector Cleveleys, and it's my pleasure to guide you through the evening and instruct you as necessary to help you work out, as the play goes along, who kills who, how and why. More of that later. Does each team have an Accusation Sheet? Good. Then let's get the show on the road.

(FX - Fade out spot.)

(FX - Linking music to Act One.)

Act One

Scene 1 - Monday

(FX - Fade up lights to Ada and Annie's living room.)

(FX - Fade out music.)

(Ada and Annie are seated in armchairs. Annie is reading a book. Ada is flicking through a newspaper. Annie doesn't seem to be hearing Ada very well.)

Ada: Shall I make a cup of tea?

Annie: What's the time?

Ada: Nearly four – time for a cup of tea.

(Pause)

Annie: I can't get into this book.

Ada: What is it?

Annie: It's a thriller, but nobody's dead yet, so it hasn't got going.

Ada: Oh. What's it called?

Annie: **(Putting the book down.)** Shall I make a cup of tea?

Ada: Funny title for a thriller.

Annie: Yes or no?

Ada: Annie...

Annie: **(Getting up.)** I'll put the kettle on.

Ada: Annie...

(Annie goes out to the kitchen. Ada gets up and looks about the room. She is searching for Annie's hearing aid. She finds it down the side of the armchair, reacts in despair. Annie returns with a plate and a packet of biscuits.)

Annie: Custard creams.

Ada: **(Holding out her hand with the hearing aid.)** Annie.

Annie: Oh. I didn't know I'd lost it.

Ada: You didn't know you'd lost it?

Annie: Pardon?

Ada: Never mind. Put it in and let's have a sensible conversation.

Annie: What? I wish you wouldn't mumble, Ada.

Ada: **(Loudly)** Put it in! **(She hands the hearing aid to Annie.)** How's that?

Annie: **(Putting the hearing aid into her ear.)** Pardon?

Ada: **(Loudly)** Can you hear what I'm saying?

Annie: I think the battery's gone. **(Fiddling with it.)** Oh. That's better. It wasn't switched on. I can hear the clock ticking now. What were you saying?

Ada: Doesn't matter. Has the kettle boiled?

(George is offstage, knocking at the door.)

Annie: Pardon?

Ada: Are you sure you switched it on?

Annie: Yes, I did. It's what the doctor called extra miscellaneous noises. They interfere with it.
Was that the front door?

(George knocks again.)

Ada: I'll go and see.

(Ada goes off to the front door. Annie goes off to the kitchen and returns with a tray of tea things. There is no teapot. She sets them down on the table. Ada returns.)

Ada: It's a man.

Annie: Ooooh! Is he tall, dark and handsome?

Ada: **(A beat)** He's from Tesco's.

Annie: Well, that doesn't rule him out. What does he want?

(George enters carrying a box of groceries, a clipboard with papers attached on the top of it.)

George: Sorry to barge in, but this is heavy. Where would you like me to put it?

Ada: Just put it on the table. What is it?

George: Groceries.

Ada: They can't be ours.

George: **(Consults his clipboard.)** Forty-four Willoughby Road?

Annie: That's us all right. But we haven't ordered any groceries.

Ada: We go to the Co-op. Tesco's too far at our age.

George: Didn't you order it online?

Ada: Do what?

George: On line.

Annie: Did you fetch the washing in Ada?

Ada: Yes. No. Not the washing line, Annie. He means some computer thing. I think. We've never been into that sort of thing. You're sure it's addressed to us?

George: Forty-four Willoughby Road. Parsons.

Ada: Parsons, yes. But I never ordered anything. What's in it?

George: **(Taking the receipt from the box.)** Tea, coffee, sugar, biscuits – just basic groceries – lot of tinned stuff - that's why it's so bloomin' heavy – ham, tongue, corned beef, baked beans... Ooh, bottle of port wine.

Annie: **(Eagerly)** We'll keep it.

Ada: Annie! No we won't. Not if it's not ours. I'm... I'm mystified.

Annie: Somebody's sent you a present, Ada.

George: Can you make up your mind? I've got other deliveries.

Ada: Do you know who it's from? Somebody must have paid for it.

George: Look, I've no idea. Just sign for it will you, and I'll be on my way.

Ada: I'm not sure...

Annie: Never look a gift horse in the mouth, Ada.

George: Oooooh. What's the name? **(Consulting his clipboard.)** Parsons. **(Writes in a space on the clipboard.)** There you go. Signed for. All done and dusted. Enjoy it, whoever it's from. Ta-ta.

(George leaves)

Ada: Oh, Annie. What have we done?

Annie: Forgotten the tea pot, that's what we've done.

Ada: Never mind that. It's very nice of somebody I'm sure, but we don't need charity. We're not exactly poor, Annie.

Annie: I know, but it's a long time since we had a glass of port. Some cheesy biscuits would be nice with it. I wonder what else is in here. **(Rummaging in the grocery box.)**

Ada: Oh! Our Annie, you're hopeless. And port wine's not a good idea with the pills you're taking...

Annie: **(Putting a hand to her hearing aid.)** Pardon?

Ada: **(Attempting to pick up the groceries.)** Give me a hand with this.

Annie: Pardon?... Oh.

(Annie suddenly realises that Ada is struggling with the box of groceries, and they carry it together into the kitchen.)

(FX - Cross fade to Bus Stop.)

(Clear tea things.)

Scene 2 - Monday

(Ada's daughter Rose is sitting on the bench waiting for a bus. Rita, an old friend arrives.)

Rita: Well I never! It's Rose, isn't it. Rose Parsons. Well, Rose Parsons as was. Fancy seeing you. How are you?

Rose: I'm fine thanks. Don't tell me, I'll remember in a minute. Erm... Rita isn't it. Rita... Reynolds – as was. How are you?

Rita: Not so bad. Not so bad. You going into town? We could have a coffee in Starbucks and catch up. What is it – three years?

Rose: Yeah – must be.

Rita: The new job turned out all right then did it?

Rose: Oh yes, it was a good move. You still with Robinsons?

Rita: **(Resignedly)** Yeee-eess. Still there. Got a promotion. PPS to Mr Robinson. Still boring, but it's a bit more money. You have to pay the bills.

Rose: Yes. You do... **(Coming to tears.)** Yes, you have to pay the bills.

Rita: Oh, Rose. What have I said? Are you all right?

Rose: Yes. I'm sorry. **(Handkerchief out.)** I shall be all right in a minute. It's just – things have been getting a bit on top of me lately.

Rita: We should definitely have that coffee then. Get it off your chest whatever it is.

Rose: That's good of you, but I can't, really...

Rita: My treat... Marriage, is it?

Rose: What? Oh, no, nothing like that.

Rita: Geoff wasn't it. Geoff, erm... Spencer?

Rose: Yes... No, me and Geoff are fine but... he was made redundant, so when you said about paying the bills, it just hit a nerve.

Rita: Oh, Rose, I am sorry.

Rose: No, it's all right. You weren't to know. He got redundancy money, of course, but it doesn't go very far when you've got the mortgage to pay and school uniforms and...

Rita: Yes. I sometimes thank the Lord I'm single.

Rose: But I thought...

Rita: Oh, I did. Worst mistake I ever made - only lasted six months. I was well shot of him. Never again. Never again. Anyway, you're sure you won't have that coffee?

Rose: I'd love to, Rita. I really would, but I'll be getting off this bus – if it ever comes - and getting straight onto another – out to my mother's.

Rita: Oh, still going strong then is she? She must be getting on now.

Rose: Oh, she's fine - does really well for her age. You knew Dad... **(Searching for a word rather than saying he was murdered.)** Died?

Rita: Yes **(Aware of a difficulty.)** I did see it in the paper. Your Mum took it badly I remember.

Rose: Yes, so after a while, she sold up and moved in with Aunt Annie in Willoughby Road. They keep each other company. I pop over now and again.

Rita: Willoughby Road? Right out there? I've got a friend lives out there. It's miles.

Rose: Well, it's quiet. They seem to like it. I mean, Aunt Annie's always lived up there. There's a pub they sometimes go to for lunch, and a Co-op just round the corner. It's not as isolated as you think.

Rita: Oh, right. She'll erm... She'll have a good bit put-by then if she sold that big house in Lilac Avenue.

Rose: Oh yes. Not that it's much help to us. She invested it somewhere. There it went and there it stays. Children have to stand on their own two feet, she says. Anyway, I wouldn't dream of asking. Geoff would hate it.

Rita: Yes, I suppose so.

(FX - Sound of bus approaching.)

Rita: Oh. Here comes the bus at last.

(FX - Cross fade to the sitting room.)
(Rose and Rita exit.)
(FX - The bus stops, starts up again and fades into the distance.)
(Clear bus stop and bench.)

Scene 3 - Monday

(The tea things have been removed. Ada is seated at the table, Annie in an armchair.)

Ada: If you don't mind Annie, I'm going to ask you to go to your room for a while. I'm expecting a visitor.

Annie: You having some man in?

Ada: Is that all you ever think about?

Annie: You're not too old to get married again.

Ada: Seeing as you never married, I don't know why you're so anxious to see me wed again.

Annie: Who's coming?

Ada: **(Consulting a business card.)** Charles Robinson.

Annie: Is he eligible?

Ada: Annie! Give over! If you must know, he's a solicitor.

Annie: That doesn't rule him out. What time's he coming?

Ada: Any minute now. Go on. Off you go.

(Charles offstage - knocks at the door.)

Annie: Oooh, that'll be him. I'll go and let him in for you. Size him up.

Ada: Annie! It's just a matter of business.

(Annie goes out and returns with Charles Robinson. He carries a briefcase.)

Annie: I'll leave you to it then. **(Winks at Ada.)** Best of luck.

(Annie leaves to go upstairs.)

Charles: Best of luck?

Ada: She's got it into her head I'm seeing a fancy man. You're probably married with six children. **(Laughs)**

Charles: **(Bemused)** As it happens, no. Perhaps we should get down to business. **(He sits down and takes papers from his brief case, sorting them out on the table.)** Have you made a will before?

Ada: No.

Charles: So, as things stand, the whole of your estate will go to your next of kin. Who would that be?

Ada: That would be Rose, my daughter.

[The drama continues...]