



Good Deeds, Deadly Deeds

*A murder mystery in two acts
by Karen Ince*

Customer Taster

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The full pack should provide everything you need to produce your very own murder mystery event.

The pack is intended to be used at a sit down meal where the principal characters will act out a set of events for the assembled guests.

The whole pack is, for the most part, a **scripted performance**; the cast have set lines to learn, which contain the information the audience need to work out whodunnit - if they are thinking clearly enough!

The murderer, however, is decided on the night; six sealed envelopes are distributed to the cast, one proclaiming its recipient to be the murderer, and explaining their method.

There is also the need for **improvisation**: three **eyewitnesses** are required to improvise their testimony when questioned by the audience and a **master of ceremonies**, who must control proceedings.

The whole document includes:

- A **Plot Overview** (*Part of which is disclosed in this Customer Taster*) and **Character Overview**, including **motives** for each character.
- **General Staging Notes** on how best to plan and stage your Murder Mystery event (*in this Customer Taster*).
- **Detailed Character Notes** with descriptions for your actors to expand upon individually.
- A **Script** for your actors to follow (and improvise around if they are confident enough!)
- A **Props** list for the scripted section (*in this Customer Taster*).
- **Setting Diagrams** for a suggested set and diagrams of rooms mentioned in the script.
- **Murder Scenarios** to be selected at random on the night.

Plot Overview

Chris is a successful middle-aged businessman whose wife, Angela, died some three years ago. He now lives with his daughter Becca, who recently returned from university to work as a junior reporter for the local paper. Her dream is to cover a story large enough to get her noticed by the national press.

Angela's long-lost cousin Nigel is coming to stay, having told Chris he is returning to England (from South Africa) on a three-week visit. Chris, having never met Nigel before, agrees.

The scene opens on a weekday morning. Becca is starting work late as she has covered a charity event, run by Helen, the night before. Chris is worried that either Becca or their housekeeper, Viv, has been moving private papers around in his study. Their neighbour Jackie, a fussy mother-hen type, calls round just as Chris is about to leave to pick up some papers from work.

When she has a moment alone, Viv phones a man named Peter who turns out to be masquerading as 'Nigel'. He is evidently some sort of con-man. Viv vents her frustration over the family's treatment of her, and is assured by 'Nigel' that she will have revenge. She declares her love for him, but their conversation is cut short by Becca and Jackie's return.

Nigel arrives, settling in quickly and talking to Chris, Becca and Viv. Before long he insinuates that Chris stood to profit from Angela's death, which would have meant a large insurance payoff as well as the contents of her will. He nearly lets slip that he is not actually visiting from South Africa, and mentions that he has 'business to attend to' whilst visiting Chris.

That evening, Nigel continues to talk with the family, even flirting with Becca a little. Helen stops round to sell them tickets to her upcoming charity 'fun casino' event, but she and Nigel recognise each other. They are quick to cover it up, and the arrival of Jackie and her husband Barry results in them booking a table for six at the 'fun casino'.

Helen leaves, and Nigel presses Chris to come to the cellar under the pretense of looking for his golf clubs. Whilst they and Becca are out of the room, Jackie tries to convince Barry that Nigel is up to no good. Barry appears to shrug off the suggestion but reluctantly decides to look into it. Chris and Nigel return from the cellar, and we get the impression they have had a heated discussion in which Nigel has found a way to manipulate Chris.

The next Saturday, after returning from a round of golf, Barry waits until they are alone to confront Nigel. He tells Nigel he has uncovered evidence of the con and wants to expose him. Nigel counters by threatening to expose Barry's affair with Chris's late wife. Barry backs down, but the thought is always in his mind. Nigel goes out to the garden to talk to Helen; Chris and Barry discuss Nigel but are wary to say anything that might bring their own secrets out into the open.

The night of the 'fun casino' arrives, and whilst the mood is jovial there are tensions bubbling under the surface. We discover that...

... *and the scene develops...*

Characters

Chris - Middle-aged, widower, successful businessman.

Becca - Chris's daughter. Returned home to live after university, working as a junior reporter on the local paper.

Viv - Chris's cleaner. Prefers to be called a housekeeper. Would prefer to be thought of as part of the family. Age flexible.

Jackie - Their Neighbour. Was Angela's best friend, and after her death she took on the role of mother substitute to Becca. Thinks of Becca and Chris as her family. A fussy, 'mother-hen' type. Age flexible, but should match Barry.

Barry - Jackie's husband. Bit of a drinker, gambler. Age flexible but should match Jackie.

Helen - Local do-gooder. Glamorous. Very active in raising money for charity. Likes to organise high-profile events. Age flexible.

Nigel - The long-lost cousin of Chris' late wife. On a visit from South Africa. A ladies man. Age flexible but should be younger than Chris.

One of the above is the victim.

Motive

Each character has a motive for murdering the victim...

In addition to the murder suspects, the following parts are suggested:

Three eyewitnesses - Their testimony will be different each evening, given that the murderer and so they need to be able to improvise how they word it from a fact sheet they will be given.

The Master of Ceremonies - Takes charge of the questioning of eyewitnesses and suspects.

General Staging Notes

Casting / rehearsal

Each member of the cast should be given their character profile with their script at the beginning of the production process. The information does not need to be shared with other cast members! In fact, although some of it is obvious, it's better kept to themselves. They should then be asked to revisit this before the performances as the information will help them to answer questions from the audience. You should hold as many rehearsals as required depending on experience of performers. The first rehearsal should concentrate on reading through this pack and the script, getting a feel for how the event is structured and understanding the role that each character has to play in the plot.

Before the second rehearsal the performers should further prepare their back stories. We provide character overviews that should be expanded further by the actors – we recommend writing down a more detailed character history. If it suits your production, and the cast are not hiding details of their characters from each other, we recommend reading these expanded histories aloud, in character, at the next rehearsal.

Facilities required for the performers

The performers need a separate private room for their use. They will use this prior to the event to get changed and prepared and will use the room as a backstage area during the event. The murder victim will also use this room once deceased!

Recommended event format

The evening works best if structured round a sit down meal. If the event is being staged in hotel this may be a formal served multi-course meal, but if this was being staged in a hall or private venue you could lay on a simpler meal or even a table buffet. However guests should have a table to sit at to watch and enjoy the action.

Pre-dinner drinks

Before moving to the seated area, we recommend pre-dinner drinks. This gives an opportunity for the guests to mingle and – as you see fit – to meet the characters informally before the action begins.

Dining

We recommend serving the main course in the interval between Acts One and Two of the scripted piece. This will ensure the audience are not focusing on their meal when they should be paying attention to the action! There are three scenes in Act One, so you could also serve starters in a short interval between two of those scenes. Desserts could be served after the victim has been announced, to give time for the ‘eyewitness’ actors to prepare their testimonies and the main cast to prepare for questioning.

As a broad guide your event should run as follows:

7.30 to 8.00	Pre-dinner drinks
8.00	Act One begins. Starters may be served in an interval between scenes.
8.35	Act One ends. Main course is served.
9.00	Act Two.
9.20	Desserts served.
9.35	Eyewitness testimony and questioning of the cast.
9.50	Coffee is served. Guests write down their accusations.
10.00	The Verdict.

Improvisation

As already explained, there is a set script for this Murder Mystery scenario. You can stick to the script or your performers can improvise dialogue around it if they are confident. Be warned that if the cast choose to improvise, it is important to ensure the vital clues stay in. The benefit of improvising is that it will display interactions and behaviour based on their back stories and knowledge of the plot and their interpersonal relationships. This is not as daunting as it sounds!

If your cast meet the audience whilst serving pre-dinner drinks, you are bound to get some comments about ‘who dies first?’, ‘are you the murderer?’ at the start of the evening. The trick is to act confused and surprised! What are they talking about? This is a special occasion!

Setting

Act 1 is set in Chris’s front room. Suggested layout is included later in the full pack.

Act 2 is set at ‘Middle Marchfield village hall’ during a charity dinner and fun casino. The plan of the village hall is included, and can be copied and provided to the audience if required. The stage should be set with a table to mimic the ones the audience are sitting at. It should appear that the characters had a meal at the same time as the audience. The charity casino will be referred to as taking place in another part of the building.

Eye-witnesses.

There will be three eyewitnesses each evening. The testimony they provide will be different each night. They can be played by the same or different members of the society. Roles will be a selection from: waiter, kitchen helper, bartender, croupier, guest. They will be given a speech containing relevant information about the movements of the suspects, and possibly information on the murder weapon. They can either memorise this, or improvise a character, as long as the important information is conveyed to the audience. They are not questioned.

Guilty or not guilty?

For each of the six possible endings there is a set of sealed envelopes for each member of the cast (except the victim), and for each eye witness. In addition to telling them whether they are the murderer,

it includes essential information (different each night) which should be included in answers to the audience questions where relevant.

The Master of Ceremonies will be provided with the information on the location of the body, and the murder weapon which should be announced before the eye witnesses are introduced.

Once the eye witnesses have given their testimony, the suspects can then be brought back on stage and each table or team are given an opportunity to ask a question. These should be relayed by the MC, so all the audience have a chance to hear the question, and then the cast member answers.

Usually the cast members are expected to tell the truth, except on the night when they are guilty, in which case they can lie as much as they want. They should however, listen to the eye witness testimony, so that they are aware of what else the audience has heard.

The Verdict

After the eyewitness reports and questioning of the characters, the audience should complete the supplied “Whodunnit?” forms stating who they accuse of the murder, and their motive. These will be collected by the Master of Ceremonies and a winner (whoever’s guess was most accurate) should be chosen by the cast. Depending on your production, the audience member judged to be the winner could be given a prize. After this the cast should return to the stage to receive applause and take their bows.

Example of one of the Character Profiles

Barry

You are a reasonably successful man. You work as an insurance claims investigator, and get well paid for saving your company a lot of money in bogus, fraudulent claims. You are married to Jackie, who was left quite a large amount of money by her parents. They bought the house you live in, as a wedding present for you. It is in her sole name which sometimes irritates you, and you sometimes think that she despises you for not having more money! You cover up these occasional feelings of inadequacy by being extra loud, cheerful and forceful.

You like to go out with friends, playing golf, night out at the local casino, day at the races. You don’t believe you have a problem with either drink or gambling, you enjoy both, other people might say perhaps a little too much! Your relationship with Jackie has deteriorated significantly over the past 5 years, since Angela’s death.

Angela was having an affair with a married man before she died. However, she decided to break it off, and sort out her relationship with Chris. He was besotted with her, and had hoped she would run off with him. He became very upset, and in the ensuing argument, he struck out at her, which resulted in her death. Panicking, he managed to stage a car accident that would explain her injuries. The reason you know all this is that you were that man! Being an insurance investigator meant that you knew what would be looked for, and could allay any suspicions. You also ensured speedy payment of the life insurance – to assuage your guilt. You also became closer to Jackie for a while, realising that you do still love her, and that you nearly devastated her life too. More recently though, you have increasingly found comfort and forgetfulness in drinking and gambling. You have never told anyone about the affair, or its awful ending.

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Customer Taster excerpt

Act 1 – The living room of Chris’s House.

Scene 1 – Morning

(Curtain opens on an untidy living room. There are papers, magazines, dirty cups & plates, empty soft drink cans etc. Chris enters from the kitchen, dressed for work, with a cup of coffee in his hand. He sighs, annoyed at the mess. Crossing the stage, he puts his cup on the coffee table, and starts to clear up. Becca enters from the stairs, in nightclothes, yawning.)

Becca: Morning Dad.

Chris: **(Impatiently)** Becca, for goodness sake, can’t you at least make an effort to try and be a bit tidier! You’re not living in one of your student houses now, you know!

Becca: Oh Dad! Stop making such a fuss! For goodness sake, it’s only a few bits. And anyway, Viv’ll be here soon. She’ll clear it up!

Chris: That’s really not the point! This stuff shouldn’t be left lying around all over the place. You’ve got a room of your own – for which you don’t pay any rent! You could try using it sometimes.

Becca: Dad! This is my home, why should I pay rent?

Chris: Because houses cost money to maintain, that’s why! And you’ve got a job, you should be paying your own way!

Becca: Why? You’re not exactly hard up, are you? And you’d have to maintain the house whether I was here or not, so it’s no different is it? I pay towards food and bills! Why should I pay any more? You haven’t even got a mortgage, thanks to...

Chris: Don’t start that again! Don’t you think, that I would rather have a mortgage, and have Angela alive still, than to have had her life insurance to pay it off with?

Becca: **(Suddenly contrite)** I’m sorry. It’s just that, well...

Chris: **(Moves over, and hugs her)** I know, sweetheart. We both still miss her. I suppose we always will. And you’re right, if anyone should get the benefit of the money, it should be you. No more talk about paying rent, OK?

Becca: Ok. Oh, Dad, I do still miss her you know.

Chris: I know. Me too. **(Pause)** I do wish you’d learn to be tidier though – it does get on my nerves! And you can’t expect Viv just to tidy up after you all the time. You’re not a kid any more.

Becca: I know Dad, but you know, she likes to feel that we need her. She’d hate it if there was nothing for her to do.

Chris: **(Smiling)** That’s a poor excuse for being lazy, young lady. Now get yourself sorted out, and get off to work.

Becca: Oh, I don’t have to go in ‘til later today.

Chris: All right for some! I thought this was meant to be a full-time job?

Becca: **(Smiling)** Yeah, yeah, very funny! I was out covering that ‘do’ last night, so I don’t have to go in yet. OK?

Chris: Oh? I didn’t realise you were working, I thought you were just out with your friends. **(Disapprovingly)** You didn’t really look dressed for work! What ‘do’ was that?

Becca: **(Groaning)** One of Helen what’s-her-name’s things! You know what she’s like, always organizing something in aid of one of her pet charities. This was a quiz night and dinner. As usual she managed to get a ‘celeb’ quiz master, so of course we had to cover it for the paper. Anyone else’s charity event, they have to write it up themselves, and we put it in if we can find the space! Give her her due, she’s got amazing contacts. Her address book must be bursting with the names of the rich and famous, I don’t know how she does it!

Chris: Yes, she does seem to have a lot of contacts in the celebrity world! **(Pause)** Anyway, don't forget we've got Nigel arriving later. Please try to be a bit more considerate, tidier, while he's here. I don't want him thinking his only relatives are complete slob!

Becca: Don't worry – I'll be a model daughter, cousin, housemate, whatever, while he's here. What time's he arriving again?

Chris: He said he wasn't sure – probably middle of the day. I'm going to go into the office now, pick up some papers, make sure everyone's OK, and then come back and work from here until he arrives. Goodness knows what we're going to do with him while he's here though! It's not as if we know him.

Becca: Yeah – it's going to be pretty weird, I mean, Mum's unknown cousin, suddenly turning up out of the blue, and coming to stay. I don't even remember Mum mentioning him at all.

Chris: No reason why you would love. I mean. Angela's Aunt & Uncle moved out to South Africa years ago, and apart from Christmas cards, they didn't really stay in touch. After your Nan died, there wasn't any other family on that side, and it didn't seem likely that they'd ever come back. We knew they had a couple of children, Nigel and his sister, umm, S - S –Sue? no, Sarah, that's it! Their names were always on the cards you see. And that's all we knew about them. Angela did talk a couple of times about going out there for a holiday, you know safari and stuff, and visit them at the same time. She sometimes said she wished she'd had more family, and I think she would have liked to be closer to the few she had.

Becca: Yeah, so when he phoned up and said he was going to be in England for a few weeks, you could hardly tell him you weren't interested could you!

Chris: Well, he's your relative too – and you don't have many do you love? I mean, this is your best chance to get to know a bit more about your mum's family. And Angela wouldn't have stopped to think, she'd have insisted straight away that he come and stay with us. I had to do the same, for her sake!

Becca: I know Dad, and I am looking forward to it, but it is going to be a bit strange isn't it. What if we don't like him? What if he's horrible?

Chris: **(Laughing)** Oh, Becca – I'm sure he'll be perfectly normal! And in any case, it's only for a few days.

Becca: **(Laughing)** Well, as long as he's only got one head...! And doesn't smell...

Chris: **(Sobering)** Er, Becca – there is something else I want to talk to you about. **(He looks over his shoulder towards the kitchen)** Before Viv gets here.

Becca: What? What is it Dad?

Chris: Have you been in my study recently? Looking for anything?

Becca: **(Puzzled)** What do mean? I went in there the other day looking for a spare pen!

Chris: Well, no, I mean. Oh, it's awkward! Have you been looking through stuff, you know going through the filing cabinet, that kind of thing?

Becca: What are you saying?

Chris: I'm just asking if you've been in there looking for anything, I mean, it would be all right if you have, but I need to know.

Becca: Dad, what's this all about? What's going on?

Chris: It's just, things have been moved, and I need to know if it was you.

Becca: **(Impatiently)** Well, it wasn't. It was probably Viv, just tidying up, dusting whatever!

Chris: Well, that's the problem, you see. I've asked her not to go in there. A few weeks ago.

Becca: Why?

Chris: I got the impression she'd been going through stuff, looking at private papers, that kind of thing.

Becca: Oh for heaven's sake Dad! You're getting paranoid in your old age! Why on earth would she want to do that? She knows all about us anyway, I should think. I mean, she's been here long enough. And anyway, what have you got in there that's so top secret?

The scene continues...

Props

Act One

Scene One

Two chairs **(Set Onstage)**

Two sofas **(Set Onstage)**

Telephone table **(Set Onstage)**

Phone **(On telephone table)**

Coffee Table **(Set Onstage)**

Household debris including newspapers, magazines, cups and plates **(On chairs, sofa, tables)**

Coffee mug **(Chris)**

Coffee cups **(Offstage for Viv)**

Bag **(Offstage for Becca)**

Briefcase **(Offstage for Chris)**

Parcel **(Nigel)**

Tray with cups **(Offstage for Viv)**

Scene Two

Furniture as before **(Set Onstage)**

Wine glasses **(Set Onstage)**

Tray of drinks **(Offstage for Becca)**

Scene Three

Furniture as before **(Set Onstage)**

Shopping bags containing clothes, plants etc. **(Becca, Jackie)**

Tea tray **(Offstage for Jackie)**

Beer bottles **(Offstage for Chris)**

Teapot **(Offstage for Jackie)**

Act Two

Table **(Set Onstage)**

Plates, glasses, empty bottles **(On Table)**

Additional drinks **(Offstage for cast members as necessary)**