

Moody & Sullen Investigate:



A Dinner Theatre Murder Mystery
by
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Customer Taster

KILLING THYME

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KILLING THYME

About the pack

Killing Thyme is a scripted murder mystery that will also require the cast to answer questions put to them by their audience. However, all the information needed by the audience is contained in the script, so the cast do not need to deliver further clues. In the full Murder Mystery pack, a full script is provided, as well as ‘accusation sheets’ for the audience to write their answers.

Killing Thyme is set in the mid-1920s, over two acts, with two possible endings and approximately sixty minutes of scripted dialogue. The murder evening is designed to be played by nine actors in a venue with a stage or suitable acting area, with tables around the hall for your audience. The actors perform Act One, followed by an interval, and then Act Two. 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 an interval 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

The murder mystery pack contains:-

- **The Organiser’s Overview** (extracts included in this taster)
- **The Script** (extracts included in this taster)
- **The Accusation Sheet** - for the audience to enter their solutions

Organiser’s Overview Contents

- Synopsis
- Character Descriptions
- General Staging Notes
 - Brief description of each step of the production
 - Suggested Show Timings
 - Notes on Audience Deliberation
- Production Notes
 - Props List
 - Set Description
 - Costume Suggestions
 - Music Notes

Synopsis

The 1925 Killington Annual Village Fete and Vegetable Show is being held in the grounds of Rotherfield Hall. The prestigious top prize in the vegetable tent is always fiercely contended and this year, with the addition of a handsome cash prize for the winner, competition is intense. There are squabbles over spinach, arguments over artichokes and tantrums over turnips, but is anyone in the green-fingered elite capable of being a cold-blooded murderer? Inspector Harry Moody and his sidekick PC Joe Sullen are, once more, called in to dig down to the root of the issue and weed out the offender.

Character Descriptions

Harry Moody – Investigating officer. This is Harry's third investigation with his sidekick Joe. He does not suffer fools gladly and is keen to move to a more demanding role in a large town, so comes across as being quite frustrated by some of the locals, who he thinks are odd and difficult to deal with.

Joe Sullen – Local police constable and Moody's right hand man. He is an amicable, well-mannered chap, and a typical local 'bobby'.

Victoria Rotherfield – The niece of Lady Dorothy Rotherfield and sole heir to Rotherfield Hall. What she lacks in academic achievement, she makes up for in her pleasant 'matter-of-fact' manner. She comes across as amicable but a bit scatty.

Alfie Swadling – The local postman and a vegetable show participant. A friendly sort generally, but can have a short fuse if pushed. He is in a relationship with Olive, which is the subject of local gossip.

Horace Flitter – Past winner of the vegetable show. Horace's whole life pivots around the vegetable show – and growing vegetables. He provides most of the village with fresh vegetables via the local shop. He is very competitive.

Violet Mulford – Sister of Ivy and local resident/show participant. Violet is the more outgoing of the two sisters and is usually the source of village gossip but not the subject. She comes across as being quite a jolly character but it is a bit of an act. Violet and Ivy are both spinsters.

Ivy Mulford - Sister of Violet and local resident/show participant. Quieter of the two sisters, but quite clever and although she somewhat lives in her sister's shadow, she can manipulate things to get what she wants. She used to be courted by Alfie Swadling before Olive's husband died.

Olive Bosely - Local resident/show participant. She is a widow following the death of her husband Arthur and now in a secret relationship with Alfie. She is quite a pleasant and easygoing person, but easily led by suggestion.

Rose Woodley - Local resident/show participant. Rose is new to the village and a bit of an unknown character. She acts as though she has a secret and is quite jumpy at any suspicious comments aimed at her.

Extras (optional) - Village Fete attendees, as space allows on stage.

General Staging Notes

The mystery is set in the mid-1920s and is performed by four male actors and five female actors. If you have space for extras you could include them at the start of Act 1 Scene 3 which is the judging/body discovered scene, but they are not required for the plot. It is set out over two acts with approximately sixty minutes of scripted dialogue.

The play is written so that the main characters in the vegetable show should be ‘larger than life’ and often with an air of ridiculousness about them, they have an opportunity to be ‘overacted’ to increase the ridicule and can, at suitable times, deliver a punchline or a double entendre as though addressing the audience.

There is an interval to allow for the audience to enjoy a meal and/or drinks and time given for audience questions and deliberation before the final scene. The final scene contains two possible endings to allow for productions over two nights, or for the performing group to select whichever ending they prefer. The production notes include stage settings and props, costume suggestions, timings and an example whodunit sheet for the audience.

Timing

Act One – approximately 30 minutes, though allow for 40.

Scene 1: 5 minutes.

Scene 2: 15-20 minutes.

Scene 3: 10-15 minutes.

Interval – as required

Act Two – approximately 40 minutes if including full audience participation

Scene 1 and 2: 20-25 minutes

Audience questions and deliberation: 15 minutes.

Scene 3: 5 minutes.

Audience Deliberation

In Act Two, there is a break between Scene 1 and 2 for audience deliberation and at the end of Scene 1 you have an option whether you want to allow audience questioning.

Consider how you want audience participation to work. It is usually better if you have teams or tables rather than normal theatre-type seating, if your venue is suited to this. If you want to allow your audience to ask your characters questions then make sure you give them some paper and pens at the start of the evening so they can take notes. You may also want to explain before the show starts that there will be a chance for one question per team later in the play, so they can start thinking during the performance. Or you can leave the pens, paper and explanatory note on the tables.

If you are including audience questions, then *only the murderer is allowed to lie!* All other characters should speak the truth as they know it, or as it is perceived. Remember to rehearse the sort of questions you might be asked. It’s a fun evening, so there may be some odd questions based on the vegetables, maybe even asking the best way to avoid carrot-fly! Try to think about what may be asked and come up with some answers so you have them to hand. Don’t forget that sometimes it is difficult for everyone in a hall to hear audience questions, so it is always a good idea to repeat the question to the character, e.g. “A good question there from table seven, what was in the herbal tea you gave Olive?”

If you are allowing audience questions then once they are complete Joe should announce that there will be approximately 10 minutes for deliberation, after which the sheets will be collected. After his announcement the stage curtains should then close and the characters can leave the stage at that point.

There is an example whodunit sheet in this pack. You could use your extras to give out and collect sheets, but they should remain in character. If you are not including audience questioning, then make sure that when you give out the sheets the audience know how long they have to deliberate. At the end of the allowed time, gather in the answer sheets. Make sure you know who the winning team is before you start the final scene, because Joe will need to announce it!

KILLING THYME

Act One

Scene 1 - Introduction

(Enter Harry and Joe front of curtain.)

Harry: Do you know something, PC Sullen?
Joe: Well I'd like to think I know at least one thing, Sir, but I doubt if we're talking about how to make tea on this occasion, Inspector Moody, so would you care to enlighten me?
Harry: Well, we're investigating a murder, are we not?
Joe: We are, Sir.
Harry: And there have been murders here in this village before.
Joe: Yes, Sir.
Harry: Do you think maybe it is jinxed?
Joe: That would be a shame, Sir, it was always such a friendly place, Sir, until...
Harry: Until what, PC Sullen?
Joe: Well, it's just that I don't recall us having to investigate any until you arrived, Sir.
Harry: Are you saying that the string of murders here has something to do with me?
Joe: Oh no Sir, not at all Sir. I'm sure it is just a coincidence.
Harry: And we all know what coincidences are, don't we Sullen?
Joe: Yes Sir. (**Pause, and then as if quoting from a rule book.**) Coincidence - a convenient event or series of events and circumstances which allow us to arrest people who look a bit dodgy.
Harry: Exactly, PC Sullen. And I don't look a bit dodgy.
Joe: Umm, no Sir, you don't look a bit dodgy.
Harry: No, I don't look at all dodgy is the phrase you are looking for, PC Sullen!
Joe: Yes Sir, I mean no Sir. You don't look dodgy at all Sir.
Harry: So obviously that wouldn't apply to me.
Joe: Obviously Sir.
Harry: So Sullen, where is the body?
Joe: Any particular body Sir? There are a lot of bodies about today with it being the fete and all.
Harry: Preferably the dead one Sullen, seeing as that's what we are here to investigate!
Joe: It's behind the tent Sir.
Harry: It's a village fete Sullen, there are dozens of tents and hundreds of bodies of various levels of consciousness all over the place. Though, judging by what I saw on my way in, the beer tent has potential for the body's location. There were plenty of them there who were looking quite lifeless.
Joe: Ah no Sir, that's just the local brew which does that. Old Mr Williams from the village makes his own, quite potent it is. One year Mrs Williams decided to have a glass or seven and she slept for a week! No Sir the aforementioned body is behind main display tent.
Harry: The one with the vegetables?
Joe: I know the folk around here are a bit strange Sir and, well to be honest, (**loud whisper**) there are some prize turnips amongst them, but should you really call them vegetables?
Harry: I meant the tent with vegetable displays Sullen, as I think you well know.
Joe: Oh, I see, of course! In that case, yes Sir, it is that tent.
Harry: Then that is where we should go next. We need to find out what happened earlier today before the body was discovered and see if we can and find the truth in the tomatoes. (**Laughs at his own joke.**) Do you see what I did there Sullen?
Joe: Did where Sir?
Harry: Truth in the tomatoes. It's a vegetable show. It's a vegetable joke! Come on Sullen, off we go! Truth in the tomatoes, ha ha ha... (**Exits while talking to himself and laughing.**)
Joe: (**Looking and sounding confused.**) But it's a fruit Sir. Tomatoes. They're fruit, not... oh well. Let him enjoy the moment. (**Shouting after Harry.**) Coming Sir! (**Exits.**)

Scene 2 - The main display tent, setting up the displays.

(Stage set with a long table - covered with a plain cover, long enough to reach the floor from the audience viewpoint. Under the table, out of view, is Olive's box of vegetables.)

(As Curtains Open, Olive is standing behind the table, arranging some vegetables.)

(Enter Alfie, carrying a box of vegetables and herbs.)

Alfie: Olive, you're already here! I thought we were going to arrive together?

Olive: Change of plan Alfie, I wanted to get here early today to set up the vegetables to look their best for judging. I think I can win it this year Alfie, and that cash prize will make such a difference.

Alfie: (Moves next to Olive and puts his box on the table.) Oh yes it will. And when we're married it will mean what's yours will also be mine, so if you win, we both win!

Olive: Yes, but...

Alfie: But what Olive?

Olive: (Stops arranging and turns to face Alfie.) I just think we should wait a while.

Alfie: But if we wait Olive we'll miss the show and then I, we, won't have a chance of the cash prize.

Olive: I don't mean wait for the show, I mean wait to get married.

Alfie: Why do we need to wait? I can't wait.

Olive: Well, it's nice to know you are so enthusiastic about marrying me Alfie. (Pauses and turns back to her vegetable arrangement and starts moving things around.) I just think I need more time.

Alfie: I'm not sure I can do anything about that Olive. (Checks his box of vegetables and brings out some parsley.) How about a bunch of parsley instead?

Olive: No Alfie not thyme the herb, time as in minutes, hours, days and weeks. I need more time to think about whether I want to marry you or not.

Alfie: (Raising his voice.) What? Don't be silly Olive, of course you do!

Olive: (Stops arranging vegetables.) Shhh! People will hear you!

Alfie: (Speaking normally.) Look, we've been planning this for ages now. I've put in so much effort! You and I will be married after the show and then what's yours is mine and we'll be happy ever after, till death us do part and all that stuff. Just stick with the plan Olive, you know I'm right. It's what is best for both of us Olive. It's what is best for you. Stick with the plan.

Olive: I don't know Alfie.

(Alfie starts taking out vegetables and the herbs from his box to prepare and put them on the table next to Olive's and appears oblivious to what Olive is saying.)

Olive: (Wistfully, and rather melodramatic.) Love needs to be a two way thing. It is a meeting of minds, a sharing of aspirations and desires. It has to feel right and I don't think you have the same feelings for me as I have for you Alfie; I've always felt that whatever I said or wanted you were on a different page to me. I don't get the right feeling. (Looks at Alfie and realises he has not been listening to her.) I said there's something missing Alfie!

Alfie: Turnips.

Olive: What?

Alfie: Turnips. You're missing turnips. Turnips are always a good hit with the judges. You need turnips.

Olive: Turnips! You're talking about turnips and I'm pouring out my heart to you here.

Alfie: What? Sorry, what did you say my dear?

Olive: I'm pouring everything out Alfie, laying it on the table.

Alfie: And did you find the turnips?

Olive: No Alfie, I didn't find the wretched turnips! It's over! I don't want anything else to do with this, it's finished!

(Olive goes to leave but is stopped by Alfie who grabs hold of her hands.)

Alfie: Don't be silly Olive. It will be all right, nobody need know, it can be our secret.

Olive: Are you sure Alfie? I'm not sure whether time will put this right.

Alfie: Of course it will or if not the parsley will be nearly as good. Look, take these...

(Passes Olive two turnips and a bunch of herbs.)

(Olive looks confused, staring at the herbs and the turnips in her hand.)

Alfie: I won't tell anyone. When you're finished here come and join me behind the refreshment tent. I have some of your favourite soup for you. That will make everything better. Trust me Olive, soon you won't have to worry about anything ever again. (Takes some herbs from the box, which he then puts under the table and exits.)

Olive: (Looks up from the herbs and turnips.) What? He didn't listen! He didn't listen to a word I said!

(Enter Ivy and Violet, one of them is carrying a box of vegetables and herbs.)

Olive: Him and his wretched turnips, it's all he cares about! That soup had better be good or he may find his turnips in unexpected places! (She puts the herbs on her own display.)

Ivy: Olive Bosely. I should have guessed you'd be in here. Alfie just left looking very flustered and bothered and you're looking the same. Now, I'm not one to gossip of course, but I wonder what you two have been up to?

Olive: Ivy, Violet. Good afternoon to you as well. And for your information Ivy, we were not up to anything. Nothing of your concern or business anyway. (She puts the turnips on her own display.)

Violet: Oh dear Olive, they're a bit withered.

Olive: What are?

Violet: Your turnips

Olive: Oh them, they're not.

Ivy: Not what dear?

Olive: They're umm, not as bad as you think it is, I'm sure.

(Ivy and Violet start to unpack their vegetables, and set out their display from the box throughout their dialogue in this scene, while Olive continues to set out her display.)

Ivy: Well Olive, I think you may have met your match in vegetables this year. We have grown our own...

Violet: (Picking out two artichokes from the box and holding them up proudly.)

Artichokes!

Olive: Artichokes?

Ivy: And they are possibly the best in the...

Violet: County!

Olive: Do you two always do that?

Ivy: Do...

Violet: What?

Olive: Finish each other's...

Ivy: Cakes?

Violet: Sewing projects?

Ivy: Books?

Violet: Tea?

Olive: Sentences!

Ivy: Oh that?

Violet: Yes we usually...

Ivy: Do that.

Violet: } (Together)

Ivy: } Why?

Olive: It's only slightly...

Violet: Clever?

Ivy: Remarkable?

Olive: Annoying!

Violet: Well, if you think that is annoying, wait till you see how wonderful our artichokes are!

[Continued in the full pack...]